

ST. SIMON'S NIECE.

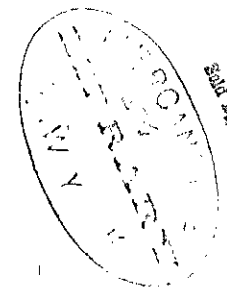
A Novel.

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By FRANK LEE BENEDICT,

AUTHOR OF

"MY DAUGHTER ELINOR," "MISS VAN KORTLAND," "MISS DOROTHY'S CHARGE,"
"MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR," &c. &c.



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TO

MRS. CASHEL HOEY,

AS A

TOKEN OF FRIENDSHIP AND ADMIRATION FOR HER GENIUS.

BIARRITZ, FRANCE, May, 1875.



ST. SIMON'S NIECE.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUARTIER MONTMARTRE.

A CROOKED old man, and a crooked small boy, who looked older than one of the patriarchs, were quarreling fiercely in an unintelligible patois. So far as could be judged from their gestures, the difference of opinion had arisen in regard to the carrying of their joint property, a hand-organ and a monkey, each preferring the latter for his burden.

The organ, a very Methuselah of its kind, stood in a door-way; the monkey, rather more time-worn and wicked in appearance than either of his owners, had perched himself on its top, and munched an apple covertly, while the contest waxed hotter, evincing a high-bred indifference as to which of the combatants had the honor of his society.

An ancient clothes-woman, a peripatetic pyramid of rags, crooned a sort of rhyme in a bass voice that she seemed to have borrowed from a giant. Dirty little children squabbled in the gutter. An omnibus toiled up the hill, having a third horse attached for the ascent, and the driver and two other men belabored the unfortunate beasts, and made as much noise as a troop of hyenas. Idlers in blouses lounged about the entrance of the *cabaret* at the corner, as earnest in discussion as if the fate of the nation depended on their efforts. A young woman in doubtfully clean finery halted with her right foot poised on a curb-stone, awaiting an opportunity to cross the street, and displaying her ankles while she waited, for the benefit of any passers-by who might think them worth regarding.

It was a street in the heart of Paris, but a region despised by wandering English and Americans—far up in the Quartier Montmartre, where the hill was most precipitous, and the *trottoirs* so slippery that an unwary promenader took three steps backward to one in advance, apparently indulging in some remarkable kind of pirouette. The tall houses, too, looked just ready to slide down the descent, and seemed frowning darkly at the prospect of a tumble.

The last rays of the setting sun lighted up the

scene, and rendered the squalor and noise more insupportable than usual. The fruit and vegetable vendors screamed, with renewed energy. The hurry and animation increased, as though every body had a host of things to accomplish before the night arrived; and yet no one did any thing but shriek and dance about in an insane dervish sort of fashion.

At one the windows of an apartment *au second* in the largest and most habitable-looking dwelling, Fannie St. Simon stood and surveyed the scene, and gazed away through the distance at a pile of gorgeous-tinted clouds, wishing drearily that they might burst into a fiery storm, and complete the ruin attempted by the Communards a few months previous.

She made a very pretty picture, framed among the dingy draperies, with a scarlet shawl thrown over her shoulders; for October had come, and the evening air fell chill and sharp. But her personal appearance, important as she had all her life been in the habit of considering it, was a matter of utter indifference just now.

The light faded rapidly out of the west, the noises below ceased to distract her attention. Fanny's gaze settled upon a black and white lettered sign near the corner, which marked a *mont-de-piété*, and her face grew rather sullen as she remembered that in a couple of days she must inevitably make acquaintance with the mysteries of its interior.

She turned from the window, and resumed her contemplation of such valuables as she possessed. An hour or two before, she had spread the trinkets on the table, to decide which among them should be first offered in the sacrifice grown imperative. There was a tolerable store of jewelry—articles of value, too—but they would bring little enough under the rigid estimate of a French pawnbroker. She turned over the glittering baubles, recalling the occasions for which they had been purchased or presented, till the memories they roused brought up the past as vividly as if she were reading pages from an old diary, and gave her a twinge of pain, philosophical as she was. Suddenly she swept the whole mass into a drawer, locked it, went back to the case-

ment, and sat down to watch the twilight gather, cold and gray, as her own life at this moment appeared.

Four months had passed since any news from St. Simon had reached her, and she knew the man well enough to fear that he never meant to write or come back. With only herself to provide for, she might have regarded the future composedly, menacing as it looked. But there was the Tortoise on her hands, and Fanny said to herself, with a good-natured smile, that a Tortoise was a somewhat cumbrous luxury under the circumstances.

The animal in question was St. Simon's wife. He had so long ago given her this appellation, that Fanny adopted it unconsciously, though she was neither unkind nor disrespectful to the helpless woman. But the Tortoise was an incubance at present, there could be no doubt. Their money had been gone for some time, and now old Antoinette averred that the neighboring grocers, the charcoal dealers, and the cross *laitière* absolutely refused a longer credit, and were clamorous for their dues.

Fanny thought of the days when she had dashed up the Champs-Élysées in a duchess's carriage; when she had danced at the Tuileries balls; when the American colony had delighted to do her honor, in spite of the whispers concerning St. Simon. It seemed odd enough to end like this. The future was hidden in a mist so dark and impenetrable, that she could not help calling the present crisis the end, though she recognized her folly in thus naming it.

She wondered a little what she could do to keep the wolf from the door. She had varied accomplishments, spoke several languages admirably, possessed a marvelous contralto voice, and was a fine musician. She could be a governess—Fanny St. Simon a governess! She thought of the necessary testimonials, and laughed at the idea of going meekly among her country-people to beg such vouchers of her fitness and respectability. The grand ladies would immediately recollect the doubtful stories formerly whispered about St. Simon, and give her the cold shoulder at once, though they had chosen to ignore the gossip while he could invite them to eat good dinners in the company of titled foreigners.

Fanny pictured the scene—her own efforts at humility, the lofty patronage in certain quarters, the delightful insolence in others, the draws, the contemptuous pity, the looking as if it required a powerful effort of memory to recall her to mind. She felt rather inclined to undertake the task without delay, just for the amusement of the thing. She might sing at a *café chantant*; really, the choice seemed to lie between that and teaching, and Fanny thought the latter would prove decidedly the more agreeable occupation of the two. She remembered, when taken to the circus as a child, she had particularly admired a

little girl, who balanced herself on a huge ball, and rolled it down an inclined plane by the motion of her feet. The phenomenon's silk stockings and short, spangled petticoats had especially taken her fancy. It might be rather amusing to astonish the Parisians by some such performance, heralded by huge yellow posters with her name on them in immense capitals. She did not think very gravely; even with the probability before her of having no dinner the next day but one, she did not grow especially serious or despondent. She had kept any knowledge of the true state of affairs from the Tortoise; and as long as she had a comfortable easy-chair, a surreptitious pinch of snuff, and an old French novel to fall asleep over, the Tortoise was content. But if these necessities failed, the Tortoise would wail in agony and fright, and Fanny hated to see her distressed; so some resolution on her own part could not much longer be deferred.

Life had been full of odd changes to the girl. They had always led a very Bohemian existence. One winter St. Simon had a banker's account, and plenty of money; the next they were obliged to economize in some little German or Italian town. Therefore, though this emergency was new, it brought none of the terror which it would have done to most young women of her age.

She had lived in Europe since she was a little child. St. Simon was her paternal uncle, and had taken her and her twenty thousand dollars into his keeping at her mother's death. Fanny was aware that of the fortune not a vestige had existed for years; and now it seemed that St. Simon had disappeared quite as hopelessly. She did not feel angry; she did not even dislike the man. If he ever got money again, he might return, if he remembered it. While thinking the matter over to-night, she did not trouble herself with a single harsh thought in regard to him. Indeed, she regretted his society; for he could be exceedingly agreeable, and, when things went well, was as pleasant to Fanny as if there had been something to gain. She knew that he was a gambler, and a bad man every way; but she doubted exceedingly whether other men were much better. At least, he had the advantage of possessing charming manners, and Fanny considered this merit ought to cover a multitude of sins. Life had not given her a lofty opinion of her species; she owned slight faith in any thing here or hereafter, though the latter misfortune rose more from lack of reflection than because her opinions were deliberately heretical or wicked.

St. Simon had left Fanny and the Tortoise at a second-rate German spa, where they had dragged out the long winter while Paris, usually their head-quarters, was besieged. His departure had been very sudden; but then his departures always were. He was going to America. He talked a great deal, though vaguely, about

some grand scheme which was to insure his fortune; but Fanny had made acquaintance with too many schemes equally vague and grand, to pay much attention. He should only be absent a few weeks. Fanny must take the Tortoise to Paris. His friend, Monsieur Besson, had placed his apartment at their disposal. Monsieur Besson was going to America also. He gave Fanny money, and promised to send more in case he should be delayed. That was early in June. When the girl brought the Tortoise to these dingy lodgings, the ruins of the palace were still smoking. It was October now, and no tidings had come. There was no one in America to whom she could write for news of her uncle, had she felt inclined. She wore out the summer as best she could, taking such amusements as fell in her way—for amuse herself she must—and enjoyed them rather more than she had done the court society and the companionship of the American colony during the last winter of the falling empire.

The apartment was commodious, albeit somewhat dingy; and old Antoinette, who had been Fanny's *bonne*, and possessed a genius for every thing—from dressing hair to cooking a dinner—and was the best and most obstinate creature that ever came out of Brittany, made them very comfortable. But now they were past even the possibility of credit; and this morning, when Antoinette moaned and cursed St. Simon in the name of all the saints in the calendar, Fanny proposed that she should set up as a rope-dancer, and Antoinette tell fortunes; and the woman laughed till she cried, being about as reckless and incapable of serious thought as her young mistress.

The shadows deepened in the room, the window-curtains looked like pills, a few portraits stared malevolently at her through the gloom, and the place grew so eerie and uncomfortable that Fanny began to think of forsaking its silence for the companionship of the Tortoise, who had been dozing in the *salon* ever since dinner.

The door opened suddenly, and Fanny said, "Are you back already?"

She supposed it was Antoinette, who had gone out on some errand, and proposed visiting a neighbor before she returned.

"Already" is not complimentary," replied a laughing voice. "She speaks as if these four months had been half an hour."

Fanny did not stir—her heart almost stopped beating from astonishment, which she had no mind to betray.

"St. Simon's ghost," said she, calmly; "well, I have always wanted to meet a ghost. Was it warm down there?"

"Upon my word, I believe nothing could surprise that creature!" he cried, admiringly. "It's so dark I can't see you. Come, and bid me welcome."

"Wait till I light a candle," returned she. "No, I remember, I have no matches. Antoinette used the last one to kindle the fire."

"Nice housekeeping," he said, laughing still.

"Have you let yourselves get out of every thing else too?"

"We have half a bottle of salad-oil and a cold cauliflower," said Fanny. "I had serious thoughts of cooking the Tortoise to-morrow. I couldn't keep her any longer; so the kindest thing seemed to be to eat her."

St. Simon had struck a match; now he held it up, and stared at her by the faint gleam.

"What the deuce do you mean?" he asked.

"There's the candle just by you. Don't waste the *allumette*—I've grown economical. You'd better save the end of it; one can chew wax when there's nothing else to be got."

"She's daft," said St. Simon, who by this time had lighted the candle; "quite daft."

"How do you do?" said Fanny, rising.

They shook hands warmly. St. Simon pressed his lips upon the dainty white fingers. It was the sole salute he ever offered her, and it was by just such courtesy that he retained a warm place in Fanny's mind, little as she respected him.

"I'm awfully glad to see you," he said.

"You look very well."

"So do you—for a ghost. When did you die, St. Simon?" she asked, gravely.

"I'm terribly hungry—"

"There's a half-bottle of salad-oil, a cold cauliflower—oh! and the Tortoise," interrupted Fanny.

"How is she? I peeped into the *salon*, but she was fast asleep; so I came on in search of you."

"She is very well. Six times each day she has said, 'St. Simon will arrive to-morrow—I dreamed it.'"

"Poor old Tortoise! Well, aren't you glad to see me?"

"Yes, but awe-stricken; one always is at sight of a ghost."

"One would suppose you had not heard from me since I went away," he said, rather impatiently.

"Never," she replied, carelessly.

"Why, Fan! I have written once a month! Didn't you get the check?"

"I have had a good many bills lately," said Fanny; "but I don't think that is the same."

"Didn't you get the money I sent—the draft?"

"I've seen no money for a fortnight, except a pewter half-franc which Antoinette keeps for luck," returned Fanny.

St. Simon looked so genuinely astonished that she decided he was about to tell an enormous falsehood.

"I sent you a draft for three thousand francs in August," he said. "I wrote you when I

should be here, what had detained me, and all about it."

Fanny regarded the clock on the mantel, and appeared deaf.

"I'm telling you the truth, Fanny," he continued. She looked more deaf than ever.

"I sent the draft to Holtinguer—wrote you here to the house that you would find it there. I'll go with you to the bank to-morrow morning—it's the truth."

Fanny turned and looked at him.

"I perceive it is now," she said, calmly; "I should have believed you at first, only you were so earnest about it."

"*Mauvaise langue!*" he cried, laughing again.

"And you've not heard from me?"

"Never a line."

"But how have you managed?"

"Paid money as long as I had it—gone on credit since. I'm at the end of that now. I was just debating at which *café* I should appear as *prima donna*."

"It's too bad! I'm awfully sorry, Fan!"

"Oh! never mind—I think I liked it."

"Has the Tortoise worried you?"

"No; she knew nothing about the state of affairs. But, now you are back, the matter grows more complicated—you must eat, too, and you eat a good deal."

"But I've loads of money—"

"In prospective?"

"Hang it, no! I tell you things have gone splendidly! Why, in a few months I can double your twenty thousand for you."

"My expectations don't go beyond to-morrow's dinner," said Fanny. "Are you sure you have money to pay for it?"

He drew a purse from his pocket, and showed her a goodly pile of English sovereigns, took out a draft, and let her see the amount.

"We need not take to the *café chantant* or a hand-organ, yet," she remarked, quietly.

"Can one never surprise you?" he inquired.

"You don't ask a single question!"

"You always taught me it was ill-bred, or inconvenient."

"Upon my word, you're sharper-tongued than ever! Never mind, Fan, our stock is up—we'll have rare times! But the first thing is to dine—"

"A half-bottle of salad-oil, a cauli—"

"Oh! confound it, don't! I say, let's go out to a restaurant. We'll dine comfortably, and I'll tell you all my news."

"Very well; go and speak to the Tortoise while I change my dress."

"I must wash my own face—I'm just in by the Calais train. Which is the Tortoise's chamber? I'll find water and towels there, I suppose."

She opened the door into the next room.

"I've no candle except this," she said; "but there's one somewhere on her dressing-table."

You can have the chamber beyond hers—I'll tell Antoinette to get it ready."

"I say, Fan, I'll lay a wager that when the Tortoise wakes up and sees me, her first words are, 'Oh, St. Simon—there, I've lost my snuff-box!'"

He went away laughing, and Fanny dressed herself by the light of the solitary taper. She was skillful enough with her needle when she chose, and, in spite of her lack of money, had managed to alter her out-of-door garments so that they looked as stylish and fresh as if just from the hands of a Parisian *modiste*.

"Are you ready?" she asked, tapping at the door of the adjoining room, when her toilet was complete.

He came in, looking wonderfully young and handsome. It occurred to Fanny to marvel about his age. He must be near fifty, but there was no trace of it in either countenance or figure—tall, slight, and active as a boy of eighteen.

They passed on to the *salon*; the Tortoise woke from her nap at their entrance, looked up, and said, in the calmest voice,

"Oh, St. Simon— There, I've lost my snuff-box!"

Her listeners began to laugh; but St. Simon went forward, shook hands with her decorously, and said,

"I'm very glad to see you. Don't agitate yourself; here's your box on the table."

"Oh dear!" sighed the Tortoise, helplessly, blinking like a white owl, "and I never do let him know I take snuff!"

"It shall remain as profound a mystery as ever, my love," said he. "Fanny is going out with me. I'll say good-night, in case you should be in bed before we get back."

"Why—it's very sudden—Fanny did not tell me you had written; but I expected you—I did, Fanny," mumbled the Tortoise, still too much oppressed by sleep to know whether it was reality or a dream.

She had been a pretty woman in her youth; she was fat now, and looked somehow as if coming to bits, but she was pretty still, and her vacant blue eyes had an expression like those of a drowsy baby. They left her, and she resumed her nap without delay. On the staircase they encountered Antoinette, who chattered like a parrot, in her delight and surprise.

"At last I have created a sensation," cried St. Simon; "I am enchanted! Behold twenty francs, Antoinette."

"Well," said Fanny, in English, "you must have found a gold-mine."

"Exactly—you have hit the right word!" he answered. "Where shall we go, Fanny?"

"We must walk down the hill to find a carriage. Oh, anywhere that's nice! I've not been in a restaurant for so long, it will seem quite jolly."

"What a horrid quarter!" exclaimed St. Simon, as they stepped into the street. "I really wonder how people exist here."

"So you don't think of staying?"

"We'll remove to-morrow. I think one of those apartments up in the Avenue Friedland will be the thing, eh?"

"They're always rather dear."

"Oh, don't do the economy! At present our dodge is to make a show. Many Americans here, do you know?"

"A good many of the old set. I saw a register the other day with a list of names: of course I've seen nobody."

"Of course! Well, we'll dawn upon them in our new apartment—impress upon the Tortoise that we have just come from Schwalbach."

"Only she can't pronounce the word," said Fanny.

"So much the better; but, whatever she calls it, there you staid while I was in America."

"There is no necessity for saying any thing," replied Fanny.

"But it is very important that no one should know you have been lodged in this beastly den."

"Nobody will; who's to ask or care? If we can give the people something to eat in a nice place, they'll not inquire where we've been, or how we got our money."

"All the same, I shall give them a little information."

They descended the hill. St. Simon hailed a *fiacre*, and they drove away to a restaurant on the Boulevard des Italiens.

"Do you know where Helen Devereux is?" St. Simon asked, suddenly.

"Helen Devereux!" repeated Fanny. "What on earth brought her into your head?"

"Do you happen to know where she is?"

"No; how should I?" returned Fanny. "Haven't I been buried alive for four months?"

"The sepulture seems to have agreed with you," he said; "you're looking wonderfully well. So you've no idea of Miss Devereux's whereabouts?"

"I don't suppose you fancy that we correspond," retorted she, with a somewhat bitter laugh. "I remember, though, last spring seeing her name in the *Morning Post*. She may be in England still."

"Her bankers will be able to tell," returned St. Simon. "The boulevards look quite gay; not so well lighted as formerly."

"Oh, Paris is detestable—dead!" cried Fanny.

"You'll find it look pleasanter in our new quarter, with plenty of fresh dresses and a carriage at your command."

"*Quel luxe!*" laughed she.

"I know what I am about," said he.

"My dear St. Simon, I shall never doubt it while you talk to me of having new dresses and a

carriage! But you've not told me yet the meaning of all this proposed splendor—I mean, where the funds come from."

"Because you've not asked. My dear, I am secretary of the Nevada Silver Mining Company. I can't see your face, but you're sneering—you are wrong. The company exists, the mine exists, the shares are real and valuable; we want a few more names and a little more money—we shall have both."

"Do you imagine that Helen Devereux will be induced to put her shekels into such a scheme?"

"Nobody cares whether she does or not—only don't call it a scheme; I can prove its reality even to you. But I'll tell you this: Miss Devereux owns a tract of land close to the mine. I have satisfied myself it holds silver too. If I can, I should like to become the possessor of it before she or the company learns its value."

"She doesn't like you, and she hates me," said Fanny.

"Which speaks poorly for her taste," he observed, calmly. "But I mean to find her, and I want you to be good friends."

Fanny did not notice his remark. "And Besson," she cried, "my dear old Besson?—what a wretch I am not to have asked about him at first!"

"He is well; he came back with me, of course; and oh, how sea-sick he was!" and St. Simon laughed.

"But why did he not come to the house? I am sure he has a right to his own apartment."

"Just his delicacy—afraid he might be in your way; but we will give it up to him very soon. He is your devout worshiper still, Fan! Ill as he was on the voyage, he could always talk of you and the grand fortune we were bringing you."

"So he is interested in your mine?"

"My dear child, I should never have got hold of the matter but for him. That scape-grace son of his, you know, died in California. Somehow he had possession of these lands—won them at cards, may be. Besson never thought any thing about it till I stumbled over the papers; that was what sent me off to America in such haste."

St. Simon hated explanations, and Fanny asked for no more. Besson would tell her; his narrative would possess an advantage over any story her present companion might have to relate; she could believe in its accuracy.

"I can assure Miss Devereux she might do worse than join us," St. Simon burst out, presently. "We have splendid names; there's no doubt about success this time, Fan. You have heard of Gregory Alleyne?"

She started slightly, in spite of her self-control.

"Why do you mention those two together?" she inquired.

"For no reason; they are not acquainted, that I am aware. But you have heard of him?"

"Yes, as a very rich man."

"Enormously rich! Well, he is interested in our mine. A very agreeable fellow too—you will see him."

"Is he in Paris?"

"No, but he sails for Europe shortly."

Fanny did not speak. It was odd that he should want to find Helen Devereux, and that Gregory Alleyne was soon to be near. She had never seen the man, yet the two were always connected in her mind.

Of all human beings, Miss Devereux was the only one Fanny really hated, as she was the only one to whom the girl had ever done a downright, deliberately cruel wrong.

CHAPTER II.

OLD BESSON.

THE next morning St. Simon asked his niece to go with him in search of an apartment—a more suitable apartment, he phrased it. Fanny refrained from asking if he meant more suitable for himself, though he perfectly understood the merrily malicious glance she gave him. But he was in too high good-humor to take offense; he only shook his head at her, offered some compliment on her appearance, and actually sent the Tortoise a bouquet into her bedroom, a haven of refuge which she never left till noon.

"He must have found a gold mountain, he is so cheerful," Antoinette whispered to her young mistress, while that lady was dressing to accompany her uncle. "Hark! how he sings! And I never knew him rise so early in my life."

"Never mind," replied Fanny, "we'll take 'the goods the gods provide,' and ask no questions."

She translated the quotation into French, of course, as Antoinette was in happy ignorance of English. Antoinette saw fit to be shocked; she was liable to little attacks of piety, which evaporated in lectures.

"Mademoiselle said the gods; surely she knows that is like the ancient heathens," cried Antoinette, reproachfully.

"And who were they?" asked Fanny.

"*Dame*, mademoiselle ought to remember; it is not for an ignorant old woman like me to remind her," answered Antoinette, with wise humility. "They lived, I think, in the Elawns; it is some part of England, very sure."

She meant the Highlands, Fanny discovered. According to Antoinette, whatever was dreadful originated in *perfidie Albion*. It was the home of paganism and heresy, and her hatred of it went even beyond her horror of Prussia, because a much older sentiment.

"We are to have a new apartment," she continued, "and domestics and a carriage—monsieur has told me."

"So much the better for us," said Fanny. "I am glad you will have an easier life for a while."

"It is no matter for me," Antoinette replied; "black bread is good enough for an old woman, but mademoiselle is young, and young birds like to fly: it is natural."

Just here St. Simon's voice called from without. "Shall you soon be ready, Fan?"

She went to meet him, and Antoinette followed.

"Is it necessary to arrange every thing to-day, monsieur?" she asked.

"We shall get into new quarters to-morrow," he answered. "You will have to consider yourself housekeeper, Antoinette. I suppose there will be no end of trouble about servants just now."

"All Communards," returned Antoinette, disdainfully; but her face showed that she considered herself equal to dealing with the worst of the lot, and getting the mastery too.

She was a little woman, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on her bones; her face wrinkled and brown as a nut; a hard-headed old creature, whose best quality was a warm devotion to Mademoiselle Fanny. She clung to her tall, comical Brittany cap and her early superstitions, and was a difficult person to manage unless through her affections or her pride, though neither were strong enough to make her truthful. There probably was not so unscrupulous a liar to be found in France at that moment—always excepting St. Simon himself. But he never lied without a motive, and a strong one, whereas Antoinette lied apparently from sheer excess of imagination.

"Where are we going first?" Fanny asked her uncle, as they walked down the hill in search of a hack.

"To Holtinguers's; I want to get the draft."

So they drove there, and Fanny sat in the carriage while St. Simon entered the bank. Presently he came back, and put a letter in her hands.

"Open it," he said.

Sure enough, there was the check for three thousand francs.

"It would have looked a very large sum to me last week," said she.

"Don't speak of it, I am shocked! Never mind; it will answer now to buy your *chiffons*," he replied.

The silver mine might prove a pit for the unwary, but one thing was certain—St. Simon must have plenty of money. Fanny contented herself with this reflection, and decided that it would be wisdom to secure her prize without delay. She suggested that, as they were at the bank, they had better get the draft cashed.

"Of course," he said; "but you must come in to sign your name: it is made payable to you."

He helped her out of the carriage, and they went into the house. In a few moments the ugly thick *billets* were safe in Fanny's *porte-monnaie*.

"I sha'n't borrow them," St. Simon said, laughing, as they drove off again. "Buy what you like, Fan, you need some dresses—I know you'll not be extravagant. Now, then, we'll choose a place to pitch our tent; after that I'll take you to your *modiste*."

They spent as pleasant a morning together as if they had not been relations, and returned in high spirits. When they reached home Antoinette informed Fanny that Monsieur Besson was in the *salon*.

"Then I shall disappear," St. Simon observed.

"The old soul would rather delight at seeing you without my presence. We will dine out, Fan, I think."

"Then we must take T. with us," she answered. "Nothing she enjoys so much as a dinner at a restaurant."

"As you please," said St. Simon, shrugging his shoulders. "We might go to the Vaudeville afterward; the Tortoise can sleep as comfortably in the *loge* as she would at home in her chair."

Fanny laughed assent, and passed on into the *salon*. The Tortoise was slumbering tranquilly in her corner, and Besson sat with an album open before him, looking at Fanny's picture.

He was a little hard of hearing; she crossed the room softly and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"That can't speak, and I can," said she. "My dear Besson, my best of Bessons, *soyez le bienvenu!* How very glad I am to see you!"

The old man started as if her light touch had given him an electric shock. He rose, seized her two hands, and pressed his lips upon them, for a moment absolutely unable to utter a syllable.

"What! not a word to say?" cried Fanny, gayly.

"So many that I can not tell which to speak first," he replied; and as he raised his head she could see that his eyes were full of tears.

"I do believe he is actually glad to find me again, this foolish Besson," laughed she.

"Yes, a foolish old Besson," he answered, gently; "but glad—oh, so glad!—to see you."

"Then sit down, and tell me about every thing. Only think—I never received a line from either of you."

"St. Simon told me this morning. And yet we wrote."

"I know; but I never thought of going to the banker's. How well you look! The voyage has done you good."

He was a little old man, at least seventy, with silky white hair, and a face no line of whose features ever seemed meant to appear in company. Yet it was such a good, kind face, that after the first feeling of wonder one only thought of the sweet expression which fairly beautified it. His

legs were too short, else his body was too long; his left shoulder so much higher than the other that he was almost deformed—as if Nature had not been able to do enough to show herself a cruel step-mother where he was concerned.

He had known Fanny from the time St. Simon brought her to Europe a child—had always proved her devoted slave. Besson's life had been a hard one. Neither tenderness nor gratitude had come much in his way; and though Fanny tyrannized over him, she was attentive and affectionate, and Besson worshiped her. In his humility he would not have dreamed of asking more, had he possessed the wealth of the Indies and the grandest title in Europe; but he loved her—loved her with the self-sacrificing spirit of a father and the passion of a youthful adorer; and, old and bent, and near the end of his earthly pilgrimage as he was, Besson had never loved another woman.

He had been married years and years before, in the days when he was rich; but he seldom spoke of that season, even to Fanny. The wife who tortured him was long since dead. A few years previous to the time of which I write, his only son died, after spending nearly the last remnant of Besson's fortune.

The young fellow ended a rapid course of folly and sin by a crime which would have brought him to the galleys, had he not escaped. Some property Besson owned in New York he made over to the boy, hoping always that he might begin a new and better career in that distant land—redeem, perhaps, his promise of sending for his father. He never sent, and at last Besson learned that he was dead. St. Simon succeeded in having such effects as he left forwarded to Besson after much delay. It was in searching these trunks that St. Simon found the papers which inspired him with the idea of going to America.

Young Besson had exchanged the New York property for a little ready money and a tract of land in Nevada. A few days after reading the paper, St. Simon chanced to encounter a famous mineralogist just returned from America. He displayed some wonderful specimens of silver ore. St. Simon discovered that they came from the deserted mine opened on the property Besson had bought. The persons who sold the young man the land had believed the vein a failure; but the mineralogist was convinced of its value, and his reputation rendered this verdict decisive—would do so to the world at large as well as to St. Simon.

So St. Simon went to America, and took old Besson with him. Every thing succeeded as happily as his vivid fancy had imagined; here was wealth at last. Among the original proprietors of the tract was a man St. Simon knew well, a man as unscrupulous as himself, without his talent. He became St. Simon's confederate, and was to have the charge of the works, which were to recommence as soon as a company and capital could be raised.

New York chanced to be in a mood to listen. Mining schemes in these far-off lands were the rage. St. Simon had no difficulty in interesting men whose names and position were sufficient to give his plans a stable foundation at once.

So Fanny learned from Besson that the existence of the mine and the company were absolute facts. The old man was sanguine of success. He told her the whole story, beginning with the discovery of the papers, and Fanny listened, while the Tortoise slumbered in her chair as peacefully as if neither success nor failure mattered.

"Then it is really no dream of St. Simon's—not even one of his brilliant fables," Fanny said, thoughtfully, when the Frenchman had ended the long account which I have condensed into as few words as possible.

"I should have gone to my grave never knowing what wealth was in my reach, if it had not been for him," Besson replied. His admiration for St. Simon was unbounded; he believed in him too; but more acute people than Besson had often done so. Fanny perceived that St. Simon had managed to secure the lion's share; but the old man was so perfectly content that she did not bring the fact before his observation.

What Besson cared most for was the fact that he should now have a fortune to leave Fanny; this had been the great charm which the project possessed for him from the first. He told her this, too, as simply as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and Fanny accepted it as such. She could not in the instant reach the complete faith he held in regard to success. St. Simon's schemes had been too numerous. She had seen so many fine bubbles vanish into thin air, that, even with the confirmation of what had already been done to serve as an earnest for the future, she was not able to think of the affair as a positive reality. But she refrained from troubling Besson by any expression of doubt. Indeed, whether the project succeeded ultimately or not, one thing was certain—St. Simon had already got hold of some money by it; therefore life for the next few months was likely to prove sunny and agreeable. Fanny was so thorough a Bohemian by nature that she was quite ready to take, as she had said to Antoinette, "the goods the gods provided," and be content. If she could amuse herself to-day, she would to the fullest extent, and put the to-morrow out of her mind, though it might loom dinnerless in the distance.

The present prospect promised more than this—a season of luxury, a resumption of her place in society, consideration and attention from her countrymen, all the gayeties which Paris could offer after its recent humiliation. Fanny was satisfied, and beamed upon Besson till his very soul filled with sunshine, and he wove golden visions for her future—always hers; the advan-

tages to accrue to him from these successes were of slight consequence.

"You ought to come and live with us," Fanny said, when they had arrived at a discussion of St. Simon's proposed fitting.

Besson shook his head.

"The old man will stay here," he answered.

"I am fond of the place; habit is much at my age. And now I shall love the dark, dingy rooms better than ever because you have lived in them. I find my servant Babette is ready to come to me again. I will jog on in my usual fashion. I need no change."

"Perhaps you will be more comfortable," Fanny said. "But you must come often to see us—though you will be busy, I suppose."

"No, no; I am too old for business. It is all in St. Simon's hands. He needs no assistance; he does not want me bothered."

Fanny offered no objection to this either. What she thought was, "Ah, well, the poor soul will not last long enough to be troubled, if it is only a bubble; and I can take care of my own interests, if there prove to be any, in spite of St. Simon's craftiness."

Then she listened again to Besson's expressions of thankfulness that her fortune was now secured, and was cheerful, as if she believed as thoroughly as he in their certainty, though had she done so, it probably would never have occurred to her to feel gratitude in any quarter. She would have wondered a little at "her luck," and accepted it as philosophically as she did the evil turns chance or fate had so often played her. She told Besson nothing of the straits she had been in since their departure, because, though she and St. Simon could laugh over them, the knowledge would have caused the old man great pain. He possessed a little income, more than sufficient for his wants, and had often supplied Fanny's needs from his own purse. But when he and St. Simon were preparing to go to America, the latter's funds chanced to be at a low ebb, and he captured all the money Besson could scrape together.

This was Thursday. On Saturday they were established in a pretty *entresol* of a fine house on the Avenue Friedland; a goodly staff of domestics provided for Antoinette to rule over; and Fanny, with her peculiar faculty of forgetting disagreeable things, put the Quartier Montmartre leagues beyond her life immediately.

The next morning, while she was taking her coffee, there came a message from St. Simon to know if she would go to church—the American Chapel—asking also the hour of service.

"I must be dreaming, or St. Simon must be mad," thought Fanny. "He go to church, indeed! What on earth can it mean?"

But she returned a courteous message; and, as it was late, began to dress without delay. He was waiting for her in the *salon*—faultless in at-

tire, looking as elegant and contented as if he had never known a care.

"Here you are," he said; "that's a very pretty costume too—all black. I like that for church; it has a respectful air, which pleases me."

"Bless me," thought Fanny, "this will end ill! St. Simon puzzles me, and he never did that before."

The new carriage was at the door, and off they dashed. Fanny leaned comfortably back against the soft cushions, and wondered vaguely if her acquaintance with the hill of Montmartre was only a bad dream.

The clergyman had just entered the chancel as they walked into the church. There was a tolerably large congregation. St. Simon saw at the first glance that various members of the colony, whom he needed, were already returned. But he behaved with perfect decorum, and attended to his duties—to Fanny's astonishment, not even troubled to find his place in the Prayer-book, and that was more than could be said for a good many persons present. One sees carelessness and a want of reverence in numerous churches; but to watch the perfection of ill-breeding and disrespect in that line it is necessary to visit the American Chapel, Rue Bayard, Paris, any Sunday morning at half-past eleven.

The congregation came dawdling in by twos and threes up to the time the sermon commenced: the later they came, the more bustle they made, and the more difficult they were about suiting themselves in the matter of seats. Acquaintances saluted each other with pleasant bows and smiles, as if they had been at the opera; friends seated within speaking distance whispered freely; people stood up or sat down, knelt or lounged, as they saw fit; women appeared decked in rain-bows, looking as if they had dressed for a ball and strayed thither by mistake; young men used their eyeglasses; elderly men, fat and pompous, as if stuffed with "greenbacks," reclined easily, with complacent, patronizing expression of face, as who should say, "This is well, very well; religion is right and proper. I am willing to lend the Lord the support of my countenance, but don't dawdle; get it over—get it over; time is money, Mr. Clergyman!"

Just behind St. Simon and his niece sat three females, who beguiled the tedium of the service by an animated conversation concerning the people as they entered—neat little scraps of biography, or pleasant bits of scandal whispered between the responses. St. Simon listened, with his Prayer-book close to his short-sighted eyes, and was highly amused.

"That's Mrs. Howard—didn't know she was back; they say she's got a divorce from her husband." Then another: "No, indeed, he got it. Oh, my dear, the awfulest stories! And they do say she went down and staid a week at the marquis's place." Then a soft chorus of "Oh

my! Oh my!" In a moment, "Who's that? Why, Annie Moreton. She's going on as bad as ever with Count Romain, and he as good as married. I wonder she can show her face in church. There are the Delavals. She gambled so this summer at Baden, that her husband," etc., etc. Then an instant given to the service—a response uttered to the prayers—then more whispers.

Fanny moved to the farther end of the seat, and favored the trio with a glance which checked them for a little. She did not pretend to be good—I employ the expression she would have done—but talk like this in a sacred edifice was distasteful to her. St. Simon's eyes twinkled mischievously at her over the edge of his book; but she refused to see it. He told her afterward that she had quite spoiled his pleasure. He was certain he had just caught his own name when her steady regard silenced the gossips.

The service was over; the rainbows streamed out. There were a good many people who knew the St. Simons, and the sight of their handsome carriage caused them to receive hearty greetings.

"Well," said St. Simon, as they drove off, "there's less difference between Christians and sinners than I supposed, only the sinners are rather better bred in general. I told old Jennings and his wife I should expect them to dine with me on Thursday. We'll send out some invitations to-morrow."

"The most tiresome people I ever knew," said Fanny, wearily.

"Very likely; but we want Jennings as a share-holder."

"It's paying dear to invite them to dinner," laughed Fanny. "St. Simon, we'll take the Tortoise to the Bois. I want to see how the poor old wood looks after its desecration."

They did drive to the Bois later in the day, and Fanny and St. Simon went to the Gymnase in the evening. (I beg that no one will be shocked with me, or doubt my morality on this account. I am not to blame for their actions; all I can do is to chronicle them faithfully. I shall not set up the man or his niece as a model.)

The next morning Fanny left cards at various houses, cards were left on them, and she and St. Simon made out the list of invitations he wished to send for his dinner-party.

It was almost dusk; Fanny, usually good-natured, had been out into the Faubourg St. Honoré with old Antoinette to choose that faithful adherent a new gown. As they turned into the avenue, a young man almost ran against them in his haste. He lifted his hat in apology, catching sight of Fanny's face as he did so. She had recognized him at a glance, and was hurrying on, but he exclaimed,

"Miss St. Simon!—is it possible? I am delighted to see you. Didn't know you were in Paris."

There were two tiny spots of vivid color on

Fanny's cheeks; but her veil hid them, and her voice was languid and unconcerned, as she said,

"How do you do, Mr. Castlemaine? I did not dream of meeting you here. Have you been long in Paris?"

"Only twenty-four hours. I am on my way to England."

"On foot?" she asked.

"Not precisely; but I leave by the half-past eight train."

"*Bon voyage*," said she, and made a step forward.

He walked by her side, while Antoinette fell a little back, and dreamed of the effect her new gown would produce. Nobody is too ignorant or practical for visions of some kind.

"You don't seem in the least glad to see me," Mr. Castlemaine said.

"It is scarcely worth while, since you are going immediately," she replied.

"I wish I was not obliged, now that I have seen you," returned he.

The voice was soft and regretful, but Fanny St. Simon had learned that its tone meant nothing. He would have said the same thing in the same way to Antoinette; it was his habit with women. She did not even take a second glance at the handsome face, though her heart was hungry to feast upon its careless smiles. She looked straight before her, and walked as quietly on as though not a pulse had quickened.

"Where have you been this age?" he asked. "I've not seen you since the last winter of the dear old Empire."

"Oh, I have vegetated—like most people to whom Paris was home before the siege. And you?"

"I have been in England—only came over last week to visit my mother's cousin at Munich, where he has a fancy for burying himself at present—thought I would have a peep at poor fallen Babylon on my way back. Do you spend the winter here?"

"I believe so. Shall we see you again?"

The voice was perfectly unconcerned, yet Fanny St. Simon waited breathlessly for the answer.

"My plans are very undecided, but I doubt my returning."

"Who was in London this season that I know?" she asked.

"Lots of people. We had any quantity of Americans."

"Yes; I saw by the lists. By-the-way, Miss Devereux was there."

"Oh, she made a tremendous sensation—is called a beauty," he replied; but, somehow, the slow, drawling voice was not so easy as it had been.

"So she is a beauty," returned Fanny; "there could not be two opinions in regard to that. Where is she now?"

"Upon my word, I don't—oh, let me see! I did hear she had disappeared into Devon."

Fanny began talking of other people and things. He accompanied her to the door of her house.

"Will you come in?" she asked.

"I'd like nothing better, but I really must take myself off."

She did not try to detain him. She had plenty of persuasive words always at command; she had a legion of pleading smiles and earnest glances which few masculines could resist, but she did not essay the least of them upon this man.

"Did you say you were stopping in London?" she asked.

"I am going down to Torquay—"

He paused suddenly; Fanny had time to remember that Torquay was in Devonshire; then he was adding,

"Only for a few days—just to see another old relative."

"Your devotion on the shrine of relationship is beautiful and touching," said she.

"Ah, you know I'm a poor devil, dependent on the whim of ancient uncles and aunts," he answered, laughing.

"And none of them will die! How cruel to you!"

"So I think," returned he; "but my private opinions do not seem to hasten their departure in the least."

He was going away—going to Helen Devereux—he, the sole man among all her admirers who had ever touched Fanny St. Simon's heart. She could not keep him; she had nothing to offer. Yet she knew he had loved her; this belief had always been her one solace in thinking of him. But now she asked herself bitterly, what was love to this spoiled, idle, extravagant creature, upon whom numberless women had wasted their hearts? Had he any thing beyond his marvelous beauty, and his dangerous power of pleasing, to recommend him? She doubted if he were capable of loving any human being—able to keep a promise or a vow—a man who had squandered a fortune in dissolute amusements—a man who had never done a really good act in his life. She recapitulated these charges in her mind as sternly as his harshest censor ever summed them up; yet at this moment Fanny St. Simon would have flung her soul under his feet, and let him trample it, just to hear one word of tenderness, one syllable of regret!

She threw back her veil and looked at him. Her countenance was perfectly composed; even her color did not change. This girl possessed a power of self-control which, under other guidance, might have made absolute heroism easy to her. She uttered merry words—the first which rose to her lips; all she wanted was one long look at his face before she lost him. Such a handsome face—such a splendid specimen of manly beauty he was in every way; glorious almost as the shape

in which old-time sculptors modeled the eternal youth of some Grecian god. Eyes that were blue or hazel as the light chanced to strike them; a mouth at once proud, melancholy, and sweet; smiles and glances which might have disarmed the deadliest foe; a voice whose every cadence was music. Nature seemed to have delighted in perfecting each detail, as an artist lingers with loving hand over his masterpiece.

Fanny threw back her veil and gazed, that she might photograph still more clearly on her heart those lineaments already indelibly impressed thereon. A young face still, though not youthful; a face which told of passion, reckless purpose, impulses tender as a woman's, capabilities of good and evil beyond those which most men have to nurture or struggle against. All this she saw and recognized even while her eyes were dazzled by the beauty which, in its completeness, was still so virile and manly that the word I have employed—usually feminine in its suggestions—became a type of masculine perfection, as it does when one describes the statue of the Antinous.

Antoinette's ideas of propriety would not permit her really to leave her young mistress, but she passed on into the shadow of the *porte-cochère*, and waited for the interview to end. There was no reason why she should go. Had she understood English, there was no syllable she might not have heard.

A few more laughing speeches, a few more pleasant wishes interchanged, then Talbot Castlemaine bowed over Fanny's gloved hand, and turned away.



FANNY ST. SIMON walked into the house without casting so much as a look behind her. She answered quietly a volley of idle questions from Antoinette, mounted the stairs, and gained her own chamber.

She locked the door, took off her bonnet, arranged various trifles on her dressing-table, was perfectly calm for several moments. Suddenly her composure gave way. She sat flat down on the hearth-rug, and burst into a passion of sobs and tears. She did not cry often, or easily; but now she wept as if her very heart were breaking.

"What a precious fool I am!" she muttered, at length. "But I don't care—I will cry! Oh, my life! oh, this horrid, hateful world! I wish I could kill Helen Devereux—I'd do it—I would, and be hanged with pleasure."

She tore the handkerchief she held into tatters as she spoke, and this performance brought her back to her senses; for the handkerchief was trimmed with duchesse lace, and had only been purchased that morning. She got up from the

rug, made a becoming toilet, and seated herself to wait till the summons came for dinner.

"I am just where I was before," she thought. "The world has not come to an end because I have seen Talbot Castlemaine. Oh, Talbot, Talbot!"

Then it was all to do over again, and she actually pulled down the shining masses of hair which she had so carefully arranged, and stamped her feet like a crazy woman. But she shed no more tears. There was a fiery pain now in her head which burned them up. So little of a story, so poor a romance! She had known this man for several years; she had loved him from the first moment she looked in his face, and he was the only one of his sex whose presence ever caused a pulsation of her heart to quicken.

They had met in Italy, down under the purple skies of beautiful Sorrento. Castlemaine was thrown from his horse, and injured his hip. St. Simon brought him home, and Fanny nursed him during many long weeks.

She believed heaven itself could offer no happiness such as hers was during this season. While the bliss lasted, she let herself think that it would never fade. He would fling prudence to the winds; let his love conquer all difficulties, and ask her to become his wife. But he did not do this.

He loved her—loved her with a passion which no woman had ever before inspired in him. Those weeks were as sweet to him as they could be to her. They were all in all to one another. St. Simon had been called away. The Tortoise was always asleep or eating. No human being intruded between them.

Oh, those weeks! Fanny St. Simon knew that away down the farthest cycles of eternity their memory must haunt her. They rambled among the vine-clad hills; they sat on the cliffs, and watched the sun set over the golden waves; they floated about the sunny waters in an enchanted bark, and made charmed visits to Capri, with its beautiful marvels. They were happy; he as happy as the girl who loved him. But the end came. A relative upon whom he was in a measure dependent summoned him back to England; he dared not refuse.

Fanny made no effort to keep him; she was not angry that he lacked fortitude to face care and privation for her sake. They talked the matter plainly out; she argued the impossibility of a marriage between them (as soon as she perceived that he desired her so to argue) as clearly and dispassionately as a third person could have done. She was calmer than he, when the moment of parting arrived; but many a woman who has died of a broken heart suffered less than Fanny St. Simon did then and afterward.

This was the whole of Fanny's romance—the only one she had ever known. Men had loved her, and her power over the race was almost

boundless, but she had nothing to do with love. She was to make a rich marriage—it was the end and aim of her existence; yet, often as the chance had been offered, each time, to St. Simon's wrath and dismay, she had flung it from her.

Now she had seen Talbot Castlemaine again—a fleeting glance, permitted to bring up her wretchedness with new force. But they had met more than once since that dream in Italy—met, and been gay and friendly—parted, and she had borne it. Only the last winter of the Empire—just after she had dealt her covert blow at Helen Devereux—he appeared, and devoted himself to the heiress. Fanny had to stand by and see this, remembering that she was powerless, that it was her act, too, which left Miss Devereux at liberty to listen to him if she chose.

Fanny had borne it with desperate courage. She told herself that she could well enough endure this latest pang. It could not go so deep as the former thrusts. Her heart had grown accustomed to stabs; it must have hardened somewhat.

But he meant to marry Helen Devereux and her millions. Letters from London during the past season had told Fanny of his renewed devotion in that quarter. It was this fact which hurt the most. It would have been hard to give him up to any woman; but, of all women, that it should be Helen Devereux who won the prize! It drove Fanny "past her patience," to use poor Queen Katharine's pathetic complaint.

"I'm not a good woman," she said to herself; "I dare say I shall grow worse, but every thing has been against me—always—and I'll not try to do right; I'll never try again—never!"

She staid in her room until Antoinette appeared with the information that dinner was ready.

"But monsieur is not entered," Antoinette explained. "The poor madame says she is quite faint—it is a half-hour past the time."

"He does not dine at home—I had forgotten it," said Fanny. "Tell Paul to serve the soup at once."

She walked on into the *salon*; the Tortoise sat buried in an easy-chair by the fire. She wanted a fire in July, and always sat as close to the fender as she could get; indeed, had more than once been rescued from a dreadful death by Fanny's assistance. Catarrh and constant snuff-taking had left her nose useless, except as a dust-hole; she might have burned up without her olfactory organs telling her there was any thing the matter.

"I'm so hungry," she said, plaintively, as Fanny appeared.

"Well, go into the *salle à manger*. I have told them to serve dinner," her niece replied.

"But don't you think St. Simon will mind?"

"Oh, he's not coming home—I shouldn't wait if he was," returned Fanny, carelessly. "He must learn to be punctual."

"I feel quite faint," moaned the Tortoise. "I've taken nothing since breakfast, only a bit of cake and a glass of my bitters at three o'clock, and a cup of tea and a biscuit at five."

It was seven now; Fanny hastened to lead her into the dining-room, lest she should perish of inanition.

"That's my chief trouble," said the Tortoise, as she crumbled into her seat at table. The expression is absurd, but it is the only one that answers. She seemed to go to bits whenever she sat down, and each time she rose she dropped some portion of her apparel—any thing from a shawl to a garter.

No matter how carefully she was dressed, Fanny herself might superintend the operation, and tie and pin in every direction. The instant the Tortoise moved, she began to come apart; and at the most unexpected moments, in company or not, could be heard the plaintive appeal,

"Oh! please put me together, Fanny; I'm all wrong, somehow!"

"What is your chief trouble, T.?" inquired Fanny. She had long before taken up the habit of addressing her thus, but the Tortoise never asked why.

"Quick digestion," returned she.

"I have often heard complaints of slow digestion."

"No; that's not what ails me. My stomach is like a sieve! I'm sure if I could take chloroform or something, and have a new lining put in, I should think it might be managed?"

"I've no doubt of it," replied Fanny, thinking how amused St. Simon would be at this new inspiration. "We are to have a dinner-party on Thursday, T."

"Are we? I remember now—St. Simon said something—but I thought it was we were invited out."

"No, no; we are the entertainers. I have ordered you a new gray satin dress, trimmed with white lace—you'll be very gorgeous."

"I hope the pins won't stick into me," sighed the Tortoise; "they always do. I declare, sometimes I think I must be a cushion without knowing it."

"There was once a man who was a tea-pot," said Fanny.

"Was there, really?"

"Well, he thought himself one, and was dreadfully afraid he should get broken."

"Yes, indeed, I should think so! I never knew a man that was a tea-pot," said the Tortoise, meditatively; "but lor! how afraid he would be, with servants so careless; but, then, it's a joke."

"A poor joke to him," said Fanny, eating her *matelote* quietly, and thinking how nice it was to have a good dinner once more, all the while that Talbot Castlemaine's image stared at her from a silver dish-cover, and she wondered drearily if

some principle of evil ruled the universe, and took a special pleasure in tormenting her.

She had a sensuous love for beautiful things; she was like St. Simon in that. She adored ease and luxury, but, like him, she could support reverses with Spartan fortitude. The two were often as gay eating cold meat and salad in a stuffy chamber *au cinquième* in some dull German town as ever they had been when dining in state off the delicacies of the season, though they did this whenever they could, and thought very little at whose cost it might be.

"Am I to say St. Simon has been in America?" asked the Tortoise, presently.

"Of course, if you like—why not, T.?"

"Well, I didn't know. Sometimes I'm not to tell things—luckily, I forget, anyway. "But," dropping her voice to a whisper, "where do you think he went?"

"To America, T."

"Oh, but he said he had been there," returned the Tortoise, as if the assertion on his part was proof positive that in whatever direction he had journeyed, Columbia could not have been the bourn.

Here was another story with which to amuse St. Simon. He would be highly diverted by the Tortoise's perspicacity.

"He really did go," said Fanny. "Odd as it seems, he told the truth word for word."

"Oh, it's not that; I didn't mean that."

"He tells lies?" asked Fanny, calmly.

"Parables, Fanny; he told me when we were first married to call them parables, and I never forgot. Do you know I always recollect the word by thinking of pirate? I can't tell how, but I do."

While Fanny smiled in good-natured contempt, she was wondering what the poor Tortoise had been like when she was young, and first married to St. Simon. Fanny had heard that she was very pretty, and rather a bright girl. She must have suffered in her way, for Fanny knew that St. Simon's polish was only an enamel; there was a ruthless savage under, when roused. Many women would have left him, others would have become vixens. The Tortoise had allowed herself to be flattened gradually under his iron hand; had lived a life of repression and fear, for she was afraid of him, until such mind as she had left was chaotic as a rag-bag.

"Fanny," she said, presently, after having devoured her *matelote* and partaken heartily of the delicate *entrée*, and made her fingers so hopelessly greasy that her niece was obliged to leave her seat and rub them with a napkin.

"Well, T.?"

"It's nice to be rich; I wish we could stay so."

"Do you, indeed!"

"Yes; but we never do. It's like—what is it like? Living on a staircase: one day at the top

and the next at the bottom," said the Tortoise, pulling her snuff-box out of her pocket (forgetting where she was), and thrusting it hastily back as she caught Fanny's eye.

"A very good comparison, T.! But perhaps now we shall stay at the top. After all, you were very comfortable this summer."

"Yes. I wish Paul would hurry with the other course; my digestion is so quick."

It was true that Fanny had made her comfortable; however spare her own dinner, there was always some dainty dish and a bottle of good wine for the poor Tortoise. Fanny hated to see any creature suffer, as much, perhaps, from a selfish dread as any thing else.

"Fanny," said the Tortoise again.

"Yes, T."

"Do you think I might go and stand in the passage a moment?" She asked the question diffidently, and Fanny knew that her fingers were on the snuff-box, which she fondly believed a profound secret.

"No, you will catch cold; you can sneeze after dinner," she said, for she gratified the old soul by never mentioning the snuff-taking proclivities under any other name. "I think you had better wait."

"Perhaps I had," sighed the Tortoise, and allowed the *tabatière* to drop back into the recesses of her pocket.

Fortunately Paul appeared at this instant with another dish, and she forgot her longing in a laudable desire to give her active digestive organs more work.

After dinner the Tortoise dozed in her chair, occasionally waking long enough to imbibe a pinch of snuff with an air of great mystery. Fanny sat at the piano, and played snatches from operas in a brilliant way, sung now and then averse, walked up and down the room thinking of Talbot Castlemaine's eyes, of Helen Devereux, of her own thwarted, blighted existence; yet all the while conscious of a certain gratification in her luxuriant surroundings—in the glimpses she caught of herself in the mirrors, her face and figure admirably set off by her becoming new attire. "After all," she thought, "if one must be miserable, there's a little comfort in being so in a nice dress and a handsome room. I don't suppose I should be wretched if I had any thing to do, but I haven't, and shouldn't know how to do it if I had."

St. Simon came in rather early, to Fanny's astonishment. Nothing had ever puzzled her so much as this rigid assumption of respectability on his part.

"I thought you would be dull," said he; "and it sounds well to say that I come home at eleven."

"It's tiresome to be respectable," yawned Fanny.

"Don't corrupt my nascent morality by such sentiments," said St. Simon.

"I think the jolliest month I remember was that at Chaudfontaine three years ago," pursued Fanny; "don't you recollect?"

He nodded, and rolled himself a cigarette.

"We were awfully under a cloud, and you had dreadful luck at the tables. But there were no Americans, no English—nobody that wasn't immoral and improper! Was it not fun?"

"Yes; what larks our suppers were!"

"With that little actress, and old De Farville, and Madame de Sansen; I wonder what's become of them all."

"My dear, we're respectable now!"

"Oh, make me a cigarette, and let's have some sherry-and-soda; I'm sick of myself."

"How peacefully the Tortoise sleeps!" said St. Simon, handing her the cigarette he had just made. "You think I'm not a good man; but only fancy, if I had murdered her I might have married a fortune twenty times."

"I wonder you never did," said Fanny; "it shows that there are some temptations you can resist."

"I never thought seriously of it but once," he continued, as he rang the bell. "That was years ago—just before I went to America for you. I was awfully down; I had left the Tortoise at Brussels, and had gone to Hamburg. There was a rich widow who flung herself straight at my head, and told me—sherry-and-soda." This last addressed to Paul, who appeared in answer to his master's summons.

"What did she say after?" asked Fanny.

"I was the only man she ever cared for; that was the third time I'd seen her. Then some fool let out that I was married. I assure you I was strongly tempted to go back and help the Tortoise develop into an angel."

"You said you wanted Helen Devereux's address," said Fanny.

"Have you found it?" he inquired, rather eagerly.

"She's in Devonshire: must be visiting Marian Payne. I've the name of the place somewhere."

"You always find out things for me. I couldn't get on without you, Fan."

"Then there's no danger of my finding myself murdered in my sleep at present."

"No; for the time you may slumber tranquilly; but who told you the Devereux's whereabouts?"

"Talbot Castlemaine," she replied, flinging the end of her cigarette into the fire.

"Where on earth did he spring from?"

"Out of it, perhaps. I met him in the street. There's Paul with the drinkables. I'm parched with thirst."

St. Simon stood and looked full at her for an instant; a glance, half curious, half quizzical.

"Romances are pretty things," said he.

"Sherry-and-soda is better," she replied;

"give me some, if you please, and—St. Simon!"

He stopped on his way to the table and looked back at her; she had called his name in a voice suddenly haughty and hard.

"Miss St. Simon!" said he.

"If you ever look at me like that again when I mention Talbot Castlemaine's name, I'll give you reason to regret it."

He went up to the table, mixed the sherry-and-soda, filled a glass for himself, and returned to the hearth with both tumblers in his hands.

"Accept," said he; "forgive and forget. I want you to be in your very best temper for the next two months."

"A perfect eternity," cried Fanny, gayly.

They sat down by the fire, and sipped their cooling draughts, while the Tortoise slumbered quietly; at intervals indulging in a little snore which sounded like "Peek! peek!" but both were too much accustomed to notice.

"So you expect Gregory Alleyne in Paris," said Fanny.

"Yes, early next month. Ah! there's a fortune, Fan, if you could only make up your mind to catch it."

"I am sleepy," said she: "I shall go to bed."

She rose and stood with one foot on the fender, looking back over her shoulder at her uncle.

"St. Simon," said she, "I have made up my mind. I mean to marry that man."

"A very sensible resolution. If you say you'll do it, I know you will. You might have settled yourself half a dozen times, if you had not given way to your caprices."

"Don't go over that."

"You are right; there's never the least good in raking up the past. But I shall be glad to see you well married, Fanny."

"A very proper speech—sounds like the *père noble*!" laughed she. "Upon my word, St. Simon, you do a bit of paternal solicitude in the neatest fashion."

"Don't discourage me by sneering at my efforts," he said, laughing too. "Gregory Alleyne is among the richest men in America at this present; he's a very good fellow too—a little heavy on hand, a little overstrained in his notions; for instance, you mustn't smoke a cigarette before him."

"I'll engage to make him put up with whatever I please to do," said Fanny.

"I've no doubt he'll fall helplessly enough in love, if you choose to *ensorceler* him."

"I doubt it, then, and I have my reasons; but I shall marry him all the same."

"Why shouldn't he?" asked St. Simon. "But it's no particular good to have a husband who is in love; the money is the great thing."

"I would marry him if he hadn't it," Fanny exclaimed.

"Good heavens!" cried St. Simon, aghast.

"You say he is a good man?"

"Yes, if you mean slow and moral."

"If he were the worst man that ever lived, I'd marry him," said Fanny, tapping her foot slowly on the fender as she spoke.

"Well, this passes my comprehension!" exclaimed St. Simon, putting on his eyeglass to study her face.

She had turned now so that the light fell full upon her features; her eyes blazed with a sombre fire; a cruel smile flitted across her lips.

"Yes, this passes my comprehension," repeated St. Simon.

"Does it?" she asked.

"A man you never set eyes on! My dear Fanny, you don't often talk for effect unless there is something to be gained by it; but really it does seem to me that just now you are only airing your vocabulary for the pleasure of seeing me open my eyes."

"I am doing nothing of the sort. I never spoke more seriously in my life. I shall marry Gregory Alleyne, whether he will or not. I'd do it if he were a poor man instead of a rich one. I'd do it if he were likely to prove my tyrant instead of my slave."

She was in earnest; he had only to look in her face to be certain of that.

"I never expected again to feel the sensation of surprise," murmured St. Simon. "For mercy's sake, unfold the mystery!"

"Because Helen Devereux loves him; because she was engaged to him once; because she is the sort of idiotic woman who can never care but for one man; because for me to marry him will wring her heart—be a daily and hourly torture to her if she should live a hundred years—that's why I mean to marry Gregory Alleyne."

She had spoken in the same slow, repressed voice, still tapping the fender with her foot. St. Simon leaned back and stared in her face, more astonished by her speech and manner than he had been at any thing in ten years.

"Good-night," said she, abruptly. "Take my word for it, I mean what I say, and I shall do it."

She passed quietly out of the room, and left St. Simon to his meditations.

CHAPTER IV.

CASTING THE NET.

It was eight o'clock on Thursday evening. St. Simon's guests began to make their appearance singly, or by pairs, or family trios, in the pretty *salon* where he and his niece awaited them. Fanny had a genius, as she had in many other things, for giving furnished apartments a look at once home-like and picturesque. In this instance she had found good material to work

upon, for the room was well-shaped, the furniture admirably selected, and the *portières* at the end afforded glimpses of a second and still larger *salon*, with a charming boudoir beyond that.

Naturally the Tortoise was also present; but she never received any callers, or entertained them after they were received. She talked a good deal when she could keep awake; but during the first half hour in company she was always too much occupied in adjusting stray pins which insisted on pricking her (pins were the bane of the Tortoise's life; and if she had not been the sweetest-tempered woman in the world, she would have daily cursed their inventor), to pay more than a vague attention to night besides.

Enter two or three men from America—all of them people whom St. Simon meant to catch in his net. Enter several fathers of families with their spouses, conveying under their wings daughters who cooed like doves. Enter Mr. and Mrs. Pattaker—the latter a notable person in the colony; in fact, the head and front of that important body. Whomsoever Mrs. Pattaker willed to "take up" was joyfully accepted by the whole band. Whomsoever Mrs. Pattaker willed to fling against the stones was immediately trampled under foot, or obliged to get out of the way.

St. Simon, like the crafty old fisherman he was, caught her in his net with little trouble. Soon after his arrival, he held a long, confidential interview with her, and made her a present of a number of shares of the mining stock. Mrs. Pattaker was a very rich woman; so of course she was greedy for more. St. Simon had gained a powerful ally; she would sound his trumpet, give parties, help him to catch gudgeons and whales.

Mrs. Pattaker had been a beauty; she was not so any longer, but she still believed herself to be, and that answered every purpose where she was concerned. Mrs. Pattaker's grandfather had been one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and she overwhelmed her world by the awful majesty of that dread phantom.

Mrs. Pattaker's daughter had married a French duke (who pulled her hair regularly or irregularly once a week); therefore Mrs. Pattaker regarded herself as a sort of duchess dowager. She was intensely aristocratic, and talked as incessantly about blood as if she had been a fabricator of black puddings. She was intensely Republican also, principally on account of the Signer, and fluttered the Star-spangled Banner a great deal, frequently announcing her readiness to die wrapped amidst its folds.

The anomaly is not uncommon; so let no person, unfamiliar with the habits of Americans whose grandfathers signed the Declaration, and whose daughters have wedded titles, venture to pronounce it unnatural.

Mr. Pattaker was—Mrs. Pattaker's husband; sufficient honor for one man. So, having an

nounced the fact, I need say no more about him—nobody ever did.

Enter Colonel Judd, from the Far West, resembling, on account of the length of his legs, a pair of tailor's shears; informing whomsoever would listen, in a fine nasal accent, that he had worked his way up from a shoe-maker's bench; quoting the Latin proverb about the propriety of one of that craft never going beyond his last, and adding (people who were acquainted with him knew where the laugh came in) that his last was realizing half a million from Brazilian bonds.

Enter Sir John Dudgeon, looking as if he had smelled something unpleasant in his early youth, and had never since recovered his equanimity. Enter, beside him, Lady Dudgeon, in a green dress with a blue convolvulus wreath, wearing also a conscious, deprecating expression of countenance, as though fearful she were the odor which had disturbed Sir John's olfactories, and lifted his proboscis out of the proper angle.

Enter Miss Langois; French by parentage, American by birth and education. The skinniest old maid in Europe; the readiest to do and say obliging things of and for people: it was her stock in trade. Every body you could mention, from the Khan of Tartary to the President of the United States, was Miss Langois's bosom friend. She found even good words to speak of her married sisters, who had all the flesh and all the money she lacked, who tyrannized over her, and dressed her in their cast-off garments. She knew the whole world, and went everywhere; her tongue would be of service to St. Simon, therefore he bore the sight of her elbows with fortitude.

Enter a Gallic marquis, who wished to purchase a Yankee heiress; aged five-and-thirty to count by years, but centuries old if one counted by his familiarity with vice.

Immediately after, Miss Paola Walton and her mamma; Miss Paola celebrated for sighing in the marquis's wake, and informing her friends in strict confidence that she and the noble gentleman were a modern type of Romeo and Juliet—only separated by money, or the lack of it, instead of a family feud. After looking at her, nobody felt inclined to dispute her right to being the heroine of a drama, for she was frail and weedy enough to have stood for a model of Juliet just emerged from the tomb.

Enter Mrs. Gerard and Mrs. Dunstable—two American sisters—each chaperoning the other. They are so well known in every Continental city that it seems a waste of time to dwell upon them, though they deserve—and get wherever they go—more than a passing mention.

Enter a variety of really charming and well-bred people, whom, in accordance with the habit of story-writers in general, I shall not describe. The dear reading public prefers to hear about

persons at whom they can laugh, and decide which group among their circle of acquaintance the author has meant to depict.

Enter more and more guests; among the last a pleasant young fellow with whom St. Simon had formed acquaintance on the steamer. This was Roland Spencer, aged two-and-twenty; handsome, clever, rich; visiting Europe for the first time, and fuller of dreams and illusions than one often finds a young man in our century. He looked at Fanny St. Simon, who was bewildering in a maize-colored silk with a tulle tunic, and straightway transformed her into an angel, and fell helplessly, idiotically, in love.

Every body had arrived now; so St. Simon led the way toward the dining-room, with Mrs. Pattaker on his arm. Lady Dudgeon might be a baronet's wife, but Mrs. Pattaker always ranked next to princesses of the blood.

Foolish Roland Spencer had the bliss of conducting Fanny, and the touch of her gloved fingers on his coat-sleeve riveted and locked the fetters which her first glance had thrown about him.

"My uncle tells me you have come over to remain for several years," were among her first words, spoken because she must talk. Thinking him shy, she good-naturedly took the initiative in the conversation.

"Yes; I want to see Europe thoroughly, and go to the East," he answered, feeling all the while as if he walked on air, and dizzy with the faint odor of Parma violets which hung about her.

"Then you'll be blind," said Fanny; "every body who goes to Egypt gets—oh, something with a long name. You'll have to come back, and be led up and down by a dog. I always thought I should like that! There's a spaniel I see every day in the Champs Élysées that walks so beautifully on his hind legs, and carries a basket in his mouth; but you mustn't drop sous in it, because the spaniel's master is a cheat."

"I'll save my sous to buy the dog and basket against ophthalmia overtakes me," said he.

"I do believe he's not a fool," thought Fanny, and glanced at him; she had not before taken the trouble. That head certainly did not belong to a simpleton; there were ideality and all the imaginative bumps finely developed. Miss St. Simon was phrenological enough to see this. "How glibly you speak that long word," she continued aloud. "Are you awfully wise and learned?"

"Not a bit," said he, laughing.

"Then I'll not hate you immediately. Do you know Mrs. Pattaker?"

"Oh yes; my mother was an old friend of hers."

"Then you will be allowed to live! If you did not know Mrs. Pattaker, the police would drive you out of Paris in twenty-four hours!

They have an order to banish all Americans who don't know her. I'm not sure whether it's her command or that of President Thiers, but it's the law. I'm horribly afraid of Mrs. Pattaker! I stepped on her little dog's tail once, and did not dare come back to France for six months."

Roland Spencer thought this nonsensical trash the wittiest talk he had ever heard, and laughed so heartily, as they were taking their seats, that he attracted Mrs. Pattaker's attention, and she called from her end of the table,

"Oh, you bad boy! Remind me to scold you for not coming to see me this morning. I had twenty things for you to do."

Mrs. Pattaker always had twenty things for each of her friends to do, but this patronizing sweetness toward Roland established his claims to consideration at once. Every acquaintance of Mrs. Pattaker's knew the different inflections of her voice, and her tone proved that Mr. Spencer was a man to cultivate: he must have both money and family. People regarded him with favor; the young women discovered that he was very handsome. Sir John Dudgeon said, in his puffy, wheezy voice,

"You're a fortunate man, sir—a very fortunate man!"

Colonel Judd said,

"You'll not need to go beyond your last—ha, ha—little joke of mine—ever hear it, Lady Dudgeon?"

Whether she had or not, Mrs. Pattaker had no mind to listen to it now, so she hastened to make her voice heard.

"Marquis," she said, "His Majesty was suffering the day before yesterday—no, it was on Sunday—from a cold in the head."

By His Majesty she means the Count of Chambord. Formerly Mrs. Pattaker had worshipped at the shrine of the Bonapartes; but since the fall of the empire, she had developed into a Legitimist, announced her intention of putting on mourning when the anniversary of the death of Louis XVI. should arrive, after the habit of the Faubourg St. Germain, and had displaced the bust of the empress in her *salon* by a portrait of Marie Antoinette.

"A cold, had he?" said the marquis, as indifferently as he dared answer a giver of such dinners as Mrs. Pattaker provided.

Every body became greatly excited about His Majesty's ailment, and even the Tortoise was heard to murmur something in regard to the virtues of flaxseed tea.

"O le drapeau blanc!" cried Mrs. Pattaker, enthusiastically.

"Sh! sh!" This from Miss Langois to some unfortunate who had tried to speak.

It was supposed that Mrs. Pattaker was about to be eloquent. She apparently thought so herself, for she struck the famous attitude—the family attitude—that in which Stuart painted old

John (never mind who) the Signer. But the burst was not forthcoming; so after waiting an instant, and keeping every body else waiting, Mrs. Pattaker was obliged to relinquish the *pose*, and content herself with sighing, "*O le drapeau blanc!*"

"Yes, indeed—the drappy blanche!" echoed Colonel Judd.

Sir John Dudgeon, disgusted with such mutilation of the soft syllables, felt it his duty to give the proper pronunciation for the colonel's benefit, so he repeated,

"Oh, the drapp blauk!"

And Miss Langois, who had a parrot-like propensity for echoing whatever she heard, murmured,

"Oh, the *drap*—"

But could get no further, for she saw Mrs. Pattaker's eye upon her. By this time, Roland Spencer was nearly in a fit from the effort to repress his laughter, and wicked Fanny added to his sufferings by sundry speeches unheard by any body else.

"You find Paris so dull that you mean to run away to Italy for the winter," she said, when he had regained his composure. "My uncle told me. I think it's wicked of you to desert us."

She smiled at him for the first time as she spoke, and Roland Spencer went straight into paradise. I should say that Saint Augustine himself could not have resisted Fanny St. Simon's smile.

As for Roland, his resolution was taken from that moment; a legion of fiery dragons should not force him away.

"I have not made up my mind," he answered, coloring. He was still capable of a blush, this young man!

"Ah, then, perhaps we shall persuade you to stay," said she, and smiled again straight in his eyes for the pleasure of seeing the red come into his cheeks once more. She considered him a mere boy—at least a thousand years younger than herself. "I shall have to beg Mrs. Pattaker to lay her commands upon you; nobody ever disobeys her."

"I think I'd rather stay because you persuaded me," said he, courageously; and the speech was not bad for a beginner.

"I shall see how you behave; if you are very attentive and devoted, and help me tease Mrs. Pattaker, perhaps I shall try my powers," she replied, and gave him a third smile. After that, Roland needed no dinner, and was more thoroughly intoxicated than if he had finished a bottle of Champagne. Poor boy; he could not know that St. Simon had said to his niece,

"I depend on you to keep the young fellow here; he may be very useful; just turn his head a bit."

"So you don't like Mrs. Pattaker," Roland said.

"Bless me, I shouldn't venture to! I bow meekly before her; that is all she asks."

Fanny St. Simon did not look in the least like a woman who would bow meekly before any human being, and he told her so, only he rendered the words complimentary, and meant them to be.

"But you don't know me yet," said Fanny. "I'll tell you confidentially that I'm not nice, but you mustn't find it out. Tell me what you like—horses, dogs, cards. I am always very anxious to suit my conversation to my audience."

"Do you think it impossible I should go beyond that range in my likings?" he inquired, rather injured.

"Few men do, at all events."

"Well, at least I do not like cards," said he.

"So much the better," returned she, quickly.

"Mind you are able to say the same next spring; will you remember?"

"Do you want a promise?" he asked, feeling that it would be delightful to have such a pledge between them.

"Yes; a promise."

"Then I give it."

Straightway she recollected that probably she was running directly counter to St. Simon's plans, but she did not care. Something about this frank, fresh, handsome young fellow interested her as men of his age seldom did. She would keep him in Paris if she could, but he should not be made a victim. She did not even think of making him hers, though nowadays she was so sore at heart, and so bitter, that she spared few of his sex who crossed her path; but she meant no harm to him.

She turned a deaf ear to the attempts of her other neighbor to draw her into conversation, and talked with Roland Spencer as she could talk when she chose, perceiving that he could appreciate subjects beyond the ordinary limits of ordinary young men. In the mean while the general chatter went on its course, Mrs. Pattaker keeping it a good deal in her own control. Just now she was full of the claims of Legitimacy. If Henry V. had promised her the title of duchess, she could not have been louder in his praise, and her assertion of his rights. She abused the fallen emperor, and all belonging to him; and no one so much as looked a recollection of the days when she had moved heaven and earth to obtain invitations to court, and had given an emerald bracelet, worth sums untold, to the fair countess who procured for her the honor of staying three days at Compiègne.

"Extremes meet," said Mrs. Pattaker; "therefore I, a born Republican—I, in whose veins run the blood of one of the signers of the most august document the world ever saw—am at the same time a Legitimist. I would place the *drapeau blanc* and the Star-spangled Banner side by side, and go forth to victory, conscious that I bore the

two emblems under which might nestle the hopes of an entire world."

It was very fine language, and it was felt to be such by her hearers.

"As a man and an Englishman, madam," said old Sir John, "I may say as a baronet, I thoroughly agree with your doctrine; it's putting the thing neatly, and putting it in a nutshell; it is, begad."

"It makes your talkers on the other side sing small," said Colonel Judd; "it's finishing the thing up to the handle, and no mistake."

Most people expressed the same opinion in their different ways, and Mrs. Pattaker leaned pensively back in the family attitude, and her brow flushed a little under its tiara of brilliants—flushed with a consciousness of superiority, mental and moral. To do Mrs. Pattaker justice, her complexion was her own, and a good one still; so was her figure. Mrs. Pattaker was a pagan; her chief gods were wealth and station. But she went to church regularly once a week in the cause of respectability, and always had various charities on hand, to which she obliged her satellites to subscribe liberally. Talk to Mrs. Pattaker about physical illness or pain—she had never suffered either—and she would have called you weak. Talk to her about the heart-ache, and she would have thought you an idiot. Take Mrs. Pattaker as she was; be humble and adoring, and if you were a woman, she endured you gracefully; if you were a man, she allowed you to kneel at the foot of her pedestal, while she dazzled you by the majesty of the family attitude.

"We sink into it naturally," she sometimes observed; "as far back as we can trace the line of the august Signer"—and her looks said that was almost to the Flood—"the family attitude has been an heir-loom. It suggests thought, it suggests contemplation, it suggests mind. It is no merit of my own that I possess it—no weakness to admit its possession. I have it—that is all; it is enough."

The quill which the august Signer had used lay on a velvet cushion under a glass case in Mrs. Pattaker's drawing-room. The gold snuff-box presented him by George III. previous to the Revolution lay beside it. On the anniversary of the Declaration Mrs. Pattaker made a feast, and shed tears before the pen and the snuff-box, and her guests were expected to shed tears likewise. History does not record that Mrs. Pattaker ever shed tears on any other occasion or subject; but she wept once each year over these mementos of her illustrious ancestor, and did it gracefully. Beauty, like the attitude, was an heir-loom in the Signer's family. Mrs. Pattaker's great-aunt had been a toast at Louis XIV.'s court. Another great-aunt had wedded an English earl.

The portraits of both ladies were still in existence, and there could be no doubt in regard to

their truthfulness, for they closely resembled Mrs. Pattaker, attitude and all.

"Just to think," Fanny said, pensively, addressing Roland Spencer in an under-tone, "if poor crazy old King George—I don't remember which—had only succeeded in beheading the signers, there never would have been any Mrs. Pattaker."

"What a mercy," he began; but Fanny held up her finger with a mischievous look, and interrupted—

"That the dear royal old gentleman's sanguinary designs were not carried into execution, of course."

"Of course," repeated Roland. Then both laughed again, and he thought her wittier than ever.

"I was born with a hatred of dinner-parties," said he, jumping through his thoughts till he reached in his mind the difference between this festivity and those framed on the stereotyped pattern.

"Thanks," retorted Fanny, before he could get further; "and I was born with a hatred of the people who accept invitations to them—"

"You did not let me finish—"

"I am glad; you might have said something worse."

"I wanted to say that to-night's party is so different from my experience and ideas, that I take dinners into favor henceforth," laughed he.

"Oh!" said Fanny. "And I meant to add that the company this evening reconciles me to dinner-goers—thanks, of course, to Mrs. Pattaker."

"The Pattaker is not half a bad woman," returned Roland, feeling so amiably disposed that he could even venture to speak with improper familiarity of that august personage.

"Half bad, indeed!" cried Fanny. "Why, there are no comparisons for her! She is unique—she is Mrs. Pattaker, and nobody else. That is the reason all virtuous people are at liberty to worship her. She resembles nothing in the heavens above or the earth beneath."

Roland forgot the irreverence of her speech in his appreciation of its fun, and thought that each instant she grew more fascinating.

"You are not to persuade me to be wicked any longer," said Fanny. "I am sure you come under the head of the temptations we are taught to struggle against. I can feel Mrs. Pattaker's eyes on me this moment. I dare not look toward her to be certain; but I feel their power."

Roland looked; sure enough, Mrs. Pattaker was intently regarding them, even while she listened amiably to St. Simon's conversation.

"I knew it," said Fanny; "I saw you start. I assure you, besides all her other wonderful qualities, she is as full of magnetism as the needle or the North Pole, or whatever it is that at-

tracts. I can always tell when she enters a room, even if I can not see her."

"Ridiculous old thing," muttered Roland, so annoyed by the great lady's scrutiny that he could not remember courtesy.

"Don't think out loud," said Fanny; "there's nothing so impolite. It is horridly vulgar to think at all; but at least you must learn to act as if you were not capable of such an enormity."

So they continued their nonsense, and forgot all about Mrs. Pattaker. But that lady did not forget them, and, unless when talking herself, remembered to watch them. Mrs. Pattaker's eyes were serviceable as well as handsome, and perceived clearly the danger which lay in store for Roland Spencer.

She decided to warn him against Fanny St. Simon—to do it without delay. She must fulfill her duty by the son of her old friend; and when this principle actuated Mrs. Pattaker, she stopped at nothing. In the present case her duty was plain—"he who ran might read." Mrs. Pattaker, like many other people, was fond of Scriptural quotations, when her conscience was roused, as to the necessity of nullifying the witcheries of some sister woman who was likely to be trusted by unwary pilgrims.

Mrs. Pattaker made a note of the duty in her mind, and that kind of moral obligation Mrs. Pattaker never forgot.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE SALON.

THE dinner—and a remarkably good one it was—followed its course in as decorous a fashion as if its givers had been born and bred noble as the noblest of their guests—say Mrs. Pattaker or the marquis—instead of being the most out-and-out pair of Bohemians that ever existed.

The thought of all she had gone through in the past months rose more than once in Fanny's mind; and several times when she met St. Simon's eyes she could see the reflection of similar memories there. Not that either of them felt the least surprise at the odd vicissitudes. If Fanny could have been proved the rightful heir to the English throne, she would not have experienced more than a passing thrill of astonishment; and St. Simon, turned into an Eastern pasha, say some fine Monday morning, would have been quite equal to the duties of his new position before noon.

Both had the same almost irresistible desire to tell the whole story of St. Simon's wanderings and Fanny's hardships out for the public amusement—the threatened cooking of the Tortoise to make the climax. But finding themselves in such virtuous society, they assimilated too perfectly therewith to give way to such wicked

temptings of carnal nature. Still the impulse would every now and then dart through their minds, and each could read it in the other's eyes; and perhaps that, slight thing as it was, amused both more than all the brilliant conversation of the high and mighty people whom they had the honor of entertaining.

Considering that the chief guests were marquises and the mothers-in-law of dukes, and other appallingly great personages, perhaps it was natural that the general tone of conversation should be a little stately and overpowering—not dull, of course, but grand; no merry trifles, no nonsensical *persiflage* such as Fanny and Roland Spencer were privately indulging in; just slow and dignified, and—and (this was St. Simon's thought, so do not blame me for it) slightly soporific in its effects.

Mrs. Pattaker occasionally got back to Henry V. She approached the subject in a majestic fashion, which made one feel as if one were in a throne-room watching her pay her homage to visible royalty. She related personal anecdotes of the worthy descendant of the Bourbons, and displayed her familiarity with his history in a delightful way. But whatever might be the subject she chose to enlarge upon, it was treated in a manner which displayed Mrs. Pattaker's own virtues and claims to admiration so clearly that there was no possibility of any body's forgetting them.

The other guests talked too. Sometimes St. Simon and the agreeable people would seize the upper hand and keep it for a few moments; but before long Sir John Dudgeon was sure to trample down their trivial remarks under his gruff voice, or Mrs. Pattaker would go into or come out of the family attitude, and perform a long monologue calculated to awe the unregenerate soul who might be forced to listen. Indeed, every body talked except Lady Dudgeon and the Tortoise. The baronet's wife was a good deal occupied in keeping the convolvulus wreath in its proper place. The wreath did not seem pleased with its abode, and was constantly trailing away like a snake over the shoulder of one neighbor or tickling the face of the other, causing each in turn to jump in an undignified manner, and indulge in frantie, not to say indecorous, dashes, under the impression that he was assailed by some species of reptile with a bite in it. The poor Tortoise, according to her usual habit, went partially asleep between the courses, but she felt that St. Simon was watching her, and took care to doze in a preternaturally erect attitude, with her eyes wide open, and void of speculation as two bits of glass. The performance infinitely amused her husband and his niece, both being of the order of people who could talk about one thing, listen to another, and see every thing which happened into the bargain. But at least the Tortoise and Lady Dudgeon could eat,

and they did; and as, after all, that is the purpose for which people sit down to dinner, they may be said to have played well their parts, and their utter disregard of an indigestion later showed positive bravery besides.

Roland Spencer did not by any means prove a dining-table meteor, as Mr. Disraeli would have done in his youth; nevertheless, St. Simon, who found leisure to glance toward him now and then, was perfectly satisfied with his behavior. The young man was so dazzled by Fanny that he drank nectar and ate glorified food not to be found in the bill of fare. Several marriageable ladies remarked his conduct, but with no such sentiments of approval as their host entertained. They knew Spencer was rich, and they could see that he was handsome, and thought it just like Miss St. Simon's impudence to set about turning his head before they could get any "show" whatever. They would have liked charitably to warn him of his danger; to repeat the gossip rife in regard to her uncle and his family; to mention, not maliciously, but from a desire to aid a fellow human being, what a heartless and outrageous flirt the creature herself was universally considered. Even Paola Walton, that modern Juliet yearning for the grave, still retained sufficient interest in mundane matters to suffer a thrill of indignation, and emerged from a blank-verse reverie to ask her neighbor if he did not think poor Fanny St. Simon had gone off dreadfully in point of looks; adding, "She must be old, though. I can remember her ever since I was a tiny thing. But then" (here she sighed and relapsed into a graceful melancholy), "I am sure she is to be congratulated. What is youth? A bubble, a dream! Vanity of vanities is writ on all we see."

Her neighbor took the speech for a poetical quotation, and, feeling it necessary to make a suitable response, ejaculated, "Ah, yass! Shlakspeare—exactly—very good."

In the mean time the conversation grew more animated. Old Sir John Dudgeon had eaten and drunk till his face looked as if he had drawn a magenta-colored veil over it. Colonel Judd had piled eatables and drinkables into himself in as reckless a fashion as if his interior had been a cask, which he had accepted a contract to fill in a certain length of time, and was pressed to complete his bargain.

Of course the *Alabama* claims floated up on the torrent of talk. At the period of which I am writing they always would, sooner or later, find their way into the conversation wherever you went, until you dreaded them worse than your own relations, and wished devoutly that the claims and the two parties therein were sunk in the depths of the sea. The baronet and the colonel pounced upon the subject, and each distinguished himself in his peculiar style.

"If we had only died yesterday!" Fanny said

to Roland, with a shudder. "Then we should have escaped this infliction."

"If they had, you mean," returned Roland; "then they would have been spared disgracing themselves."

For the two men had mounted their hobby-horses, and were running a sort of steeple-chase of invective and abuse, each against his own particular land.

"There never was a country so humiliated as England," groaned the baronet; "we are the laughing-stock of the world."

"And we are rotten!" shouted the colonel—"rotten to the core! I see it, and I say it; thank goodness, I have not reached a pass where I am ashamed to tell the truth—we are rotten!"

"We have sunk into a nation of shop-keepers," puffed Sir John.

"We are eaten up by the canker of luxury and corruption," intoned the colonel, in his most nasal accents; "eaten alive—like—like vultures feeding on carrion."

"I wonder whether he ranks himself among the birds of prey or comes under the head of that very unpleasant kind of food," said Fanny, in a low voice, to Roland.

But Spencer could not laugh; this style of conversation on the part of a fellow-countryman filled him with strong indignation, and he thought the baronet, if possible, more idiotic and vulgar than the colonel. He was scarcely aware that both in England and America there is to be found a class of persons—let us hope not a large one—whose chief delight seems to consist in abusing the land which was so unfortunate as to give them birth. The two speakers were notable instances of this order. To listen to Sir John Dudgeon, one would have supposed that England was on the verge of bankruptcy—that she had not a sound ship left in her navy—not a capable man among her politicians.

Nor was the colonel, on his side, a whit behind the baronet. He might have been a column in a daily newspaper, so full was he of malice and virulence. Sir John's political rulers were a set of old women; the colonel's were pirates, or worse.

"I wonder," said Fanny St. Simon, sweetly, when the pair paused for breath, "that you don't each go back to your own country, and try all in one man's power to set matters straight."

"While America sends such representatives as she does abroad, what can you expect?" roared the colonel, thereby showing in what his private grievance consisted.

"While our elections go by bribery, and lords carry boroughs in their breeches-pockets, what hope is there of an honest man's being heard?" wheezed Sir John.

Then it became evident that it was the baronet's exclusion from Parliament which had ruined England.

Up to this moment Mrs. Pattaker had been engaged in a low-voiced dialogue with St. Simon, in regard to the mysterious mining shares. Now she mounted her pedestal, and assumed the family attitude.

"Sir John," said she.

"Mrs. Pattaker," gulped Sir John.

"Colonel Judd."

"Ma'am to you," quoth the colonel. Then suddenly remembered his contract, and hastily poured a glass of wine into his cask.

"You are both wrong; perhaps both right," sighed Mrs. Pattaker. "But in neither land ought we to waste our time with trivial contests. What are a few billions or trillions" (she said the words as easily as you or I could pence) "more or less? We should be aiding the *drapier blanc* to float over France, and cause the electric current of friendship to thrill from Gallia's heart to Columbia's farthest shore, embracing Albion in its all-pervading sweep."

"Ah," said St. Simon, "that is reason and poetry combined."

Here Fanny succeeded in rousing the Tortoise from her upright slumber, and Mrs. Pattaker was forced to rise with the other ladies; though she felt that Miss St. Simon, bold as she had always been, had undoubtedly developed a fresh fund of insolence during the past year.

"You may follow us if you like," that young lady said to Spencer. "I think you have endured enough for your sins."

The Frenchmen liked to follow also; so did most of the other men. St. Simon was left with Sir John, the colonel, and a few such heavy old birds, who preferred an additional bottle of claret to feminine society. St. Simon was perfectly satisfied with the success of his dinner; his niece saw this as soon as he appeared in the *salon*, impossible as it would have been for any one else to read his face.

Before the loiterers entered, Roland Spencer devoted himself to Fanny, and grew more and more bewildered by her fascinations. No doubt it was foolish; yet I think an older man might easily have envied him the ability; envied him the sensation too—for it was the first time the beautiful dream had set up its kingdom in his heart. It sounds odd to write of a youth of this generation who had almost reached three-and-twenty, but it was true nevertheless.

Straightway this woman became glorified in his sight, and he trod on air. When she gave him a cup of tea, it turned his head like strong wine; when she sung to him—literally, to him, she said—he went away off into heaven, and staid there. For the rest of the evening he heard nothing but her delicious voice—saw nothing but the magical smile and the siren glance with which she dazzled his soul anew.

Fanny St. Simon meant no harm to the boy—she called him that—wondering at his fresh-

ness of feeling. She only wanted to oblige her uncle; and her experience of life had not taught her to place much confidence in the sudden passions to which she knew men were given.

The mild festivity ended; and as soon as the guests were gone, Fanny rang for the new maid to convey the Tortoise to her room. If there was any delay, the poor soul would be sure to fall asleep, and require half an hour of persuasion and shaking to bring her back to consciousness.

"Well," said Fanny, turning toward her uncle as the Tortoise disappeared under the waiting-woman's charge, muttering incoherent sentences to the last, and prolonging the departure by dropping some article of attire at each step, "Well, St. Simon?" said Fanny.

He glanced at her, his lips still parted in the smile of good-natured contempt with which he had been regarding the partner of his life; but it changed to an expression of admiration as his eyes met those of the girl.

"You are looking wonderfully well to-night," he observed, deftly turning a cigarette in his long white fingers.

"Ah! you are satisfied with the evening," returned Fanny, lazily, apparently accounting to herself for the compliment.

"Perfectly," he said. "I'm afraid you have already made a mooning lunatic of that young Spencer."

"He's a very nice boy," Fanny replied. "We shall be great friends."

"Hum!" laughed St. Simon, softly, "that's rather like what the spider said to the fly in the children's rhyme."

"Indeed, I wouldn't do him a mischief for the world," she exclaimed, honestly. "I have not seen any body so earnest and straightforward in an age."

"Dear me! dear me!" and St. Simon shook his head, laughing still. "He's in worse danger than I thought, if you are meaning to try the friendly and sympathetic."

Fanny began a rather indignant disclaimer, but checked it suddenly: her face showed that she did not think it worth while to convince St. Simon.

"Only don't run counter openly to Mrs. Puttaker's plans for him," he added, after a pause. "She's in a particularly amiable mood, and I want to keep her so."

"Mrs. Puttaker is an idiot!" cried Fanny, irritably. "What plans has she for the poor boy? Of course I shall balk them! I never did let that woman get the better of me."

"She wants to arrange a marriage for him. She has nobody in view, I fancy. But just don't parade an intimacy with Spencer before her. I foresee that she will prove an immense help to us."

"If she only loses a lot of money, it will be a comfort," said Fanny.

"Nobody will lose any money in this transaction, my child," returned St. Simon, in a tone of dignified reproach.

"So much the better for nobody, my child," said Fanny, imitating his voice. "But will it be so much the better for us? There, then, don't look cross! I assure you that I begin to have the profoundest faith in the Nevada Silver—what is it?"

"You are nervous and irritable to-night—have a cigarette?—and you have been so for several days—ever since—"

He seemed trying to set the exact time, but Fanny knew that he was hesitating whether to run the risk of offending her by the mention of Castlemaine's name. St. Simon never liked any body to tilt at him without making a return thrust.

"Ever since when?" demanded she, in her ominously calm voice.

"Upon my word, I think ever since I got back," said he, deciding it wiser to let her scornful mention of his projects go unpunished. "The joy of seeing me probably has upset you a little."

"It may be I am cross because my projects were disarranged," she answered, merrily. "I meant to have come out at a *café chantant*, and your arrival deprived me of a new sensation."

Their conversation continued on the most amicable footing in spite of the slight disagreement that had threatened. Gradually the talk grew more serious as St. Simon led it toward the great scheme which occupied his thoughts. He was so frank and straightforward that Fanny could not help believing there must be some awful treachery at the bottom, though, try as artfully as she might, she could not get the clue, and finally was forced to believe the Nevada Silver Company a *bona-fide* affair.

She laughed to herself after she retired to her own room. It seemed so absurd to think of St. Simon as engaged in any transaction which possessed a really sound foundation. Then her thoughts wandered away—she could not tell how, nor could she ever control those vagrant fancies—to that last meeting with Talbot Castlemaine; to the brief span of Italian days when she had dreamed and been happy—the season which she believed might have left her another woman had Fate been kinder. It was all over now. The final possibility of goodness had been killed in her; nobody need blame her, whatever happened. The world was a battle-ground, and she must fight her way—*gare* to those who stood in her path! Helen Devereux's pale, proud face rose before her; she seemed to see Castlemaine looking into the sad eyes, to hear him breathing the false vows which were to win him ease and luxury; and all Fanny's demons took possession of her.

Gregory Alleyne was coming—there was a slight consolation. Let Helen Devereux strive

as she would to forget, life could hold for her no pang so sharp as the sight of this man transferring his allegiance to another.

Wait! A new thought started up in Fanny's mind—a thought so wild, so full of possible happiness, that, coming suddenly upon her, it turned her fairly dizzy and faint.

If St. Simon's plan should prove a success—if those shares he promised at once to place in her name should as speedily as he prophesied realize a great sum! Why, she would be a rich woman—as well able as Miss Devereux to offer Castlemaine the wealth he coveted. And he had loved her! Oh yes; vain, idle, shallow, false as she knew him to be (and she knew his faults thoroughly, though that knowledge did not affect her heart), he had loved her better than he ever could any other woman.

Wait! Why, it was a whole new life which opened before her in this mad, bewildering vision. If St. Simon did not deceive himself and her, in six months the dream might prove a reality. It was in her power to clear up the darkness which separated Miss Devereux and Gregory Alleyne; she had been inclined to speak the words long before, in order to render it impossible for Castlemaine to marry the girl. She had not spoken, because she knew well that in so doing she could not bring the vain man one inch nearer herself. He would only rush off in pursuit of another fortune if he lost the hope of Miss Devereux's. And, in her strange jumble of feelings, Fanny—since she was unable to win him—could not bear the idea of losing him the wealth for which he meant to sell his soul. These ideas caused her to hate Miss Devereux more intensely; the whole appeared her fault in Fanny's eyes. Let her suffer; let her marry Castlemaine and be wretched; and when her misery was at its height, she should learn that only her own intolerable pride had stood between her and peace.

But it was all changed now—that is, if St. Simon did not lie. For the present, Fanny was bound hand and foot; she could not act until her fortune was secure. Let Alleyne come; she would fool him to the top of his bent; become engaged to him. Miss Devereux would not marry Castlemaine at once—she would abate and ponder and weigh the matter. Before it was too late, Fanny could bring the estranged lovers together, and claim her own reward—if St. Simon did not deceive himself or her. There was always that black chance to contemplate; and it was difficult to have faith in St. Simon or his schemes. But since the conversation of this night, the documents he had shown her, every thing appeared so straightforward, so clear.

She was in a fever of excitement. She hurried up and down the room, distracted in her efforts to think calmly by the mad throbbings of her heart, and the beautiful visions which her capricious fancy sought to indulge. Well as she

knew Castlemaine, she had no fear; she judged him by herself—he would have been every thing good and noble had Fate proved more lenient. Before she was aware, she had gone worlds away from the point she meant to study—off into a glorified haunt which looked like a heavenly Italy—Castlemaine beside her—the wealth they both worshiped in their possession.

As she walked up and down she caught sight of her own face in the mirror, and somehow this brought her back to her senses.

"I should really be handsome if I could have a little peace," she muttered.

Her whole countenance had changed and brightened under the bewildering vision. She looked years younger than her age; her eyes were beautiful, with a soft, lambent light; a girl just entering her teens might have envied the bloom on her cheeks.

"I'm an idiot!" she continued, half aloud. "I mustn't dream like this again. I can do nothing. I shall go mad if I don't take care! If Castlemaine should marry her!"

Her face grew cold and gray; two deep lines traced themselves between her eyebrows. She turned angrily from her reflection in the mirror, sat down in her favorite easy-chair to think out her plan of action, putting her heart resolutely aside, as her checkered existence had taught her to do.

She knew from her English letters there was as yet no engagement between Castlemaine and Miss Devereux. She knew also that Miss Devereux would be slow to yield. Let matters go on—when sure that the promised golden harvest of St. Simon's was a certainty she would allow Castlemaine to learn the truth. Once convinced that she was rich, he would not hesitate.

Yet with these thoughts in her mind she made a hero of the man. She excused his weakness and vices; for these she blamed his education. She trusted him—believed in his capabilities for good. Poor, ill-trained girl, with almost every right impulse thwarted and turned away, she loved him with all the passion of her impetuous heart, all the force of her imperious will! She would have been capable of a great crime to win him, and believe that her love sanctified the means. A horrible creed to hold. Nothing more pitiful and blamable to contemplate than this woman in the pass to which she had allowed life to bring her; yet she told the truth when she said that under other circumstances she might have been a different creature. No excuse; nor do I seek to excuse her. I will not voluntarily cast a single glow over the sin of living for self, which, if you trace it through its varied ramifications, was Fanny St. Simon's chief and underlying error.

And while she wove her worldly schemes, and strove to find the road to happiness, careless, in her egotism, through what pain to others she

might reach it, that foolish Roland Spencer sat dreaming of her, and wasted hours which could more profitably have been devoted to honest, prosaic slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEVONSHIRE COTTAGE.

MISS DEVEREUX had seen fit to disregard the invitations poured in upon her from lords and ladies, potentates and powers, and had betaken herself to the quietest nook in all Devonshire, where there was not a creature to see and not a thing to do.

Marian Payne had written her this honestly, but the spoiled American heiress was not deterred from her purpose thereby, partly because she knew her visit would be a great pleasure to her solitary little friend, partly because she was tired and out of temper with herself and the world, and ready to utter Solomon's doleful cry. It was not surprising that she felt inclined to echo the misanthropic declaration of the Jewish sage, after such surfeit of the vanities of this life as had fallen to her share. As a very young girl she had turned the heads of all New York, and then traversed the ocean to make continental capitals acknowledge her supremacy. Not content with this, during the past spring she floated into Mayfair under the chaperonage of a famous duchess, and there was scarcely a title lower than royalty which had not been offered to Helen Devereux and her millions.

But when the season closed she paid a few unavoidable visits, and flitted across the Channel for a time. She came back, established her step-mother in a pleasant Twickenham villa, with quantities of new books, an Angora cat, and an old-maid gossip to fill up the measure of her content, and, unencumbered with either maid or man, set off on her journey into the heart of beautiful Devon.

The very first evening of her arrival, as she sat in the mysterious twilight, with the cottage as quiet as the Sleeping Beauty's palace, and Marian sitting opposite her, looking almost as pretty as the famous princess, the world, with its miserable triumphs, its disappointments and mistakes, seemed very far away and very tiresome to Miss Devereux. She wondered that she had not long before made a recluse of herself in some green-wood bower like this. She wondered and then laughed outright at her folly, and Marian, roused by the sound, came out of her own private dream, and asked what on earth was the matter.

"May I not laugh?" demanded Miss Devereux.

"Oh yes, if you can give good reasons, and let me share in the joke," returned Marian.

"I was laughing at myself—"

"That's what nobody else ever did," interrupted Marian.

"Why, mouse," cried Miss Devereux, "you are absolutely becoming bright; and really you have conquered your demure, shy ways in an astonishing manner."

"Only from the pleasure of having you with me," Marian averred; "I'm as shy and silly as ever in reality, I do assure you."

"I believe that girl is actually fond of me," quoth Miss Devereux, addressing her familiar—at least she called it so.

This familiar was an enameled devil hanging to her chatelaine, which she often consulted as she did now, apparently to learn from him whether her suspicion concerning Marian was correct. A marvelous little devil he was, with wicked, ruby eyes, and his tail curled over his arm. Tiny indeed, yet seeming so thoroughly alive and wide awake that very proper people were shocked at Miss Devereux's choice of an ornament. But she cared nothing for that, and was seldom to be seen without her imp. He depended from her watch-chain, or served as a locket, or dangled from a bracelet; and many a time his knowing face and the mocking gleam of his ruby orb had sorely discomfited Miss Devereux's adorers, as she earnestly held him up at some critical moment, and the imp appeared delighted with their confusion.

"Of course I'm fond of you," returned Marian, regardless of the demon; "you're like a wonderful dream to me. Living here so quietly as I do, and reading about your successes and triumphs—"

"Oh, Sathanas!" broke in Miss Devereux, shaking the imp. "You hear her! She's only a dear little goose, after all. My successes and my triumphs—how pretty it sounds! What was I laughing at?"

"I'm waiting for you to tell me," said Marian.

"Because I wondered, since I enjoy this quiet so much, why I kept on living in a whirl. Then I remembered that I am a huge idiot, and should get tired in three days if I were really obliged to stay here."

"Of course you would; you are not meant for a life like this," pronounced Marian, with the unhesitating wisdom of her years.

"Not meant for it, kitten?" asked Miss Devereux, as if ready to dispute the matter.

"Not you, indeed."

"Then I wish you'd go on and tell me what life I am meant for," she said; "because I'm very tired of the one I have tried, and even Sathanas, with all his wisdom, is unable to point out any other."

"I thought you had every thing in the world to make you happy," replied Marian, so honestly that Miss Devereux laughed again—but not gayly this time.

"I have been fed on sugar-plums until my

digestion is ruined; I shall try what bread-and-milk will do for me. I am so pleased this first evening that I really believe the regimen will prove beneficial."

"And we have such good milk and bread," said Marian, with perfect seriousness; then began to laugh in her turn and to color likewise, but both blush and laughter were so child-like that Miss Devereux envied her. "What a stupid I am!" the girl added; "I take every thing literally."

"That's because you have lived among sensible people who don't talk nonsense," returned Miss Devereux; "I must be careful, or your dear old grandmother will think me an utter monstrosity, and warn me off for fear you should be contaminated."

"Oh, grandmamma is in love with you already—she says you are like a brilliant meteor."

"Like fire-works of a very poor sort, I should say, with more smoke than flame, and it chokes—it chokes!"

She rose in an impatient way she had, and walked two or three times up and down the room.

"You are tired of sitting in the house," said Marian.

"Yes; come out and see the last of the twilight—always the prettiest sight in England, except yourself, my dear. How old are you, Marian?"

"Past eighteen."

"And I am twenty-two! I shall be a frightfully disagreeable creature soon."

"Don't call yourself names, Helen."

"Oh, but I shall! If you only felt my claws, as a good many people have done—you see I don't scratch you."

"Nor any body else, I am sure."

"Much you know about it! But drop the subject—I'm tired of Helen Devereux and every thing connected with her, only I'm such a selfish wretch that I think and talk of nobody else."

"Because you know there couldn't be a pleasanter subject to the people who love you."

"Oh, mouse, mouse! I shall kiss you, by way of punishment for your outrageous flattery."

"Besides, it's true," continued Marian, warmly returning her friend's embrace; a rarity, for Miss Devereux was not demonstrative. "You are not selfish, and you are always doing something for somebody."

"If it costs me no personal trouble! Ah, mouse, I perceive my faults plainly enough; the thing is, my clear-sightedness does not in the least help me to cure them."

"How hard you are on yourself," expostulated Marian; "I don't like it. I feel as if I were listening to some third person abuse my friend."

"Oh, don't take up the cudgels in Miss Dev-

ereux's defense—she's not worth it. Besides, it's a comfort to me occasionally to tell her severe truths; but she'll not profit by them—I know her well."

"She is the dearest, best, most lovable—"

"Selfish mass of contradictions that ever existed," interrupted Helen. "I only wonder I don't fall apart from sheer inconsistency. What is it somebody says?—'To know the right, and still the wrong pursue'—and that's me, my dear; that's Helen Devereux to the life. The man must have been inspired with a spirit of prophecy."

"You are absurd," cried Marian; but the young woman still persevered in her bad opinions of herself, in a whimsical fashion.

Marian refuted her statements with energy, and they argued over the matter until they almost forgot the beauty of the evening which they had come out to admire. We are all of us inclined to treat Nature in that fashion, notwithstanding our fine theories and ability to quote poetry in honor of her charms.

I must tell you here how she and Marian happened to be acquainted, lest I forget it, because there is no mystery about the fatality which brought the heiress's brilliant life within reach of the young girl's quiet existence.

When Marian was a child of ten, Mordaunt Payne became enamored of some scheme which was to make his fortune, and set sail for America, accompanied by his motherless little girl. In those days Mrs. Payne lived with a married daughter in Italy, and knew nothing of her son's intentions until she received a letter written on the day he sailed; so she had no opportunity to expostulate upon the folly of his taking Marian with him, or proposing any other plan in regard to her.

Mordaunt Payne was a helpless, hopeless visionary, and had been all his days. He had married a pretty, penniless girl, who died while Marian was a baby, and now he, having done the worst that he could for himself and his child by wandering off to a foreign land, proceeded to die also, and leave her alone among strangers.

Fortunately, the village in which he fell ill was near the country-seat where Helen Devereux and her parents were passing the summer. Helen's father had known Payne in England, and of course nothing was spared that could conduce to his comfort during his illness. He died in Mr. Devereux's house, and the news of his death was sent to the poor old lady, who had just returned to her native land after burying her only daughter in Rome. They were both gone now: the boy and girl whom she had idolized; the man and woman of whose futures she had expected so much; which she had lived to see prove heart-breaking failures. She wrote desiring that the little Marian should be sent to her, but it was late in the autumn before suitable guardianship

could be found, and during the time of waiting she remained in Mr. Devereux's house.

Since that season Helen and Marian had only met two or three times, but they had been regular correspondents, careless as Miss Devereux was about letters where other people were concerned. There was no one of her own sex to whom she was so warmly attached as to this girl. The penalty she paid for her wealth and grandeur was an inability often to believe in the sincerity of her friends; but Marian's truth and Marian's love were beyond a doubt, and Miss Devereux sometimes wondered at the warmth with which she returned the girl's enthusiastic devotion. It was so difficult to be greatly in earnest about any thing in these days, that her attachment for Marian formed a still greater contrast to her ordinary calm estimation of those with whom she was thrown in contact. She clung to it of course the more fondly on that account. She wove dreams for Marian's future, and gilded it with a brightness she had ceased to anticipate for her own.

Four dreamy, enchanted weeks went by.

Many a time afterward did Helen Devereux look back and marvel at the rest and happiness this period afforded her. It was nearly November now, but the weather remained soft and mild in the Devonshire valley, and so bright it seemed inclined to prove to the transatlantic stranger that the diatribes of Englishmen against the climate of their island home were base slanders.

Any description of that month would sound poor and meagre enough. The girls read and sang together, took long walks, drove an obstinate pony through the green lanes, listened to Mrs. Payne's Old-World talk, and enjoyed every moment. A beautiful ancient lady was Grandmamma Payne; like a picture on antique porcelain which has kept its coloring, but grown full of curious tiny wrinkles. She was thirty-fourth cousin to some duke, and innocently proud of her descent. It made her contented and happy in spite of narrow means and many troubles. But the troubles were over now, thank God, and Marian possessed a genius for managing the moderate income which aided it to go twice as far as it had ever done under the grandmother's régime.

To Miss Devereux's eyes the cottage was like a bit out of a pastoral poem. Every thing possessed an interest and beauty for her; even the sleepy village, the peaceful landscape, the gossip of the rooks in the oak-tree near her bedroom window, the soft music of Marian's voice, the quaint, brain-cracked ways of the two aged servants, John and Deborah, who ruled the household and tyrannized somewhat over its members, from Mrs. Payne down to the red-cheeked lass who filled a sort of "general utility" place in the kitchen. Miss Devereux enjoyed it all, and felt each day more and more as if she had stumbled

into a fairy story, and was to live on among its enchantments for ever and ever.

She had kept her whereabouts a secret, and pledged her step-mother to strict silence; so she was disturbed neither by letters begging for her return to the common world, nor by visits from troublesome adorers, who might have been tempted into wearying her had they gained a clue to her hiding-place.

"It is too pleasant to last," she said again and again to Marian, during the first fortnight; but of late she had given herself up so completely to the charm of the quiet, that she had ceased to think of the possibility of any change.

An old wound, which hurt both heart and pride, had left her a little hard and cold, too suspicious of herself and others; but its troublesome reminders faded during this season. The aims with which she had striven to fill up her life since that blow desolated the last romantic dream of girlhood—the whispers of worldly ambition, the determination to make existence sparkle bravely—all these objects looked very distant and very petty now. She just glided on from day to day, reveling in its peace as she had thought she could never again enjoy any thing—the usual belief of young people before they learn that life holds a good deal even after youthful dreams and hopes have vanished.

It was a Thursday, of all the days in the calendar the very one upon which St. Simon gathered his motley company about his hospitable board, and intoxicated several of them with bubbles more potent and dangerous than his Champagne.

Miss Devereux and Marian had been out for a long walk. Strolling homeward through the late afternoon, they suddenly encountered the handsomest man Marian had ever seen. He was just coming out of the grounds of Denton Lodge, a charming old place, seldom visited by its owner, and which had not chanced to find a tenant during the past two years.

They met; the gentleman did a neat tableau of surprise, and then a very pretty bit of enthusiastic pleasure at sight of Miss Devereux. But Miss Devereux did nothing; had she been born a duchess instead of a Republican, she could not have appeared more composed.

"I do wonder if I am dreaming or walking in my sleep," said the gentleman.

"You are capable of it," returned Miss Devereux, coolly, "and you would be sure to wonder where you had no right to go."

"Ah, your malicious remark is a failure," he said; "I had a right to come here, for I had business to bring me, as it happens."

"As if you knew the meaning of the word! But, for mercy's sake, stop looking so absurdly astonished, and stop trying to appear so ridiculously pleased, and tell what you are doing here."

"I was shutting the gate," said he; "now I am staring at you with all my eyes, and wondering if you are a vision."

"It's rude to stare, and I'll tell the keeper you have been trespassing," returned she, softening the abruptness of her words somewhat by a playful smile.

"Acquaintance with benighted Americans, who know nothing about the laws of trespass, has corrupted my morals," said he. "How do you do, Miss Devereux? Will you shake hands?"

"I think not till I know what you have been doing," she answered, eying him with a certain suspicion. "Pray how does it happen that, asleep or awake, you wandered in this direction?"

"I am on my way to see my old aunt at Torquay," he said, with apparent sincerity.

"And you pass through the Denton grounds to reach it?" asked Miss Devereux; but, though she laughed, her voice was not exactly pleasant.

"Remember what the copy-books say about interrupting people. You might have spared your satirical question. My friend Normanton has the gout—"

"Heaven help us!" Miss Devereux broke in again, regardless of his warning. "The man is mad—raving! Come, Marian, let's run home; I've no doubt he bites. But I must be civil first. I have not lost my wits, though he has his. Miss Payne, this amiable lunatic rejoices in the name of Talbot Castlemaine. I do really think his absurd behavior has driven me into poetry!"

Marian was so utterly bewildered by the rapid fire of nonsense the two had kept up during the last three minutes, that she could only bow, color beautifully, and shrink into herself. Castlemaine, as he lifted his hat, just glanced at her long enough to wonder how any feminine creature could get so pink and look so excessively pretty in the operation.

"And your friend Normanton has the gout," pursued Miss Devereux. "Do you mean to go through the list of your acquaintances' ailments? What an odd mania, to be sure!"

"It was his gout that brought me here."

"You ran away because he needed help!"

"I scorn your aspersions! He wanted me to stop and have a peep at Denton Lodge; he thinks of hiring it for the winter, as Devonshire has been its own reward on this occasion. The idea of my meeting you in this out-of-the-way spot! I'll take up the obliging line for a permanence, if one is always so amply repaid."

Miss Devereux's face cleared magically. He had explained his appearance so naturally and carelessly that she could exonerate him from the charge of hunting her; and, since the meeting was accidental, could be glad to see him. Indeed, she rather marveled if it were an inter-

position of Fate in the man's favor, and, if so, whether it was worth her while to heed it.

"Shall we be good-natured, Marian, and take him to the house to have some tea?" she asked, as unconcerned as if the odd thought which I have chronicled had not flitted through her brain.

Marian's presence of mind was not sufficiently restored to enable her to answer readily, but Castlemaine saved her any trouble by saying,

"Miss Payne would not be so unkind as to refuse. Do you know, I find that I must stay all night in the village; I have missed my train."

"You need not look so wretched about it," Miss Devereux observed, "since Marian permits you to go home with us. Only you have had no dinner, and we are early people in this region."

"But I have; I was so ferociously hungry I attended to that important duty as soon as I arrived. Please don't invent excuses for sending me off."

"The ingratitude of men! I was trying to find one for letting you stay," and he saw by her smile that she had entirely recovered her good-humor.

"One would be glad to stay forever, I think," he said. "This valley is certainly the prettiest nook in all Devonshire. What is the name of that fine old ruin we passed, some six miles off, Miss Payne?" he asked, turning to Marian.

She managed to reply, and he continued talking to her. Marian recollected how absurd it was to be shy and frightened, and scolded herself into sufficient composure to converse easily, though the color in her cheeks was still high enough and lovely enough to astonish London eyes.

Miss Devereux walked on before them, playing with a great dog which had bounded out of the Denton grounds to meet her. She seemed suddenly to have grown a little thoughtful, and Marian had to speak twice before she heard. In truth, she could not decide whether she was glad or sorry at Castlemaine's unexpected arrival. But one thing she determined upon the instant—there must be no folly on his part because he had chanced to stray into her neighborhood. However, when Marian called she allowed the pair to overtake her, and presently recovered her usual spirits.

They found Grandmamma Payne waiting for them in the cozy drawing-room. Miss Devereux presented Castlemaine, and his handsome face and charming manners won the old lady's heart immediately, as they always did the hearts of women, ancient or youthful. She recollected, too, having met his grandfather ages before, and so was prepared to adopt the young man as an acquaintance. She talked a good deal, and her conversation was always interesting. In spite of belonging to the later portion of this generation, Miss Devereux and Castlemaine

were capable of civility to an old woman, and thoroughly enjoyed her cheerful chat and reminiscences of by-gone days.

This evening was a success, and Castlemaine appeared in a new light to Miss Devereux. He put off the bored, listless ways which society men in these days seem to consider the supreme of elegance, and conversed naturally and well. She was gratified too by his appreciation of her friends—she would scarcely have given him credit for the ability. Then his tone toward herself pleased her. No airs of homage or devotion, or other of the petty arts by which men usually felt it their duty to remind her that she was an heiress and a beauty—paltry flatteries, ineffably wearisome to her keen good sense. He treated her as a friend whom he was delighted to find again; as if she were a reasonable human creature instead of a doll, she thought; and the reflection completed her satisfaction at the encounter.

So they all talked quietly and soberly; and Miss Devereux seeing how much grandma and Marian enjoyed the brightening of their quiet his presence brought, forgot to murmur at this troubling of the seclusion, any break upon which she had dreaded.

Grandmamma was compelled to keep very early hours; and, after she had gone to her room, Miss Devereux and Castlemaine repaid themselves for their good behavior by giving free rein to their unruly spirits, and that little recluse Marian listened to their random talk till she felt as if she had been dazzled by lightning. But when something led Castlemaine to speak of Italy, and he grew earnest in answer to the eager questions in her eyes, she was almost vexed with Miss Devereux for spoiling the effect of his prettiest sentences by jests and parodies on Byron.

"She is not worthy to hear about the charms of Rome, Miss Payne," he said, laughing good-naturedly. "I shall ask you to listen to me some time when she is not near."

"I know the reality, you see," Miss Devereux replied, "and am not to be deluded like Marian."

"I'd rather keep my illusion, if it is one, in regard to Italy," said Marian, courageously, though somewhat afraid of her friend's satire.

"Quite right, my dear," Miss Devereux observed; "keep all your illusions as long as you can—they will go fast enough."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Castlemaine; "you talk like a modern female Diogenes."

"Never mind what I talk like," she said; "you'll have no more of my wisdom to-night. It is high time for you to go back to the solitude of your inn."

"And at what hour in the morning may I call?" he asked, looking from one to the other, and speaking with a graceful eagerness.

"Have you forgotten the affectionate elderly relative who is expecting you with such impatience?" demanded Miss Devereux.

"I never said any thing about her impatience," he replied.

"But it could not be otherwise—the return of such a delightful prodigal must be awaited with the greatest anxiety," retorted she, ironically.

"I have set no day for my arrival—shall not be looked for before Saturday. You would not be cruel enough to drive me away immediately from this pretty place—"

"Oh! I should be conscience-stricken, knowing how ardent an admirer of nature you are," she interrupted.

"Especially if I can study her in your society and Miss Payne's! Come, be good-natured, and say that I need not be banished to-morrow."

"Stay, by all means."

"Now that is very nice of you—"

"To-morrow I shall be ill with a headache, and Marian is going off on a visit with grandmamma."

"Why, Helen!" said Marian, reproachfully, then colored at having taken her friend's non-sense seriously.

"Miss Payne's tender conscience betrays you," added Castlemaine.

"No; she's only afraid my rigid truthfulness may hurt your feelings—not aware yet how callous and hardened you are."

"Silent resignation is the only way to receive such slanders, Miss Payne," he said.

"Oh, Helen always teases the people she likes," Marian answered.

"What a highly-favored individual I must be!" he laughed. "So it is decided that I may stay?"

He looked at Miss Devereux—she held up the enameled devil, whose eyes shone vividly in the lamp-light.

"Sathanas is silent," she cried, giving the imp a shake.

"And silence always gives consent."

"After a platitude like that, you had really better depart! Sathanas means his silence to remind me what his opinion has always been in regard to you."

"Rather in my favor, I should think, that the demon does not like me."

"But such a wise demon!"

"I think he winked at me," cried Castlemaine; "he is laughing at your misinterpretation of his opinions."

He drew closer to her under pretense of studying the imp, and his face looked so handsome in its earnest appeal that it would not have been easy for feminine nature to remain obdurate.

"Until Saturday, then," said she. "Retire, Sathanas—I have proved false to your counsels!"

"That will give me time to write to Norman-ton, and receive his answer," observed Castlemaine.

"Ample time, I have no doubt," returned Miss Devereux, with a mocking laugh. "Good-night, Don Quixote."

He bowed over her hand, uttered his farewell to Marian, and departed. He saw that Miss Devereux did not fully credit the story of his straying into her neighborhood merely on his way to some other place, and to oblige an invalid friend. He thought, if it were possible, he should like to punish her by flirting with the pretty wood nymph, Marian, then remembered it would not be safe.

There was no time to lose; if he had any chance with the heiress, he must make the best use possible of it without delay. During the London season he had succeeded in believing himself somewhat fascinated by her, and fancied that if she were not so horribly rich he should be downright in love. But now—well, seeing her again did not produce the effect he had anticipated. She was so very dashing and brilliant; she seemed so earthly and worldly by the side of that sweet-faced Marian, who looked spiritual enough to unfold angelic wings and float away at any moment.

But what had he to do with angels? He asked himself the question, and laughed out till the echoes of his bitter merriment struck his own ears strangely. He had crossed the common toward the village while thinking these things, and he took them, and still more sombre reflections, into the quiet of his chamber, where he sat for a long time smoking innumerable pipes and staring absently at the moon, which gazed down upon him in cold surprise.

As soon as he had left the house, Miss Devereux announced that she was at death's door from fatigue, and the two young women went upstairs.

"I'm past speech," continued Miss Devereux, as they reached the landing. "Kiss me—good-night, kitten: sleep so soundly that you will not even dream."

"I wouldn't do that for any thing," returned Marian; "I always feel that I have been cheated when I can't remember my dreams."

"Do you?" exclaimed Miss Devereux with a shiver, and held up her candle to peep at Marian's face. "Then hosts of visions to you," she added, rather sadly, "and good-night."

"But don't you want me to undo your hair?" Marian asked, for she often arranged Miss Devereux's multitudinous tresses, which were a beautiful gold color, without any aid from art.

But Helen needed no assistance, kissed her friend again, said, "What a pretty kitten you are!" and passed on to her own room.

Marian was not sorry to find herself alone, though she wondered at Helen's profession of weariness; she felt so exhilarated and pleasantly restless that she would have liked to sit up all night. So she, too, remained at her window, and watched the moon float across the pale-blue sky;

remembered all that Castlemaine had said about Rome, and dreamed herself leagues away into a visionary world, as one can at eighteen. Ah me!

It appeared Miss Devereux had no mind to indulge in any sort of Juliet performance. She found that the servant had forgotten to close the shutters, and she hastened to bar out the soft radiance with some broken speech by no means complimentary to the orb of night—indeed, she addressed it as that "odious planet," and requested it not to stare at her so persistently. Then she shook Sathanas, and called him bad names too, and sat down to read a while, hoping that her novel would produce a somnolent effect. But it was a story about youth and love—happy love—in which a woman, young, handsome, and rich as herself, won and kept the affection of a true, noble man; and at length Miss Devereux flung the volume aside in disgust.

"It is as unreal and false as any thing can be," she thought. "Nobody's first love was ever happy. Love—bah! where do you find it out of a romance? Sathanas, I'm going to bed. What a comfort not to be bothered by a stupid maid. I think I'll always live in cottages too small to accommodate any such grand personage. I wonder if Castlemaine's coming was accidental—if I thought it was not!" She stopped short in her meditations, and began to prepare for bed; but had Talbot Castlemaine been able to see her face at that moment, he would have been more than ever convinced of the necessity of proceeding with great caution in the carrying-out of his plans.

In spite of her determination to be staid and sensible, Miss Devereux did not gain much by her commonplace performance. She laid her head on the pillow; but just as she tried to fancy herself falling asleep, she discovered that her thoughts had wandered away back into the past, and were tormenting her with visions of what might have been, but was not. Then rose Gregory Alleyne's image, palpable and living before her; when she reached that, Miss Devereux flew into such a rage that poetry and pain were quite forgotten. She sat up in bed for a few moments to chill herself into rationality, then lay down again, closed her eyes, and began to say over and over again, in a monotonous undertone,

"Twice one are two—twice two are four—twice five are ten—twice six are twelve. Somebody vows it would be more correct to say is—no matter! I'll go through the whole multiplication-table even if I dream that I am a dog-eared arithmetic, rather than be a fool. Three times one are three—three times two are six—"

But I am afraid she got into the twelves before sleep came. Great lady though she might be, there was one blessing all her money could not buy—the ability to slumber easily and be visited by pleasant dreams.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEGINNING.

THE morning after his meeting with Miss Devereux and Marian, Talbot Castlemaine appeared at the cottage as early as propriety would permit. He had risen at an hour with which he had a slight waking acquaintance since a season in his boyhood spent at a public school. That penance was of short duration, however. He found it no difficult matter to persuade his silly mother that the confinement would prove fatal to his health, and rendered himself so obnoxious to his instructors that they were glad to be rid of him on any terms. In fact, Lady Laura's maternal solicitude was roused just in time to relieve the dons from the necessity of informing her ladyship that they desired to relinquish the guardianship of her young hopeful. Henceforth Master Talbot pursued his studies under the care of a tutor who contrived to propitiate both mother and son, and was about as dangerous a companion as the youth could have found. But Lady Laura believed in him entirely, because he flattered her, and assured her that Talbot was a genius. The tutor and pupil even paid a visit to the Continent together, and it was at that early age Talbot formed his acquaintance with a certain world in Paris and divers German spas—haunts where he had since become so famous.

Later, of course, there came a sojourn at Cambridge, and before long a rustication, and as Lady Laura died about this period, Talbot never remembered that for a while he had dreamed of returning to the university, and achieving noble triumphs to atone for his temporary disgrace. He had always preserved a portion of that ability to repent his errors; but, instead of serving any good purpose, it helped to make him a more hardened sinner, from his constantly working on his own sympathies through this faculty of regretting his misdeeds.

He had not risen so early this morning from any desire to enjoy its loveliness, though capable of appreciating and talking eloquently about it if the occasion offered; nor was his desire to see Miss Devereux so strong that it deprived him of sleep. But life was not easy just then to the reckless man. An attempt, during his visit to the Continent, to soften once more the heart of his old relative had proved a failure. He was beset with debts and duns to an extent which rendered some prompt action necessary. When he did at last slumber, he was haunted by such evil dreams that he almost thought himself on the verge of a fever. Marian's pretty face intruded; Miss Devereux was mistily mixed up with his visions. There was another person still, Fanny St. Simon, and why she should come when he had scarcely thought of her for ages was more than he could imagine. But there the three women were, and some awful danger loom-

ed near. Sometimes he was endeavoring to save Marian, and Fanny St. Simon would stand between. Sometimes, to preserve himself, he had to forsake both and follow Miss Devereux, and was conscious of hating her. But whatever he did, he could not get away from the vague horrors which pursued. Even when he tried to doze after daylight, the nightmares would not relinquish their prey, though he had flung aside the curtains and let the bright autumn sunshine into the room, and was sufficiently awake to know where he was, and realize his own absurdity.

So he was glad to get up at an hour which gained him the golden opinions of the active landlady, who remarked to her husband on hearing his bell "that she knew he was a gentleman born and bred; it was only them dratted bagmen that laid abed till noon in the country."

He had left his man in London, so the operation of dressing had to be gone through unaided, an additional trial, which might have irritated a less indolent wretch than Talbot. But he put his ill-humor down to the score of his bad dreams, and blamed the innocent females who had intruded into them.

"Blessed if I'm not always haunted by the St. Simon when there is trouble ahead," he thought; "I've remarked it several times. Poor Fan—well, I behaved quite decently where she was concerned—I have always congratulated myself on that. A woman to have gone mad for, if she had been somebody else's wife! Dear me, what improper thoughts for the country! That old sparrow on the window-sill is looking at me in as much disgust as if he were the parson disguised."

He laughed, whistled to the bird, and got his amiability back; but it was too early to find an appetite, much to the landlady's distress. He had lived too long on the Continent for an English breakfast to be possible. Good Mrs. Roper had very watery conceptions of coffee, and Talbot hated tea as he did an English Sunday, and numerous other institutions (to employ a bit of expressive American slang) of his native land.

When he reached the cottage, he found Miss Devereux and Marian on the veranda, just ready to go for an early stroll.

"Still walking in your sleep, Sir Galahad!" was Miss Devereux's mocking salutation. "Certainly, awake you would never appear at this hour. I thought you would come for breakfast about our tea-time."

"I am sure Miss Payne will not credit your slanderous aspersions," he said, bowing to Marian over Miss Devereux's hand.

Marian thought her friend's laughing appellation very appropriate for the handsome man. He looked to her like one of the portraits of mediæval knights at Denham Lodge stepped out from its frame to take the air, only in a modern dress so as not to attract too much attention.

"We were going up on the hill to do a little Ruskinian business—study the clouds, and so forth," Miss Devereux said, after more merry talk. "Your big stick will be a protection, if you are none. Marian walks about in constant fear of Farmer Dobson's red bull. The said animal lives in a field two miles off, and can't get out of it; but Marian expects to meet him all the same wherever she turns."

"I promise to prevent any Europa escapade," Castlemaine answered, brandishing his stick.

"Please don't talk like a page out of Mangall's questions," returned Miss Devereux. "Mrs. Payne does not consider classical allusions proper. Besides, what's more important, I am dreadfully ignorant, and don't understand them. I suppose it was John Bull wanted to run away with Europa—he'd better be content to take care of Ireland and India—he is too old for frolics."

"And keep an eye on those rebellious buccaneering Americans," said Castlemaine.

"He will need both, my friend, and a pair of spectacles into the bargain, and then they'll outwit him," replied Miss Devereux, complacently.

"The Yankee idea; friendly statesmanship," said he.

"How often must I tell you that word only applies to New England," said Miss Devereux, rejecting the title with true Knickerbocker contempt. "Why don't you call us Comanches, and be done?"

"I will with pleasure, for it sounds very dreadful, though I don't in the least know what it means."

They spent a pleasant morning, in spite of the incessant skirmishing between the two, which puzzled Marian, and at first almost made her fancy they were not good friends. But they were very kind to her, and she gradually forgot her shyness, and was so charming in her childish way that, as soon as she found an opportunity, while Marian was busy over ferns and mosses, Miss Devereux called on Castlemaine to admit that she was a delightful creature, and worth studying.

"Yes," he said, honestly enough; "it is like turning from a *parterre* of brilliant flowers to a green dell, to look from you to her."

Miss Devereux was watching Marian, and did not notice the sigh which followed the words. He was such a capricious, impressionable wretch that for the moment he wished he had been another sort of man, and that destiny had flung this pretty wood-flower in his path, with leisure to enjoy its charms.

When they got back to the house Mrs. Payne was in her room with one of her headaches, old Deborah said, speaking of the malady as if it were a friendly neighbor who had dropped in for a visit. Marian went up to see her, and left the pair alone: they were never at a loss for con-

versation, those two. Castlemaine knew that he ought not to waste even these first days; he ought to secure his fortune at once, if it were possible. But it was a great effort—much harder to make than he had expected. He admired this beautiful woman, yet somehow she appealed less to his fancy than almost any one he had ever met. As an excuse for dilatoriness, he told himself it would be dangerous so soon to attack the citadel openly. She was very suspicious, and would believe that his finding her had not been accidental, and in such case he was sure to lose.

While they sat on the veranda the postman appeared with the letters. They proved to be for Miss Devereux only: Marian and her grandmother were not troubled with correspondents.

"If you do not read them, I must go away," he said.

So she opened the envelopes indolently, one after one. Coming to the last, she said,

"Ah, this is from Paris. I don't know the writing."

It was from St. Simon, proposing to buy her Nevada lands—a plausibly written epistle, but Miss Devereux smiled over it.

"Have you forgotten Fanny St. Simon?" she asked, suddenly.

Castlemaine absolutely started. While she read her letters he had been recalling his wretched dreams, and the name she uttered was actually in his mind.

"What made you think of her?" he asked.

"Because I have a letter from her uncle. What a delightful man he is—if one did not know him."

"I met Miss St. Simon the day I came through Paris," he said, composedly. "She was handsomely dressed, and as gay as ever."

"St. Simon has been in America. I fancy he must have got hold of money in some way," pursued Miss Devereux.

"What an absurd soul the wife was: what did they call her?—the Tortoise. I always remember them pleasantly, because it was at their house I met you."

"How pretty! Yes, I was several months with them, the year before the siege. How, I can not imagine, but my father left St. Simon one of my trustees. I wanted to come to Europe, and mamma was detained about some business of her own. St. Simon was in New York, and proposed that I should sail with him, and stay with his family in Paris till the mother could follow."

"And you did?"

"No," laughed she, "we quarreled soon after I met you there. Don't you remember I went and staid with the Minturns?"

"Oh yes," he said, recollecting perfectly, for he had always wondered if he had any share in the misunderstanding. "Did the brilliant niece

prove a troublesome companion?" he asked, indifferently, after a moment's silence.

"No, she hated me; I never knew why. But she was always gay and good-natured. Mr. St. Simon and I disagreed. It is an old story, not worth telling. I was so near my majority that I did not choose to take his advice about certain business matters."

She refrained from explaining that she had become acquainted with St. Simon's real character; had actually discovered—or, at least, circumstances convinced her—that he was trying to use her money, either meaning deliberately to swindle or to obtain a hold of her fortune, which would enable him to carry out some personal scheme he chanced to have in hand.

Miss Devereux had never told the story to any one, and, when she left his roof, good-naturedly led people to suppose it was her intention, on coming to Paris, to spend a portion of the time with the Minturns. But St. Simon knew that she more than suspected him, though he insisted on preserving the most friendly relations so far as appearances went, and forced Fanny to do the same, a difficult task, for Fanny's original hatred of her, roused by Miss Devereux's wealth and success, had grown to really appalling proportions when the young lady unconsciously came between her and her sole golden dream.

From the first, Fanny had known that her love for Talbot Castlemaine was little short of insanity; but it was Miss Devereux's appearance which effectually awakened her. Talbot told her frankly that he meant to win the heiress, and did drawing-room theatricals over the hard fate which rendered it impossible to listen to the voice of his heart. It was true enough that he had indulged in one of his wild passions where Fanny was concerned; the creature fascinated him, as she did most people who came in her way. Her memory kept a hold upon his fancy to this hour, entirely distinct from the numberless loves which before and since had occupied him. This thing was certain—whosoever the woman might be that linked herself for life to Talbot Castlemaine—Miss Devereux or another—that woman, if she valued her peace, would do well to keep her husband aloof from the possibility of falling within reach of Fanny St. Simon's influence. But Miss Devereux had not the slightest knowledge of the truth; Fanny had carefully guarded her secret. So now the American passed carelessly from the subject, and put St. Simon's letter aside. Indeed, she forgot it for some time, and was unintentionally impolite, leaving him without an answer, until he felt uncertain whether to curse the post or her insolence, as he termed it; and, to be secure of touching the real offender, cursed both with prodigious energy.

When Marian came down-stairs Castlemaine was gone.

"I sent him off," Miss Devereux said, "be-

cause it was nearly the dinner-hour, and I could not have him stop to bother."

"Grandmamma told me to invite him," Marian answered. "She said she wanted to be nice to any friend of yours."

"Oh, thanks—she is very good; but we can't harrow Deborah's soul by having him to dinner every day. We'll give him cups of tea now and then; by-the-way, he hates it, so it will be a neat little penance for him."

But Marian had no wish the dreamy-eyed man should do penance in that house; and directly after their early meal she hunted up a little *café-tière*, and initiated Deborah into the mysteries of *café noir*. The lesson was the cause, almost, of a misunderstanding between the two; for Deborah declared it was a sin to waste so much Mocha to make one tiny cup.

"And it's a heathener way, and, in my opinion, a Frencher," cried Deborah, when Marian insisted. "He's a handsome enough chap, and I'm willing to cosset Miss Devereux's friends; but it ain't Christian to go a-drinking coffee without milk, and as black as John's Sunday hat; and so I say and certify to."

But she could not have the heart seriously to oppose Marian; and that evening Castlemaine was treated to a cup of coffee which might have led him to fancy himself in the *Café Anglais*.

"Deborah never managed this," Miss Devereux averred. "Ah, mouse, I know why you crept out a while ago!"

Marian colored, but did not reply. She met Castlemaine's eyes, and felt that the glance would be sufficient reward even for worse suffering than that of her scalded fingers, over which, in her nervous haste, she had poured a few drops of boiling water.

"You are very good to me," Castlemaine said presently in a low voice, while Miss Devereux was talking with Mrs. Payne, who had just entered. "I think this place must be an enchanted valley, shut in from the rest of the world. I hope you are chief enchantress, and have destroyed the clue, so that I shall never have to wander out."

She answered laughingly—she was growing at ease with him; but he thought he had seen nothing so pretty in ten years as her blush and her shy, grateful eyes. He knew that he had no business to look at her in this way—to make his playful words seem to mean so much; but it was difficult to resist. He meant to be very wise; he had a hard part to play already; he must not run the risk of annoying Miss Devereux by any trifling with Marian. Not that she would be jealous—he knew she did not care enough for him to indulge in that feeling—but inexorably unforgiving to the slightest shadow cast over Marian's peace.

Besides, he was done with sentimental follies. Hereafter he intended to regard the prosaic side

of life, could he only secure the good which the gods promised. If Miss Devereux took him, he would try to become a pattern husband; avoid Paris and the gaming-table; devote himself to what people called a rational existence; turn country gentleman; cultivate a stomach and other virtues.

It looked rather dreary, but there was nothing else to be done. Money he must have; the last few months had brought him face to face with too many dismal chances for him to hesitate. It was equally certain that if he won Miss Devereux's millions, he must to a reasonable extent get beyond the reach of temptation, else all her available wealth would go as rapidly as the moderate means left him by his mother.

He must marry the heiress. He wondered, as he looked at her, why the prospect pleased him so little; it was like his idioey, he thought. It must be done soon, too; he was actually ruined, and his uncle would help him no further. He marvelled fretfully why that baronetcy and comfortable fortune in his family could not have belonged to him instead of those distant cousins, with three stout lives and the probability speedily of another heir to shut out even a gleam of hope.

Miss Devereux's voice roused him from his reverie, and he hastened away from his useless, moody reflections.



The day after the dinner-party Roland Spencer appeared again at the pretty apartment in the Avenue Friedland. Fanny had told him he might come, when he complained piteously that he possessed few acquaintances in Paris, and was dreadfully dull.

"You should go about to museums and other dismal places, and improve your mind," she said; but, all the same, she promised him the privilege of her society.

He found Miss St. Simon as entertaining and kind as on the previous evening; and that young lady astonished herself by actually finding pleasure in the youth's society. She was well inclined to undertake a sort of elder sister rôle with him, and determined that they should be *bons camarades*. She had no intimates among her own age and sex. Spencer really seemed able to talk and to understand, and the late solitary months had left her famished for mental food.

He staid so long that the carriage was announced, and the Tortoise entered, dressed to go out, looking like a pillow done up in cloaks and shawls.

"You may go with us if you like," Fanny said; and he did like.

So he drove with her and the Tortoise, in a

glorified chariot, along a triumphal way, bathed in a sunshine which did not warm common mortals—poor, foolish boy!

Unfortunately they met Mrs. Pattaker in her grand landau, sitting like a goddess in the family attitude, and the sight of the poor moth scorching his wings in the flame of Fanny St. Simon's dangerous eyes reminded Miss Pattaker of the promise she gave her conscience to preserve the young man from such peril.

Mrs. Pattaker was always great, but never so sublime as when she had a duty to perform, especially if that duty consisted in exposing a sinner. The moment Fanny St. Simon attempted to meddle with a youth whose future Mrs. Pattaker considered she had a right to direct, Fanny became a more hardened sinner than ever in that majestic woman's judgment, and must be treated accordingly. Notwithstanding this determination, the descendant of the Signer gave Miss St. Simon the benefit of her most beaming and patronizing smiles. Spencer was so busy gazing at the perilous damsel that he did not even perceive the Pattaker carriage and its stately occupant, until Fanny ordered him in a rapid whisper to turn his head.

"Good gracious!" said she, as the vehicles rolled on, "I was frightened half to death! If you had not seen Mrs. Pattaker she would have had us both exterminated in her wrath. Don't be so careless; you must always be prepared for Mrs. Pattaker. She is ubiquitous; and you must never fail to look as if you had come out for the express bliss of meeting her."

Roland laughed in his hearty boyish fashion, and Fanny laughed from the infection of his merriment, marveling that any masculine creature of this generation could laugh like that at three-and-twenty.

"She ought to have a band of martial music announce her approach," Spencer said.

"She will next week," returned Fanny; "President Thiers is to attend to the matter as soon as he gets through with this installment of the *milliards*."

"Lor, Fanny!" cried the Tortoise, for a wonder catching the sense of their conversation, and of course accepting it literally. "Dear me, I hope she'll not have a drum; if she has one beaten when she comes to see us it will give me a sick headache, as sure as the world."

This remark naturally caused Fanny and Spencer to laugh more absurdly than ever, and altogether the drive to the young man was decidedly Elysian. But he had not escaped Mrs. Pattaker. Fanny, on their return, ordered the carriage to go to the Avenue d'Alma, in order that she might leave cards on some newly arrived acquaintance. Mrs. Pattaker's landau was at the door as they reached it, and that lady exchanged a few pleasant words with Fanny, and even spoke to the Tortoise. The Tortoise had

that speech about martial music fresh in her mind, and was so fearful of hearing a drum beat that she shut her eyes, put her fingers in her ears, and shook like a jointed doll.

"Roland," said Mrs. Pattaker, "don't forget that I expect you at dinner to-night—seven o'clock;" and off dashed her showy equipage.

"I thought I heard a drum," moaned the Tortoise, stared a good deal, and finally, as neither of her companions noticed her, indulged in a private pinch of snuff, leaving a stain on her lavender gloves which would have irked St. Simon's soul had he been there to see.

"What on earth did she mean?" cried Roland, aghast. "Expect me—dinner—why, it's the first I've heard of it!"

"It won't be the last, if you presume to be unpunctual," returned Fanny, amused at his dismayed face. "I know what it means—you are to be lectured finely."

She leaned a little forward in her seat, looked up at him with those bewildering eyes, and added, almost in a whisper,

"Ah, don't let her make you dislike me! I have been thinking ever since we came out what good friends we should prove: don't let her spoil my pleasant dream!"

Spencer fairly shivered in a kind of ecstasy.

"As if any body could do that!" he stammered, not so much from shyness as from his haste to speak. "But why should she wish to—what does she want to say?"

"Oh! that I'm an awful flirt, and a dangerous creature; but I don't mean to flirt with you; we are to be the best friends in the world—like two boys—oh, I wish I were!—only I shall be elder sister, and you are to tell me all your secrets, remember that!"

The construction of this sentence might have shocked Lindley Murray; but the matter was so charming to Roland that his young ears actually buzzed.

"I am so glad you like me," he said, enthusiastically. "I was afraid, last night, you must think me awfully stupid."

"I do believe you are trying for a compliment!" laughed Fanny.

"Now, you can't believe me such an idiot!" he said, eagerly, and one of the quick flushes of color which often filled him with rage came into his cheeks. He turned his head away, afraid that Fanny would secretly laugh, but in truth she was thinking how handsome the blush made him, and wondering again how any creature of this century could have so much freshness left.

"Let me see," she went on, good-naturedly arranging the mantle of the Tortoise (who had sunk into a drowse) in order to give him time to subdue his roses. "You will get away from the Pattaker by ten; you may come and see us after, if you like—we're awfully late, disreputable wretches—and tell me what she says."

"There's a little consolation," he said, gayly. "But, oh! she'll go over the Signer's history, and I have heard it so often."

"View it in the light of a penance—I always do. If I find St. Peter inclined to be hard on me—up yonder, you know—I shall remind him that I knew Mrs. Pattaker, and I am sure he will be merciful."

"Peck! Peck!" wheezed the Tortoise, softly, not as a reproof to Fanny's irreverence—only an unconscious note of peace uttered in her slumber.

"Poor old dear! she's tired," Fanny said; "we must let her go home—it is getting late."

Spencer thought her careless good-nature the most beautiful specimen of love and attention he had ever witnessed, and rather marveled not to see a halo encircle her brown tresses; indeed, he felt sure it was there, and that only the dullness of his vision prevented his perceiving it.

They drove back to the house, and Spencer had to leave her; but he took her image with him to his lodgings, and it brightened the dull place like a flood of June sunlight. Fanny found that St. Simon had brought Monsieur Besson home to dinner, and during the whole meal the two talked of the Silver Company, answered her questions freely, and gave in frequently to her advice. When she left them over their wine, she was sufficiently dazzled by the brilliant plans to dream that the time was not far distant when she could summon Talbot Castlemaine to her side, and claim the happiness and rest life had hitherto so sternly refused.

While the Tortoise slumbered in her easy-chair, Fanny sat at the harp and played fitful snatches of favorite melodies. At intervals she joined her voice to the soft strains; it rang into the room where the two men lingered, causing Besson to start suddenly, to St. Simon's private delectation, for he understood the poor man's secret as well as if it had been put in words, and comprehended what strange vague echoes, half of happiness, half of pain, it awakened in the odd old creature's soul. But Fanny scarcely knew what she sung, so absorbing was her dream. The glorious chance which had unexpectedly presented itself to her on the previous night seemed to have sent her bodily into a new world.

After a while several people came in search of St. Simon, and were shown into the *salle à manger*. Presently came other visitors—these for the drawing-room; newly returned Paris dandies, who had heard of Fanny's arrival, and were eager to renew their acquaintance with the fascinating American.

In the mean time Roland Spencer had eaten his penitential dinner (I mean the adjective to apply to his feelings, not the meats, for the Pattaker liked to dine well), had listened to the Signer's history, been treated to the family attitude, and gone through the whole gamut of suffering which

the illustrious lady inflicted upon any person she desired especially to honor.

Miss Langois was present—Miss Langois usually dined at somebody's expense—and a couple of jabsy men whom Mrs. Pattaker kept about that she might always preserve the semblance of a court. Miss Langois had been taught her lesson in advance, and she recited it admirably. She was in gala costume to-night, because Mrs. Pattaker exacted such at all times. It was a remarkable dress, or rather it was two dresses—cast-off garments of her rich sister's; but Miss Langois believed it an attire built on the last rules of fashion, and was happy. Spencer marveled how one woman could possess so many bones in her neck, and confused his wits by staring at them; the more he tried not to, the more he stared. Every now and then some new bone would start into prominence, as Miss Langois talked and gesticulated, till Roland grew quite nervous, and was irresistibly impelled to lay wagers with himself as to where the next would appear, and invariably lost.

Miss Langois was present, not to perplex him with a display of her anatomy, but to help expose Fanny St. Simon in her true colors, only it was to be very carefully done, because Mrs. Pattaker remembered the mining shares hidden in her writing-desk, and had no intention of incurring any risk of a misunderstanding with St. Simon. Still she had a duty to perform by the son of her old friend, and even the prospect of reaping a golden harvest through St. Simon's aid could not subdue her long-cherished dislike of the niece. Fanny had so often run counter to her, had thwarted her in divers pet projects, had sorely annoyed her on several occasions, was mocking and insolent even in her affectation of respect. Not that Mrs. Pattaker put the matter in this light. She believed herself magnificently regardless of Fanny, only it was her duty to warn her friend's son, and she would do it. She did it, too, in the drawing-room while Miss Langois sat at the piano and played for the benefit of the jabsy men—dropping her stitches terribly, as St. Simon always said.

But Miss Langois believed in her own talent, and Mrs. Pattaker having no ears (for music), took the talent on trust, and always ordered her to play for the jabsy men when she had need to victimize some one as she was about to do Roland.

After all, she did nothing save praise Fanny St. Simon—Mrs. Pattaker was artful in her idioecy—still, she exposed her real character. Her tirade produced a marked effect on Roland, though not precisely of the nature she had intended. He had not even leisure to rush into a blaze of indignation in defense of the enchantress; he was too much absorbed by an overwhelming truth which forced itself upon his soul with overwhelming force.

He loved this glorious girl. He had only spent a few hours in her society, but he loved her. The truth started up so patent and powerful that it did not even appear new or strange. It seemed to him that he had loved her for a whole life.

Had Mrs. Pattaker allowed matters to rest, Roland, in his youthful ignorance, his singular reticence with himself, might have gone on for weeks without actually comprehending the change which had come over him. Mrs. Pattaker had opened his eyes. He saw clearly the new path into which his feet had strayed, and he gloried in walking therein. He was so dizzy and dazed under the revelation that he sat almost silent, and Mrs. Pattaker interpreted the silence favorably.

"Remember," she said, "in me you have always a sincere friend. Talk freely to me, be guided by my counsels, and all will go well."

He did not really know what she said, or what he answered. He only asked to get out of the house, to be alone with his new joy. Mrs. Pattaker allowed him to depart; and when he was gone, she said to Miss Langois and the jabsy men,

"I have seldom seen a better bred or more amenable young man. He will go far, under judicious advice."

Under her advice, of course. By going far, Mrs. Pattaker did not mean to predict lengthy journeys for the youth; she often (like many Americans and English familiar with the French tongue) considered it becoming to translate literally certain idiomatic phrases. Just now "going far" meant, in her thoughts, that Roland should marry a title, perhaps assume one on his own account, do something, at all events, to prove he was a Republican who profited by a residence in foreign lands.

It was still early when Spencer found himself at liberty, and he darted up the Champs Élysées—less brilliantly lighted since the fall of the empire than one could desire—like an arrow shot out of a bow, or a bird out of a cage, or like any other poetic imagery that may please you.

Then he ran down the Rue de Berri, and across the dark Faubourg St. Honoré, and reached the Avenue Friedland, close to the residence of the St. Simons. A sudden fit of shyness came over him. He had to rush up and down a while in the cool night air before he could venture in. He was away off by the Arch of Triumph before he knew it, staring at the grand monument, on whose summit the stars seemed fairly to rest, conducting himself generally in such an extraordinary fashion that if the twin *sergents de ville* (who ought to have been promenading the place instead of drinking beer in the *cabaret* in a neighboring street) had seen him, they would undoubtedly have regarded his antics with suspicious eyes.

At last he got enough the better of his mental intoxication to recollect that he was losing pre-

cious time. He had the whole night in which to dream; but if he desired another glimpse of Fanny to sanctify the hours, he must return to the house at once.

He found St. Simon and his friends still in the dining-room, for the servant showed him into that cloudy apartment, and he looked so blank that St. Simon secretly laughed, but he was very cordial to the young fellow.

"If you will not smoke, or have any claret," he said, "we'll go into the *salon*, and find the feminines."

So they all went thither, and there was Fanny, making herself bewitching to the dandies; but luckily they soon disappeared, and then Fanny treated Spencer to another cup of glorified tea, such she had given him on the previous evening, and let him follow her into her pet nook, where they could talk at their ease, while St. Simon kept the other men in conversation.

"Well," said Fanny, "have you come to tell me that I am a mermaid or a Gorgon disguised? Now, do let's have the whole history. Of course the Langois was there—she paved the way. You need not look so confused, bless you! Don't I know my Pattaker!"

"The woman is an idiot!" cried Spencer, flushing, not, as Fanny supposed, from embarrassment, but with indignation as he remembered Mrs. Pattaker's hints and innuendoes. He had scarcely regarded them as she spoke, so absorbed was he in the new revelation of his own heart; but their malice became evident to him now, and he hated the Signer's descendant.

"Now, don't speak disrespectfully of her," laughed Fanny; "haven't I told you it is against the law? It is not to-night I have to learn that the stately dame detests me."

"Oh, she spoke of you in the most affectionate way. She said you were fascinating—"

"But dangerous!"

"And she admires your uncle immensely," continued Roland, wisely disregarding Fanny's parenthetical exclamation.

"Ah! she admires St. Simon too," said Fanny, and laughed again to remember by what means that esteem had been secured; but she could not venture to tell Spencer the history.

"Dear me! if there were no male Pattaker and no Tor—no claim on St. Simon—I might have the Pattaker *she* for an aunt. The bare idea turns me faint."

"She is going to watch over me like a mother," pursued Roland, with a grimace of disgust. "I felt tempted to run away from Paris."

"Ah! but you will not do that?"

If he had been on the eve of departure, her glance would have kept him faithful to his post. Some wild, passionate words rose to his lips, but he checked them.

"Of course, I was only jesting," he said, in a repressed voice.

"But you have not told what she said about poor me."

"I don't think I remember any thing, only that you were fascinating. I knew she could not describe you better, so did not listen any further."

"You are a very promising young man," retorted Fanny. "You do the compliment and the fib as neatly as possible; but I don't like either from you. Recollect, we are to be *bons camarades*, and talk honestly. Of course, I mean that you are to tell me the truth. I am a woman, and it is not to be expected on my part."

He thought that a capital joke, but she was perfectly serious.

Little by little she got out of him every thing Mrs. Pattaker had said; that is, she told him the remarks as accurately as if she had listened to the conversation, and he would not deny their correctness.

"My poor dear old Pattaker!" sighed Fanny, "she is nearing her dotage, and begins to repeat herself."

She looked very sweet and martyr-like, but she was wondering if in this affair with which St. Simon had dazzled Mrs. Pattaker there would arise no opportunity of punishing the creature as she deserved. Then she put the thought aside for the present, though not relinquishing it. Unfortunately for Fanny, she shared St. Simon's creed, and longed to avenge herself on any body who attacked her—a creed which in the end brings more harm to the holder than to others.

But the business of the moment was to make Spencer forget what he had heard to her disparagement. All the fascinations she had before displayed were nothing compared to those she employed to-night; not because she wanted him in love, but she was solitary and he companionable, and she could not let Mrs. Pattaker rob her of his liking and friendship.

CHAPTER IX.

THE POWER OF ATTORNEY.

FANNY ST. SIMON and Spencer drifted quickly into an intimacy likely to prove very fatal to the young man's peace; though the lady still told herself, as she had done at the beginning, that she meant him no harm—would do him none, for the world.

Roland's freshness and enthusiasm interested her inexpressibly. She laughed at him sometimes; but that was in her gloomy moments, when his earnestness and faith in all things made her feel the difference between them, and a sharp pang of envy wrung her heart. She was very fond of the high-souled, impulsive boy, who seemed years younger than she; indeed, she felt that in many ways she was known no youth. The ex-

gencies of life had so early torn the veil from her eyes, that she could scarcely recollect a season when she had not been skeptical in regard to humanity and the world in general. She had hardly ever believed in any body's truthfulness as she did in Roland's, and it gave her a certain respect for his character, a desire to stand well in his esteem, while wondering at the pains she took. She meant to be truthful, also, where he was concerned, and believed that she was, because she adopted the habit of speaking freely to him of her faults; but she acknowledged them in a fashion which only rendered her more charming.

If Mrs. Pattaker could have known how constantly during the next fortnight Spencer sought the society against which she had warned him in grandiloquent phrases, she would have been terribly outraged, and felt that she had a new and stronger cause of grievance against this young woman, who had always refused to prostrate herself with fitting humility before the shrine of the Signer's descendant.

Roland was granted the freedom of the house in the most delightful manner; but as he liked best to go at the hours when he was sure of finding Fanny alone, the fact of his disregard of Mrs. Pattaker's wishes did not afford that lady another proof of the ingratitude of human nature—a theme upon which she was fond of holding forth.

Fanny had declared to St. Simon that she could not be bored by having people intrude at untimely seasons, it was a martyrdom to which she was not prepared to submit; besides, it was difficult to keep the Tortoise in fitting order to receive unexpected guests. So the St. Simons had their day of reception and their evening when they were at home—decorous, proper festivities, which bored Fanny dreadfully, though St. Simon endured them in a philosophical spirit, promising himself a future reward. The pair did occasionally relieve the tedium of their lives by hunting up some agreeable French acquaintances, to whom they gave dinners and suppers; but they were careful not to mention these persons to the American set, or to such Parisians as hung about American circles. Paris was horribly dull to both, naturally enough, as during the last years of the empire they had been on familiar terms with one of the gayest coteries which dazzled the world at the time, and covered with such opprobrium since the downfall of the imperial party left its adherents to be judged by the cold, cruel light which follows ruin and defeat.

Indeed, those hours with Roland Spencer were altogether the pleasantest Fanny passed at this period, astonished the while at the enjoyment she took therein. He was still so young that he loved poetry and reveled in romances. Fanny listened to more verses than she had heard or read in ages, and actually persuaded him to read

her his own, which were sweet and musical, if not remarkable in any other manner. Besides, these verses were usually the expression of the charm which knowing her had cast over his existence; and though Fanny would have derided the idea of caring about such nonsense, she was still womanly enough to be touched and gratified.

She thought she had been very wise where this boy was concerned—very considerate too. From the first she had decided the terms upon which their intimacy was to rest. He was to tell her his secrets—even his naughty ones (Roland blushed so painfully at this suggestion, however, that she was hugely diverted); and in return he was to prove patient with her *maussaderies*, *brusqueries*, and all the other varying moods of selfish caprice for which she found a variety of pretty French names. She aided him, too, in the mysteries of that language, which he spoke tolerably. Here, perhaps, she did render him a real service, as she possessed an absolute genius for this line of accomplishment, speaking three or four tongues positively without foreign accent. Then, as I have said, she was trying to be honest and truthful with him, and that rendered her more dangerous than all her other Circean attributes put together.

"You have too good an opinion of me," she said one day. "I am not worth it, do believe me. I have had a hard life—been wretchedly brought up. I'm old and worn and *blasée*! Why, I might be my own grandmother, I am so familiar with the wickedness of this dismal world."

Roland always answered such speeches with an incredulous smile, and elaborately proved to her how mistaken she was; he did so now.

"Very well; put me on a pedestal if you will," she said; "but don't blame me when you find out some day what a hideous clay image I am—promise me that."

"I do promise; I can not imagine any circumstance arising which would make me blame you."

Fanny looked in his earnest, truthful face, and for an instant she would have given her right hand to be what he believed her—young enough and good enough to prize his love and prove worthy of it.

"Perhaps I shall live to remind you of those words," she said, sadly.

"Not very probable," he returned, laughing.

"It may easily be, but I hope not. I'd like to keep one real friend; you can't think how pleasant it is to me to have found such."

He contented himself with this proffered friendship for the time. He lived on in a beautiful dream—not questioning the future, scarcely rendering a mental account of his own sensations or feelings.

Fanny was in a mood this morning to unburden her soul—"airing her vocabulary," she would have contemptuously styled it. She felt

unusually moody and disturbed, and it was like thinking aloud. She told him a great deal about her desolate, neglected, childish days; her miserable, ill-directed girlhood. She paraded her faults; she reproached herself; but over the whole she threw a poetical glamour which made it all beautiful to him, and he listened with his soul in his eyes. Perhaps it was as well that at last the Tortoise appeared, and interrupted the interview, for if they had sat there much longer Roland must inevitably have put his heart into words. The poor Tortoise was dreadfully fatigued and bewildered. Several days previous St. Simon had issued an order that she must walk every morning. He told Fanny that the poor creature would inevitably crumble to bits if she did not have exercise. So to-day she had been sent out under Antoinette's guardianship, and Antoinette, seeing fit to indulge in a rather long promenade, had brought the Tortoise back in a pitiable state.

"I've lost my handkerchief, and my boot is unbuttoned," she moaned, dropping into the first comfortable seat that presented itself. "I told Antoinette, but she wouldn't believe me, and pretended not to understand. Oh dear, I'm so faint! I wish I could have a glass of sherry and a biscuit, Fanny. I ate a few *té-lairs*, but Antoinette hurried me so they did me no good. And I can't find my box. Oh, if I've lost my box, and if St. Simon should see it! He's always prowling about, and he's so good-natured lately that he must mean mischief. Oh, Fanny, haven't you seen my box?"

Fanny hurried to her, partly animated by the contemptuous pity she always felt for the chaotic soul's troubles, partly to stop any indiscreet disclosures before Spencer.

"Let me take off your bonnet, T.," she said. "Here is Mr. Spencer waiting to shake hands with you."

"Has he got my box?" she demanded, anxiously. "Oh, if I could only sneeze, I'm sure it would do me a world of good."

Spencer had been initiated into the mysteries of the *tabatière*, and had gained the Tortoise's heart by carrying one in his pocket, and treating her to secret pinches of snuff. He slipped the box into her hand now, and decorously turned his back while she indulged in a copious refreshment. It was necessary for her peace of mind that the affair should be conducted in this, to her, surprisingly artful manner.

"I'm ever so much better," she sighed. "Oh, Fanny, I don't feel right; that new maid doesn't put me together at all, and I've lost a string. I told Antoinette, but she never pays any attention: I wish you'd make her, Fanny."

"Of course I will, T.," said Fanny. "Now, Mr. Spencer is going to ring for some wine and biscuits, and you shall go to your room and enjoy them comfortably."

"I don't like to walk," expostulated the Tortoise, feebly; "it frightens me: it makes me afraid we're poor again; and one foot seems larger than the other. I think it was a great deal more comfortable before St. Simon came back."

"I will walk with you myself, to-morrow, T.," said Fanny, "and Mr. Spencer shall go too, and give you his arm—I'm sure he will."

"Yes, indeed; I shall be delighted," added Roland, who would have gladly carried the Tortoise on his back for leagues to please the siren.

"I think he's very good," croaked the Tortoise, and added, in a wheezy whisper, "Slip the box into his pocket, Fanny."

Then Spencer rang the bell. Fanny ordered sherry and biscuits into the Tortoise's room: but it was a work of time to conduct the poor soul within reach of the refreshment her body craved. Strings and pins gave way in all directions when she tried to move, and there were such direful rustlings and creakings that Fanny began to dread her turning into a kind of caricature of the Venus de Milo before she could get her away. She was seized, too, with a desire to have Spencer share the wine and biscuits, and it took many words to convince her that he had no wish for such creature comforts.

"There's plenty of both," she said, "plenty; and St. Simon says I can have more when they're gone."

Fanny had made no secret to Spencer of the changes to which their Bohemian life exposed them, and had told him the story of their sojourn in the Quartier Montmartre; so he perfectly understood the Tortoise's apparent insanities. Having deposited that unfortunate animal safely in her chamber, and seen her soothed by the sight of the eatables, Fanny shut her softly in, and returned to Spencer.

"How good you are!" he said, suddenly. "How can you slander yourself by talking of your impatience and selfishness?"

"It is no merit; somehow poor T. does not irritate me. Isn't it odd to think she was once a pretty girl—rather a bright one, too, I have heard. I've a picture of her I'll show you some day."

So they talked on till Fanny worked herself into one of her nervous states, and was absurdly gay. She sent him off at last, pursuing him with jests and witticisms to the very door. The moment he had gone a change came over her. She was thinking of her life. Past and future opened so desolate before her. Even the hope which had of late buoyed her up ceased to aid. She tortured herself by fancying Castlemaine forever out of reach of her existence; fretted her soul by recalling the bliss of the brief season when she, too, had dreamed her dream; and finally, part from real feeling, part because she

was hysterical, burst into a passionate flood of tears, and rushed up and down the room like a person trying to qualify herself for Bedlam.

St. Simon had been busy all the morning in his *cabinet de travail*—a luxurious room which he had chosen for his own private occupation. He had wanted something out of the Tortoise's chamber, gone thither by a back passage, and, finding her comfortably asleep after the wine and biscuits, returned through the boudoir and inner *salon* to the room where Fanny was indulging in her little private mad-house business. He stood in the shadow of the silk curtains which hung over the door-way, and watched her—not sympathetically, but with a certain psychological interest. He had often seen her in these wild, rebellious moods while still a young girl, but he fancied that she had cured herself of them.

"It is really very silly," was his thought; "she can't afford these freaks at her age; she will make lines in her face that won't come out." He felt moved to advance and give her this information, but still paused a moment to admire the outburst, for it struck the dramatic side of his taste. She flung herself into a chair, buried her face in her hands, and the attitude was really a picture. He wondered that in some of their "hard-up" seasons he had never thought of sending her on the stage.

Before he had finished his reflection, before Fanny could stir, the doors into the anteroom were thrown open; a gentleman appeared on the threshold, and a stupid new servant, just without, was saying, in broken English,

"If monsieur will wait here, I shall take his name."

The new domestic had been warned against admitting any visitor into St. Simon's sanctum, so, thinking the *salon* empty, had ushered this guest in hither.

"Say that Mr. Alleyne wishes to see him—wait; here is a card."

The servant was gone, Alleyne in the room, and his eyes fixed upon her before Fanny could do more than rise from her chair. Her tears were still streaming; she looked exceedingly handsome. Some curls of her dark hair had fallen loose; her cheeks were flushed with excitement; her white cashmere robe, relieved by vivid blue trimmings and falls of delicate lace, added to the effect.

St. Simon's first feeling at the catastrophe had been rage and dismay, his second was triumph.

"By Jove!" he thought, "if she'd tried a month, she could not have managed any thing so effective, and certain to hit him home."

He crept softly back through the boudoir, and gained the passage which led to his private room.

Fanny saw the tall, rather stern-looking man regarding her—saw a sudden expression of sympathy soften his features. Confused and annoy-

ed as she felt, she was quite capable of turning the situation to the best account. She was standing close by a mirror; a half glance showed her that the tears only beautified her face. Before Alleyne could decide what to do she had moved toward him, and was saying, with a tremulous smile,

"Our new man has been guilty of an absurdity; but I am very glad to see you, Mr. Alleyne. My uncle has expected you for some days. Please don't look disturbed because you caught me crying; there's nothing the matter. Let me introduce you to Fanny St. Simon. I am a little ashamed of her, but never mind; I'll dry her eyes in a second, if you will only sit down."

He smiled in a slow, grave fashion, and, as she seated herself on a sofa, took a chair near.

"Your uncle had promised me the pleasure of making your acquaintance," he said; "but I do beg your pardon for having blundered upon you like this."

"You need not," she answered; "I am rather proud of being able to cry."

It seemed for an instant doubtful whether smiles or tears would get the mastery; and, though she went on talking easily, her voice still trembled, as if she had difficulty to repress a sob. Had she been gay without effort, Alleyne would have considered her a monster; but she was apparently fighting so gallant a battle against emotion that he regarded her with real admiration and respect; and though a stoic, nowadays, in his own opinion, where woman's beauty was concerned, her appearance impressed him greatly.

They conversed for a few moments; then the blundering servant returned to conduct the visitor to St. Simon's sanctum: that crafty fox had no mind to spoil Fanny's unintentional effect by intruding upon the pair.

Alleyne arose rather reluctantly; the young woman saw this, and triumphed in her success. She bade him good-morning, but, as he turned to follow the domestic, hastened forward a few steps, and said, hesitatingly,

"Mr. Alleyne, please—"

"What is it?" he asked, smiling again.

She looked such a pretty picture of mingled confusion and amusement at her own folly that no masculine could have resisted her.

"Only—only that you will not tell my uncle what a goose I have been. I'll be so very amiable and sensible hereafter when you come, if you will keep my little secret."

"You may be sure I shall," he answered, gravely.

"He's a prig," thought Fanny; "no, he's a stick! He can't even say that he is happy to begin our acquaintance with a secret." Then, aloud, "Thank you very much. I suppose you are going away, thinking—thinking—"

"Several things," he added, when she hesitated.

"That I am absurd, and given to hysterics," cried she, indignantly. "Now, that is more unpardonable than to catch me crying;" and she laughed again.

"I shall tell you what I was thinking, that you may not accuse me of such idiocy," he said, moving close to her; "only you must forgive the impertinence."

She gave him one shy glance, and dropped her eyes.

"I was wishing that I knew you well enough to ask if you were really grieved over any thing—if I could serve you in any way."

She gave him the benefit of another rapid glance, and held out her hand impulsively.

"Thanks, a thousand times!" said she. "I don't hate you for having seen me cry, and I fancy I shall like you. St. Simon has sounded your praises so loudly that I meant not to."

"I have only a short acquaintance with your uncle," he said, bowing over the hand which was quickly withdrawn, as if from a sudden remembrance that her conduct might appear missish and gushing; "but he has been very cordial, and obliged me in a variety of ways; so I hope you will not regard me as a stranger."

"Certainly not, after this flinging of myself on your sympathy," she replied, with graceful mockery.

"And as a proof, you will remember what I have said—if—if I could possibly serve you," he continued, speaking rather stiffly, from a genuine embarrassment.

"Thanks again. But, indeed, I told you the truth. I don't know what ailed me—life is too monotonous nowadays to hold even a grief. Oh, good gracious! please go off to my uncle. I only make matters worse by trying to find excuses."

"Not exactly—though there is no excuse needed," returned Alleyne.

Then he bowed, and went away. When the door closed, Fanny marched across the room and surveyed her image in the mirror.

"Human nature is an idiot," she calmly observed, "and, wise as you think yourself, Mr. Gregory Alleyne, you're as silly as your neighbors. Appealing to your sympathy is the little dodge that answers in your case, sir! Well, there's a good beginning made without any effort, and, if necessary, it shall be a bold to lead you farther than you fancy."

If necessary! That took her back to the hope kindled in her mind by St. Simon's plans and promises. A few months more might completely change her whole life—enable her to be done with plots and intrigues. Fanny thought it would be pleasant to wake up some morning, and find there was nothing to hinder her acting out her real thoughts and feelings; nothing to be done except make herself charming to Talbot. Ah, changeable and capricious as he was, surely her great love would give her power to keep him

constant and content. And away she went into the possible future; as foolish as humanity in general, after all her experience.

She was roused by the announcement of the carriage, and hurried off to warn the Tortoise, and to dress. There were visits to pay, and each separate household into which she was forced to enter Fanny devoted mentally to the infernal gods in very correct and forcible French. But she was especially charming, and every body who saw her said that she was more witty than ever, and did not look a day older than she had done five years previous.

It was one of Mrs. Pattaker's reception mornings, and Fanny presented herself there, and after her departure some silly man ventured that remark. The Signer's descendant said, sweetly and commiseratingly,

"Poor dear Fanny! Yes, she wears wonderfully well—considering."

But she was furious with the man all the same, and vowed that he should not dine at her house for a month. Fanny had been deliciously impertinent to Mrs. Pattaker, and caused several people, acute enough to enjoy the honeyed stings, to smile, and the great lady felt that to hear such praise of the odious creature was more than Job could have borne patiently.

As the aunt and niece reached their house they encountered St. Simon just entering. He gave the Tortoise his arm with great ceremony, but she vexed him by clattering her boot-heels on the staircase, and he squeezed her wrist so tightly that she squeaked dolefully.

"He hurts me," she sighed; "I'd rather walk by myself than be pinched."

"Oh, T., T.!" laughed St. Simon. "Am I so ungallant a husband that you do not even understand an affectionate pressure?"

"Fanny," whispered the Tortoise, who was on the other side of her—and now her voice was full of horror; "Fanny, I'm coming to bits—the new woman never does fasten my strings. Oh, I'm coming to bits, and then he will pinch me in good earnest!"

"You will have to carry a work-basket to put your remains in," said St. Simon, pleasantly enough, but Fanny knew by his face something had vexed him, and as soon as possible hurried the Tortoise off to her room.

"So Mr. Alleyne has come at last," she said.

"He told me he saw you," returned St. Simon; and added indiscreetly (for he did not mean to let her know that he had been an observer of her interrupted dramatics). "You must have struck some grand *coup*; he could talk of nothing but your little interview."

"So you were watching me this morning, St. Simon?" demanded she, jumping to a conclusion as quick as lightning.

"I was coming from T.'s room to speak to you," returned he, unmoved. "I was nearly

paralyzed by your emotion; but before I could find voice to entreat you to weep on my bosom—enter Gregory Alleyne. It was very neat. I felt ready to beat you at first, but it succeeded finely."

She flushed angrily, but occupied herself taking off her miniature bonnet and arranging her hair.

"What did you want of me?" she asked. "I suppose you are vexed, since you pinched the Tortoise."

"How ridiculous you are!" said St. Simon. Then they both laughed, and put by their ill-humor, too wise to waste it when it could only do mutual harm to have a misunderstanding, or indulge in one of the stormy scenes which formerly were by no means uncommon between the pair.

"So I succeeded with the Alleyne," said Fanny, sitting down in an arm-chair, whose soft, fluffy cushions rose about her like crimson clouds, and brought out her blue dress admirably. "Did you succeed as well?"

St. Simon took two or three turns up and down the room, came back, and stood opposite to her, twirling his eternal cigarette in his fingers.

"It is like getting hold of a bit of polished steel," said he, frankly, and without irritation.

"Hum!" quoth Fanny. "But I fancy there is a flaw here and there."

"I shall depend on you a great deal to work them," he answered. "You do not forget what you told me that first night we were talking about him in this room?"

"Don't be so horribly exact. I never forget any thing, St. Simon."

"*Apropos*, I have a letter from Miss Devereux."

"How *apropos*?" she interrupted. "*Apropos* to what, if you please?"

"To my plans, if you like," said he, biting the end of his cigarette rather venomously.

Fanny rejoiced at her new power of keeping him in order. He literally did not venture to lash her with his unmerciful tongue in the old smiling way.

"And what does the fair Helen say?" she inquired.

"Here is her letter. I had just read it, and was coming to show it to you this morning, when Alleyne appeared."

He took the dainty envelope from his pocket and handed it to her. Fanny glanced at the bold, marked superscription; she could not bring herself to touch the paper. Absurd as it was, the sight of her enemy's writing filled her with such rage—remembering, perhaps, that Talbot Castlemaine had sat by her while she wrote—that Fanny was afraid of tearing the letter or stamping on it—doing something insane or nonsensical.

"Please read it to me," said she. "I never could decipher Miss Devereux's hieroglyphics."

"It is a very pretty chirography, and a very pretty hand that pens it," returned St. Simon, smiling; for he perfectly understood the feeling which prevented Fanny touching the epistle.

There was an odd mingling of femininely acute intuitions in St. Simon's nature, along with his wild-cat propensities and the instincts of divers other crafty, cruel animals. Not one man in a thousand would have comprehended Fanny's refusal; but Lucretia Borgia herself could not have enjoyed it more than he did.

He sat down and read the letter:

"DEAR MR. ST. SIMON,—I have received your proposal to buy my lands situate in Nevada. I regret, since you have a wish to possess property in that region, that I have no wish to sell. It is very probable, as you say, that it may be many years before they can become of much value to me, yet, on the other hand, I might do a foolish thing to dispose of them, as I see by the newspapers that silver mines in the vicinity (for a long time considered unprofitable) have lately begun to attract a great deal of attention. As you have just returned from America, perhaps you may be able to give me some definite information on the subject. I shall probably be in Paris late in the autumn or early in the winter, and then we can talk the matter over, if you are good enough to favor me with a visit.

"I trust that your wife—to whom I beg you to present my sincere regards, as I remember her very pleasantly—is quite well. I have to thank Miss St. Simon for the polite messages she was good enough to send in your letter."

Fanny interrupted the reading by an exclamation of wrath.

"You sent a message from me—to that woman? Upon my word, St. Simon, you ought to be strangled!"

"I read that out by mistake," said he, good-naturedly. "After all, it was only polite; and though we cut people's throats, let us do it politely."

"Not hers!" cried Fanny, flinging her gloves across the room. "I'll write and tell her that the message was a pretty fiction on your part, and that she ought to have known me well enough to be sure of the fact."

"Perhaps she was, but she had to be civil in her turn," replied he, teasingly. "However, hear the letter out. There is more about you."

Fanny knew by his manner that something was to follow which he fancied would stab her sorely, and she composed her face to spoil his triumph.

"I have to thank Miss St. Simon," he began; but Fanny interrupted him.

"You have read that once," said she, disdainfully.

"Ah, yes. Where was I? Oh, this is it;" and he continued the reading with intense enjoyment.

"I need not ask after her health, as a mutual friend, Mr. Talbot Castlemaine, is here, and tells me that before leaving Paris he had the pleasure of meeting her, looking wonderfully well, and as gay and brilliant as ever."

St. Simon, as he read, glanced at her from the corner of his eyes, and saw her grow red and then pale; but she met his scrutiny with such firmness that he was glad to go back to the letter.

"Allow me to offer my acknowledgments for the interest you so kindly express in my well-being; to assure you of my tolerable contentment in this prosaic world; and to wish you in return a continuance of the peaceful, easy frame of mind on whose possession you desire congratulations. Very truly yours,

"HELEN DEVEREUX."

"How intolerably insolent from beginning to end!" exclaimed Fanny.

"Do you think so?" he asked, in affected surprise.

"Don't be absurd, St. Simon! You were furious at getting it, I know. She nips you very neatly, I must say;" and Fanny laughed in her turn. "She evidently knows the value of her land as well as you do. I told you from the first you could do nothing with her."

"I trust you find satisfaction in the accuracy of your judgment," he said, rather pettishly. Then, after a pause, "We need not nip each other, however, because Miss Devereux has hit us both. Upon my word, there would be a serene satisfaction in overreaching that confounded woman. I might have been rich long ago, and paid you back your twenty thousand dollars, if—"

"She would not have gone prying into her own affairs."

"I should not have cheated her—I was sure of success. If I could have got the use of some of her funds for a while, I'd have done famously. Why, when she was with us there was that business of the Spanish bonds. I could have made no end of money."

"I remember her onteries and her sneering insinuations—"

"Well, don't go over it. A devil of a temper, too, she has, as well as the rest of us! I recollect her tearing the power of attorney I had drawn up, and—"

"Suppose you'd got it?" broke in Fanny.

"Why, then I could have disposed either of a certain amount of stocks, or these very lands—there was talk about them then—as I might decide best. You know I was ready to go over to America—"

He stopped short, and remained staring in astonishment. She had risen from her seat, and was walking up and down—an inveterate habit with both uncle and niece when agitated or preoccupied. She was muttering to herself, and looking straight before her with an evil expression, which transformed her whole face—she looked positively old and ugly.

"*Quelle mouche la piquée maintenant!*" called he. "For the Lord's sake, don't prowl about, looking so like one of the Fates!"

She moved toward the door.

"I will come to you presently," said she. "I have something to say to you."

"Well, can't you say it now? It will soon be time to dress for dinner—by-the-way, Alleyne promised to dine here. What the deuce have you got in your head, Fan?"

"I don't know—I'm not sure," returned she. "I want to go to my room—I'll see you by-and-by."

She hurried away, and left him muttering something not complimentary in regard to feminine insanities. Fanny went to her chamber and bolted herself in. She unlocked an *armoire* and took out a quaint, heavy, writing-desk, which always accompanied her in her wanderings. It was a cumbrous brass-bound affair, with a peculiar lock that might have puzzled an expert burglar. The key to this desk never left Fanny; she guarded it about her person as carefully as if it had been some sacred relic. One portion of the box was arranged for jewelry, the other held papers. She put the desk on a table, and opened it, turning over the contents slowly. She came upon a letter directed to Gregory Alleyne, at New York; the writing was Helen Devereux's.

Fanny smiled bitterly as she glanced at the envelope. There was neither trouble nor remorse in her face—nothing but a cruel triumph. She recalled the events which had urged her on to this and a deeper treachery, feeling no more regret than she had done at the time. From the first she had hated Helen Devereux, not so much on account of her beauty or her wealth, as for a certain truthfulness and courage which made her unsparingly severe upon artifice of any kind. She had found Fanny out in one of her plots and thwarted her, taking no pains to conceal her contempt. From that moment Fanny vowed to have her revenge, and did not hesitate to employ the sole means which fell within her reach.

She laid the epistle in its place, and continued her examination of the papers. At length she discovered what she wanted—a legal-looking document, with parts of printed lines filled up in the same writing as that on the letter. Fanny read, and, as she read, the expression which had disfigured her face in St. Simon's presence returned darker than ever. She was roused by a tap at the door. In answer to her impatient de-

mand, Antoinette's voice answered that she was there with a note from monsieur.

"Slip it under the door—I am lying down," her mistress replied.

When she heard the old woman walk away, Fanny rose and picked up the billet. It contained a few words to say that he had received a message from Besson, and was obliged to go out—he might be a little late for dinner; Fanny must not fail to be dressed, and ready to receive Alleyne.

The fanciful clock on the mantel struck six; Fanny had been too much absorbed to notice how the shadows had gathered in the room. She locked and put aside the desk, then proceeded to dress, having rung and given orders that the maid should superintend the Tortoise's toilet.

When half-past seven came, and Gregory Alleyne entered the *salon*, he found Fanny there, looking like a classical priestess in her white robes, amiably trying to teach the Tortoise some new stitch in crochet.

The dinner went off nicely, and St. Simon was only a few moments late. Old Monsieur Besson came back with him, and Fanny did not pay much attention to Alleyne; he almost feared she was offended with him, after all. St. Simon smiled at her artfulness, enjoying it as he would have done a well-acted play. He perceived that she could manage the new-comer without assistance.

For a little while in the drawing-room Fanny was more cordial, apparently trying to be at ease: Alleyne felt quite grateful for the effort. Then several men came, Roland Spencer among them. Fanny did not forget, when he was announced, to prepare Alleyne for her intimacy with him.

"He is the nicest boy I ever met," she said; "I do hope you will cultivate him, and help me keep him out of mischief. The idea of a family turning a baby of twenty loose in Paris! Aunt and I have him at the house as much as possible, and feel like his grandmothers."

"You must, especially," said Alleyne.

"Oh, when a woman is almost five-and-twenty!"

So Alleyne was inclined to be civil to the youth, from whose age Fanny had subtracted nearly three years; but he did it, or Roland fancied that he did it, in a patronizing fashion, as men past thirty are apt to treat one-and-twenty, and Roland chafed accordingly.

When they had all gone, St. Simon retired to his cabinet to write a letter. He had not sat there long before Fanny entered.

"Bless me!" said he, "I had forgotten you'd a mysterious communication to make to me. What is that paper?"

"It is the power of attorney which Helen Devereux did not tear," said she.

He looked positively frightened for an instant,

then bewildered. He tried to take it from her hand: she held it fast, but permitted him to read it.

"Why, it is signed—witnessed by you—filled out to Jonas Petty! What the dickens does it all mean?"

"She grew very amiable after her rage," said Fanny. "She had the paper in her hand when she came to my room. I wanted to know what a power of attorney really was. She filled this out, just to show me, and I put my name as witness. We both thought it burned. I found it after she had gone, and always kept it."

She ceased speaking; the two looked in each other's face with a strange glance.

"It could not be used," said St. Simon; "it would be a very dangerous business."

"I don't propose using it," replied Fanny, coldly. "But it could be done, if a Mr. Jonas Petty were forthcoming."

"The best thing is to burn it," said St. Simon, with a shiver. "Pouff! there's a temptation about it that scents horribly of state-prison!"

"We will not burn it," said Fanny, "but you will not use it. I'll give it to you; put it away carefully. If the worst came to the worst—if every thing failed—your fine schemes and all—it might be a sort of hold on Miss Devereux. One never knows."

St. Simon locked the paper up in silence.

CHAPTER X.

"THE IRREVOCABLE WORDS."

TALBOT CASTLEMAINE lingered in the village for nearly three whole weeks—long after he knew he ought to have gone to his aunt at Torquay, from whom he hoped for a little aid, though she had neither the means nor the will to give more than temporary assistance.

Each day he wondered at his own folly in not having arrived at a definite understanding with the heiress, and called himself a variety of uncomplimentary names when he perceived what absurd feeling was at the bottom of his dilatoriness. Miss Devereux's fortune would set him right with the world, and afford the luxurious ease he craved. Her manner had so completely changed during the past fortnight, that he knew now was the time to speak. Still he hesitated and delayed, comprehending what an idiot he was, but unable to control his vagaries.

His capricious fancy had gone astray; for the moment he was actually in love with the pretty wood-flower, Marian. He understood perfectly that if he were to go insane enough to marry her, he should hate her always for standing in his way, and shutting him out from wealth and advancement; yet the very idea of relinquishing her kindled a hotter flame in his heart.

He must not yield to the feeling; existence was too hard on him. Education, example, every thing had combined to leave him unable to act the manly part he would for the time have been glad to adopt. He told himself this over and over, trying to shift the blame from his own shoulders that he might be less ashamed of his conduct. Shame and remorse, however, were no proofs of amendment, or even a desire to do better, with him; it was a habit of his to indulge them as a salve to his conscience.

In the mean time, while imagining divers sublime things which he might accomplish if fate had only been kinder, such as marrying Marian, winning a name in some wonderful career, and the like, he resolved each morning to propose to Miss Devereux, and each night cursed his stupidity for having dawdled and taken a longer reprieve. Nevertheless, those were pleasant weeks he spent in the quiet haunt, and it was only during his solitary hours that he allowed his restless thoughts to trouble him.

The weather remained enchanting, and almost every day the young people had some plan of amusement to occupy them. They visited all the places of interest within reach; for Miss Devereux proved a very fair pedestrian, in spite of the English belief that American women never walk. She had hunted up some tolerable horses, too, and Marian was learning to ride; and latterly they took long equestrian rambles among the green lanes, where the warmth and sun still lingered, as if loath to forsake the beautiful spot.

When they were idle, and indisposed for exertion, they sat on the lawn, and read new books which Miss Devereux had sent down from London.

Marian was introduced to several modern poets, of whose acquaintance her Old-World relative would scarcely have approved, had she listened to these readings. But Mrs. Payne was fond of solitude; at least, it had been so forced on her during many years that she was accustomed to it, and seldom gave the guests much of her society, though she liked them both, and was glad to have Marian happy.

The days drifted by so calm and uneventful that there would be little to chronicle in their course, yet singularly bewitching to Helen Devereux; equally so to Castlemaine, even while he smiled at the life he was leading. It would have been an astonishment to those who thought they knew him best to watch him at this time. This rout of ten London seasons, this *tapageur* of doubtful Paris *salons*, so familiar with every form of vice under a flower-crowned front that dissipation had no new experience to offer him—here he was, indulging a sort of idyllic existence, and actually enjoying it; able even to put by his cares and troubles, except when some sharp reminder reached him in the shape of a dunning letter from a creditor who chanced to discover his retreat.

His conduct toward Marian was perfect, so far as externals went. The idea that there was any thing more than friendship between him and Helen had quickly vanished from the girl's mind. Their sharp badinage, careless habits of speaking, were too unlike her fanciful ideas for any suspicion to remain, and the very freedom with which Miss Devereux talked of the man helped to confirm Marian in her opinion.

But these days had produced their effect upon the heiress. She recognized in Castlemaine, as she believed, far higher qualities than she had ventured to hope he possessed, and told herself that in marrying him she should do better with her thwarted life than in any other way. The impossible happiness of which she had once dreamed was of course very different from the reality now offered, but it would answer well enough. This man, spoiled as he was, could at least be honest and true. It would do well enough, and Helen informed her heart that at her age a woman ought to be satisfied when she could say so much for existence.

"What was it poor La Vallière wrote on the door of her convent cell?" she abruptly asked Marian one morning, as they sat together in the pretty drawing-room.

Marian was so busy with some piece of curious needle-work that she scarcely looked up. For the last half hour Miss Devereux had been, as she often expressed it, tiring herself by watching her friend's conscientious industry.

"I can't tell," the girl replied. "I just know who she was; I don't like French history, and grandma took Damas's novel away from me before I had finished the first volume."

"You dear little Mouse!" laughed Miss Devereux. "'Not happy, but content'—that was it. Never mind why or wherefore, Blossom; but while still young and beautiful, La Vallière shut herself up from the world which had been so cruel to her, and in time gained courage and strength to write that motto on the door of her chamber."

"'Not happy, but content,'" repeated Marian, musingly. She had laid her work aside to listen, and her great blue eyes were full of a child-like sympathy and wonder. "It seems very little, Helen; life had not left her much, I think."

"One might have less," returned Miss Devereux, sentimentally. "'Not happy, but content.' Yes, indeed, one might have a good deal less, and still live."

"It sounds so sad; it gives a whole history of such suffering and regret," sighed Marian.

"Oh, my dear, I never told you that a woman's experience could do any thing else! But no matter; when one reaches a stand-point where one can write La Vallière's watch-words on one's heart, it is doing very well—very well."

"It might be, when one was old," Marian said, doubtfully.

"Oh, who is ever young in our century?" cried Miss Devereux, irritably. "Yes, you are, Mouse. What eyes you have! They look like a child's who has just awakened from a pretty dream."

"Never mind my eyes," returned Marian, so unused to compliments that she colored sensitively even under her friend's admiration. "What made poor La Vallière so wretched? Had—had she loved somebody?"

"She was a proof of the truth of the Scripture warning, 'Put not your trust in princes.' It is not a nice story, Mouse; I can't tell it to such a baby as you are. Of course she loved somebody, and equally of course that somebody—a king in her case—proceeded to make her wretched with neatness and dispatch. It is odd, but I suppose women will continue fools to the end of the world."

"Do you call loving folly?" Marian asked, girl-like, hesitating somewhat over the word, which seemed too high and holy to be lightly uttered.

"I never heard any name that expressed the sentiment so well," replied Miss Devereux, dryly.

"I don't believe it," exclaimed Marian, more decidedly than she often spoke. "You don't believe it either, Helen, though you scoff and mock. It would be better to take the suffering than never have the love."

"I believe Mr. Tennyson says something of the sort," said Miss Devereux; "but I dare say in his case it is all theory. It is false, anyway."

"At least," returned Marian, dreamily, "one could die."

"Oh, could one!" cried her friend. "My dear, human nature is very tough, and doesn't die easily. Never mind; some time you are to love and be happy; I prophesy it."

"If not, I hope God will let me die; I could not live. I should go mad, Helen! When I read about such misery in novels, it makes me wretched and afraid."

Miss Devereux was thinking that perhaps the words were truer than the girl knew; thinking, too, that she would almost give up any hope of future peace on her own account to preserve Marian as she was now; sighing as she remembered that no human power could avail. Marian must fulfill her destiny like the rest. Then her thoughts wandered to her own past—that past which she strove resolutely to put from her mind, trying to believe it had no hold upon her save as a bitter memory.

She rose, and moved aimlessly about the room for a while, in a reverie which Marian did not attempt to break. No confidence had been vouchsafed her; Miss Devereux was not a woman to seek relief by pouring her sorrows or grievances into any body's bosom; but Marian comprehended that her friend had passed through tempests of which she, in her tranquil life, had no experi-

ence; tempests wherein the thunder-bolt had desolated some beautiful world of dreams, and left her alone amidst the ruins.

At length Miss Devereux went into the hall, saw a garden-bat lying on a chair, and the sight of it inspired her with the idea to go up on the hill back of the house, and have an hour's solitude. But there she came face to face with Talbot Castlemaine, who had gone thither before paying his daily visit to the cottage.

His first impulse was to steal off unobserved, and solace his soul by a quiet season with Marian. Then he remembered a number of troublesome letters which had come in with his coffee, and effectually destroyed his appetite, and he called himself more bad names for presuming to think of throwing away this opportunity.

It was destiny; the moment had come! He rose from the mossy hillock where he had been lying, and went forward to meet the heiress, wretched enough; furious with fate, disgusted with his own meanness; a sharp pain at his heart too, though somehow there was an interest given to the scene by that very sense of suffering.

Ten minutes later he was speaking the irrevocable words; and it chanced that he had chosen the time well. Helen Devereux sat down on a rustic bench to rest, and answered him frankly.

"I think you like me," she said; "I have grown to believe in you. I do all the more now because you say honestly you could not venture to think of me if I were not rich."

"Not for my own sake—for yours," he replied, feeling it necessary to do a little poetry.

"Never mind why," returned she. "I should not blame you if it were partly for your own. I say I think you like me—"

"What a way to put it," he interrupted.

"A very good way," she said, smiling gravely. "Well, I like you too; but I must tell you something. When I was a goose, ages ago, I thought myself in love. I was engaged, and, oh dear, how I did romance and Juliet! Never mind; we quarreled, or fell apart, and passed out of each other's lives."

"But you—"

"Wait! I may never feel like telling you the truth again. I know I raved over an ideal; it was all nonsense, but it has left me hard and unbelieving. See, friend, will you take me—will you teach me to have faith in you and myself—help me to make my life something better and higher?"

He was in a mood to be touched and softened, and for the moment honestly meant the words he spoke.

"We will try together," he said; "I am a miserable animal—but we will both try."

She held out her hands impulsively, and he saw that her beautiful eyes were full of tears. But even as he pressed his lips on the dainty fingers, Marian's image rose before him; acting

grew hard work again, and he was anxious to have every thing decided and over.

They staid there for a long time, and matters were definitely arranged between them. The next day he was to start on his long-deferred journey; in a fortnight he should be permitted to visit Miss Devereux at her Twickenham villa, and the following spring they would settle down into sober, rational married people.

"You are not to go to the house with me now," she pronounced. "I want to be alone a little while. Come this evening; though I'll not have you make Marian suspect by any nonsense; I hate looking like a simpleton."

So they parted, and during the remainder of the day Marian found Miss Devereux kind and amiable, but much more quiet than ordinary, though it was apparent she had not sunk into one of her gloomy moods. And Marian dreamed her own golden dreams, unconscious how deep a hold they had taken on her heart—not even aware of her secret as yet. The fortnight had been made up of enchanted hours in which she could neither think nor rouse herself, only float passively on, while the magic light grew always more dazzling and the vision warmed into fresher, distincter beauty.

It was a long day to the girl, for Castlemaine did not appear to give light and color to her thoughts by his presence, and she wondered why, when the afternoon was so fair, there seemed a great want, which took all sense of peace out of its beauty. Evening came, and for a space Marian forgot the dullness of the previous hours in the pleasurable excitement of sensations, which she had not ventured to analyze, brought by his society. But it did not last long. He had talked with her in the moonlight window while Miss Devereux sat beside grandma at the farther end of the room, and then the time for the old lady to retire arrived, and Marian went with her upstairs, according to her habit.

As she returned to the drawing-room, Miss Devereux was seated by the table, working irreparable injury to Marian's embroidery in a sudden fit of industry, and Castlemaine was walking up and down. The first words the girl caught from his lips struck a cruel blow to the dream in which she had been living.

"If I leave here to-morrow at noon," he said, "I shall reach Torquay by evening. Upon my word, it is like going away from the land of the lotus-eaters! When shall I have such a fortnight again?"

Miss Devereux laughed in good-natured mockery, and before Marian could shrink back into the darkness of the hall to recover from her first confused pain, the American's quick eyes perceived her, and she called,

"Mouse, do you hear the bit of amateur 'Childe Harold' this young gentleman thinks it proper to do?"

Marian moved forward, and sat down in the shadow; it seemed to her that she must walk unsteadily, and she dreaded observation. Miss Devereux was busy accomplishing more hopeless havoc in the embroidery, and did not notice her; but Castlemaine realized in that moment what he had before tried to disbelieve.

"You will do me justice, Miss Payne," he said; "you know I am sorry to go away, and I must to-morrow."

There was no need for Marian to speak; Miss Devereux was laughing and teasing him, and Marian could sit quiet and recover her composure in that marvelous way the weakest woman will when upon it depends the hiding of her heart's secret. Castlemaine watched her furtively; an answering trouble rose in his own breast, and with it a spasm of such blind, unreasoning rage against Helen Devereux, that he longed to rush forward and choke her to death while the careless laughter was still on her lips.

Marian knew she must get out of the room. Whether moments or hours elapsed, she could not have told. She had been asked questions, and had answered, feeling the hot blood rush over the pallor of her cheeks, and a feverish strength replace the faintness, which had seemed to her like the chill of death.

"Mouse, go and sing something, like a dear," said Miss Devereux.

"Just one song," urged Castlemaine.

She went to the piano and sung their favorite, "There was a King in Thule." When she finished, her two impulsive auditors were conscious of a dampness back of their eyelids, but before they could break the silence, Marian rose and said,

"I must bid you good-night now. Grandma wanted me to come back; she is not quite well. Is it good-bye, Mr. Castlemaine?"

"No, no; he will come and say that to-morrow," interposed Miss Devereux. "Must you go upstairs?"

"Yes; so good-night."

Castlemaine was standing by the half-open door. As she passed, he held out his hand. Their eyes met: it was only a glance, but it sent the girl away to her chamber dizzy with a sudden reaction from the suffering of the last half hour, and left Castlemaine conscious that he had been as false to his vows of the morning as if he had put his passion into words.

"Marian has not been just herself for a few days. English girl though she is, I fear I have walked her beyond her strength," Miss Devereux said, with that strange lack of penetration which the keenest people will every now and then show at the instant when penetration is most needed.

Castlemaine strolled back to the table and looked down at Miss Devereux, who was still occupied in ruining Marian's work. Once more that desire to seize her by the white slender

throat, and choke life out of her, beset him like a temporary insanity.

"My dear little girl is not very strong," pursued Helen, unconscious of the danger that for at least a second menaced her. "There is consumption in her family; I am always anxious about her. I must see; perhaps the grandmamma would let her go to Italy." She stopped, and began to laugh.

"Well?" he asked, more profoundly irritated than ever.

"I had forgotten a promise I made you yesterday," Miss Devereux replied, composedly. "That might interfere with my plan of taking Marian south."

"Yes," he said, absently.

"You are preoccupied, in fact dull, and you have been all the evening," she observed, with the candor she habitually displayed toward him.

He tried to come out of his dark fancies, and say something suitable to the occasion.

"Not much wonder, when to-morrow I have to go away."

"All the more reason why you should be particularly agreeable to-night, unless you wish to spare me the trouble of missing you. Is that your self-sacrificing idea?"

He did his best to adopt the tone of badinage which their conversations usually assumed, but he found it difficult. He went away early, and the night he spent proved far from an enviable one.

He was beset by remorse for the trouble he had brought on that innocent girl, full of self-contempt and loathing because he had not manliness enough to rise out of the sloth and errors of the past, and claim the sole way open to a better future. Heretofore he had found consolation in the thought that he had never spoken a syllable of tenderness to Marian Payne, but he felt now that to let his eyes and voice do the work was equally mean and false.

At the first she had been a pretty psychological study; that he could get in earnest, he had never dreamed. The misery and shame of this might prove to him how deadly was the wrong he had wrought—and it was too late! In his selfishness, his desire for ease, he had forged a chain which held him fast, and he knew (despising himself the more bitterly for the knowledge) that if he could break the bond, he had neither strength nor nobility to do so, weakened as his nature was by a long course of indulgence.

CHAPTER XI.

"DEAD—AND HE LOVED ME!"

WHEN Castlemaine came to the house in the morning, Marian was not to be found. Miss Devereux supposed she had mistaken the hour

for his arrival, and said so; but he comprehended that the poor girl had not been able to trust her courage.

The mute avowal which she had read in his eyes on the previous night had persuaded her that the period of his return would not be distant; then he would make all things clear. She had thought this; he was as sure of it as if he had heard the confession from her pure lips—those lips which he would have risked his soul just to kiss.

The betrothed pair jested and laughed up to the latest moment. Castlemaine had better control of his reason this morning, and the farewell was any thing rather than tender. The hardest thing for him was to beg a repetition of her promise; but he did it—every thing was definitely arranged anew. It was a relief to Castlemaine when the scene ended, and he set out on his walk through the wood to the station.

Better that Marian had not come in, he thought. She was only a girl; she would soon forget. And he—why, he was so mad that he could not tell what folly he might have committed. Had she appeared, had he read pain and unrest in her face, he would have been capable of flinging off disguises then and there. Mad, indeed, at his age to be so near ruining the worldly success brought at last within his grasp! What had he to do with dreams, or romance, or love? To dash through Vanity Fair in a gilded chariot, and smother the final trace of generous feeling under its dust, was all destiny had left possible.

And, thinking these base, miserable thoughts, meaner than the contemplation of what men call a crime, he came upon Marian in the depths of the wood. The white, frightened countenance raised toward his was wet with tears. She had come thither with no idea of meeting him. She only wanted to be alone till the certainty of his departure should give her strength again to meet her little world, and bear its scrutiny with a show of composure. Better the agony of not gaining a word or look of farewell than accept common phrases in the presence of others.

The sight of her rising like a ghost in the midst of his purgatorial anguish thrust aside the last gleam of reason he had so laboriously called up for the interview with Miss Devereux. He had never in his whole life resisted an impulse, never failed to bring misery upon every woman who had trusted him; and this passion seemed for the moment stronger than any which had gone before. He could not stop to remember the scores of times he had thought this same thing. He could not think at all; he could only see Marian's heart in her face, and know that he loved her.

When he could reflect, he was holding her hands fast, and crying, "You do care—you do care. I thought you did not mean to say good-

bye, and I was so wretched. Oh, Marian! Marian!"

The very sound of his own words helped him to realize his madness; but it was too late, even if he could have controlled himself. Marian was weeping quietly now, her head resting on his shoulder where he had laid it. He must go on.

"You did care, Marian! I tried to believe I was vain—wild; but it is true. Tell me that it is true, Marian."

Her lips were close to his bent face. He could not resist; he fastened upon them with eager kisses, and held her strained close to his passionate heart.

"Do you love me?—do you love me, Marian?"

He could only repeat this demand. He forgot Miss Devereux—his future—every thing. He could only remember that at last the coveted prize was within his reach.

His tender insistence forced a response at length from her lips, and the broken words cleared the last mists from his brain. He could think now—perceive his insanity; but it was too late—he must go on.

In the height of his remorse and wrath he was conscious that he must do a Claude Melnotte outburst of love and mystery, with truth enough in it to render the lie more galling and disgraceful. "I can not speak freely," he said. "There is a secret which I can not tell you—will you trust me?"

"Always," she whispered, and her voice, low and sweet as it was, scorched his soul like a flame.

But it was too late—he must go on.

"You must bear the secret with me, Marian, not even asking what it is. Can you do this?"

Again that happy murmur from her lips, and he must add to the base falsehoods just uttered.

"It is only for a time, my darling, my precious—only for a time. Look up, Marian; the world has not come to an end. It is only for a little while. Will you wait?"

"I will do what you bid me," she answered, and he fairly staggered under the smile which lighted her face as if it had been a blow from a sharp knife.

What did he mean? was he coming back? could he break the bonds which held him? It was not too late. Let him rush to the house, tell Miss Devereux the truth, claim her mercy and generosity. Oh, he was mad—mad! There was no time to lose, the train would start. At least he must have leisure to think—to look both possible futures in the face; and all the while he knew this was the decisive moment—now or never! He could go back, expose his meanness and duplicity; perhaps lose the chance either of love or wealth; but at least commence life afresh—a new man. The last chance; if he rejected, there would be no more help than if the hell to

which he must surely sink had already engulfed him.

He went on pleading with himself for time, time—all should be set right. The old promise so often uttered, never yet in a single instance kept, as more than one grave could have testified; worse still, more than one broken heart doomed to live under the blight his love had left. As he came out upon the rising ground near the station, he heard the engine's whistle, saw the train halt. But the delay was so brief that he could not reach the place in time. He stood still, and watched the long line of carriages disappear, uttering a low malediction on his luck.

For a moment he was undecided whether to return to Marian; then he remembered it would be a more consummate folly than that which had gone before. He had endangered his future sufficiently; his wisest course was to get away, and trust to finding some means which would insure Marian's silence. He hurried to the station; they told him there that if he rode over to Ashurst, a town ten miles distant, he would meet an express—otherwise he could not get on to Torquay until the next day. He made arrangements to have his luggage forwarded by the earliest train, and walked back to the village to ask the landlord to find him a horse.

There was nothing specially to gain by taking so much trouble, but he wanted to be gone. He had no mind to meet Miss Devereux or Marian at present; and to spend the day shut in his room with such thoughts as threatened to beset him was beyond his powers.

There was a full hour's delay before he could find a horse; the animals Miss Devereux had been in the habit of hiring were let to some new arrivals. At last Roper succeeded in persuading the groom at Denham Lodge to lend a filly he was breaking preparatory to sending her up to London.

Castlemaine was in a fever to be gone; the least hinderance always rendered him insane to carry out his plans. He mounted and rode off, it having been arranged that the filly should be left at the hotel in Ashurst. He took the hill road which led not far from the cottage—not in sight of the house, but past a quiet nook where Castlemaine and the two young ladies had been in the habit of sitting during the pleasant afternoons.

Helen Devereux had wandered out of the cottage in search of Marian, and, not finding her, sat down here to rest. She was reflecting upon the change in her life which this new decision had brought; trying to believe she had done the best for herself and the man she had promised to marry; blaming her own folly for the restless fancies which still beset her in spite of her mental assertions that she was well satisfied with what she had done.

She was sitting near the road, but hidden by a

clump of trees, which also shut out the highway from her eyes. She heard the tramp of a horse's feet in a rapid gallop; heard a sudden plunge, an angry command from a familiar voice, a heavy fall—a groan. It was all the work of an instant. When she gained the road the filly was just raising herself; close by lay Talbot Castlemaine, and the upturned face was like the face of a dead man.

She reached the spot, was trying to raise him, when a cry from a woman's voice smote her ears, and she saw Marian beside her.

"He is dead!" the girl shrieked. "Dead—and he loved me—he loved me!"

She fell forward in an insensibility almost as death-like as that which locked the senses of the man by whose side she sunk. Helen Devereux looked from one white face to the other. Marian's unconscious avowal had made this man's treachery as clear as a volume of explanations could have done. It seemed to her that hours had passed in the brief instants in which she remained staring at the two. She roused herself from her stupor. The sound of heavy wheels approaching brought back her capability to act. Castlemaine's head was resting on her knee; she laid it on the turf and rose, still gazing from his pallid countenance to Marian's.

The farm-wagon appeared round a turn of the road; the driver, seeing what had happened, checked his horses; the two men with him sprung out and hurried forward. Miss Devereux explained the accident calmly enough, adding that the fright had caused Miss Payne, whom the men knew by sight, to faint.

One of the laborers ran off in pursuit of the filly; the other said to Helen, in an awe-stricken tone,

"Is he dead?"

She forced herself to stoop and put her hand on the prostrate man's breast; she could feel his heart beat feebly. She was conscious of a horrible impulse to end his life then and there, that he might work no more harm in this world.

"He is alive," she answered. "Get him into the wagon, and drive to the inn. Tell Mr. Roper to telegraph to Ashurst for a surgeon—to have the surgeon come over in a special train at once. Hurry, before Miss Payne comes to her senses; I will help her home, and then come down to the village."

Her practical suggestions, her icy voice, rendered the men sensible and calm at once. In a few seconds more the wagon rolled away bearing Castlemaine, and one of the men followed leading the filly, who danced and frisked, apparently greatly pleased with the success of her exploit.

When the vehicle had disappeared, Miss Devereux seated herself by the roadside, and raised Marian in her arms. There was a brook running near, but she did not go for water, or do any thing to hasten the girl's return to con-

sciousness. She was thinking how much better it would be if the pure soul need never come back to this dreary earth. She could think calmly enough; indeed, as she sat there watching Marian, the right course of conduct seemed forced upon her.

Any gleam of tenderness she might ever have felt for Castlemaine had been killed outright by the knowledge of his treachery and sin. If he died, she need not remember him. She was horrified to find herself so hard and cruel, but every instinct of her loyal nature was so outraged that she could not control the sentiment. In Marian's eyes she would leave his memory untouched by a cloud. If he died, it could serve no good purpose to tell her the truth. Let her devote her life to adoring his memory—it might preserve her from other loves and other woes. If he lived—ah! then she could not hesitate. Marian must be told the truth—the man's real character exposed.

Yet in her rapid reflections Helen saw that she had been personally wrong. She had no right to engage herself, feeling as she had done, and she resolved never to be led into a similar error. Unless she could so utterly forget her old girlish romance as honestly to have joy and hope in the affection of some true man, she would persevere in her solitary course. And where was she to look for truth now!

A faint moan from Marian brought her back to the exigencies of the present. The girl opened her eyes, tried to struggle to her feet, stared wildly about, and, finding herself alone with her friend, almost believed for an instant that she had been dreaming. But the truth came to her, and she called,

"Where is he? What have you done? He is dead—he is dead!"

"No, Marian, seriously hurt, perhaps; but he is alive. He has been carried to the inn. I have sent for a surgeon."

"Let me go to him—I must go!" cried Marian, trying to get free.

"Not yet," Miss Devereux answered; and she could hear how cold and measured her voice sounded. "You must go to the house first, and lie down. You would only do harm; when the surgeon has been, you shall go."

Somehow, her tone and words brought Castlemaine's warning to Marian's mind; she must be silent. She had no intention of deceiving her friend, but she must obey him. She must keep their secret, at least while he lived; she had promised. She allowed Miss Devereux to raise her. After a few moments she was able to walk, and they proceeded to the cottage, neither speaking again for some time. Mrs. Payne had gone to spend the day with a friend, and Deborah was occupied in the kitchen, so they got up to Marian's chamber unobserved.

"You must lie down," Miss Devereux said.

"It will not be long before the surgeon arrives; after that we will go to the hotel."

Marian obeyed passively. It was almost impossible to keep still—to refrain from rushing out of the house to see him with her own eyes. But Miss Devereux had reiterated her assurance that he was alive. Even if he were to die, it might be days first; and she dared not disregard his parting counsel.

Miss Devereux was in no mood for half measures. She remembered that Mrs. Payne kept landanum in her room, and went in search of it. She mixed as strong a potion as she dared, disguising the odor and taste with some powerful essence, and forced Marian to drink the whole. In less than an hour she was fast asleep, and Miss Devereux knew she would not wake for a long time.

She put on her hat again, and walked over to the village. Mrs. Roper informed her that the surgeon had just arrived, and was in Castlemaine's room. Helen sat down in the little parlor to wait until he appeared, while Mrs. Roper felt it her duty to wail and lament with exceeding vehemence. She wondered much at the young lady's composure, and decided that either American women were monsters, or that the stranger was not Mr. Castlemaine's "sweet-heart," as she had supposed.

The surgeon's step was heard on the stairs at last.

"Please ask him to come here," Miss Devereux said. "I wish to see him alone."

And Mrs. Roper retreated, somewhat afraid of the pale beauty, and thinking that, in all her born days, she had never seen any woman so silent, so stony, and so proud.

Miss Devereux had met the surgeon once when she was at Ashurst with Mrs. Payne and Marian. The old gentleman was a rabid entomologist, and had a famous collection of horrible insects, which they went to look at and shudder over. Castlemaine had been with them, too. As the surgeon opened the door Helen was thinking of that visit: it was on that very sunny afternoon while they were alone for a while, and he talked so honestly and well that she had definitely resolved she could trust him and herself.

But the surgeon was beside her, expressing his delight at meeting her again, his grief at the melancholy circumstance which had caused his arrival, his assurances that every thing would go well.

"Then there is no serious hurt?" she asked.

"No; he was dreadfully stunned, and he has not his senses straight yet; but there is no danger. I shall stay all night myself; he will probably be a little delirious. I have sent for a nurse. In a few days he will be as well as ever."

Miss Devereux's first thought was of Marian; how could she tell her the truth? Oh! it would

have been a mercy had the girl died in the shock of the disaster.

"It is a very odd thing," the surgeon was saying, "but Mr. Castlemaine, when he gets up, will have tidings that may make him still more thankful that he is not obliged to leave this much-abused world."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He has come into a baronetcy and a fortune—neither of them unpleasant surprises. I had the news just before I started; a friend who came from London this morning told me. There is a telegram upstairs which I suppose announces the tidings."

"I think there must be a mistake," Miss Devereux said. "Mr. Castlemaine has told me there are three lives between him and the title."

"All gone, ma'am," said the surgeon, eagerly, "in the twinkling of an eye! The old baronet, his son, and nephew were lost on a steamer on their way to the East. The news nearly killed the poor young wife, so the hope of another heir went too, and our friend is Sir Talbot."

"It certainly would have been indiscreet of the filly to knock out his brains under such circumstances," said Miss Devereux, with a rather hard laugh, as she rose to go.

The surgeon wondered how he could have thought her so charming on their previous interview, and unconsciously shared Mrs. Roper's opinion as to her pride and frigidity. But Miss Devereux was not in a mood to disquiet herself about the verdict of any human creature in regard to her looks or words, and left the worthy gentleman with scanty adieus.

She found Marian still asleep, and remained to watch beside her. She had met Deborah on entering, and Deborah had heard of the accident, and was inclined to be very garrulous, but received slight encouragement. However, the old woman assigned a more charitable reason for Miss Devereux's odd manner than the landlady and surgeon had done, observing afterward to John,

"She an't one to unbuzzom herself easy; I've noticed that. And it was enough to drive her crazy, and poor Miss Marian too, seeing the young gentleman tumble afore their very eyes."

"There's no counting on the way gentlefolks 'ull take things," John averred. "I never did believe there was aught uncommon between them."

"Then it's Miss Marian," pronounced Deborah. "Do you know, I've been a-thinking that these days past."

"You're always a-finding a mare's-nest," returned John, cruelly; and then for a few moments the kitchen was less tranquil than ordinary.

Deborah did not like "to be put upon," and she told John so in plain language. What was

more, she didn't mean to be, and he might understand it; and, anyhow, the way he'd been going on lately was more than flesh and blood could bear; and if he thought that she meant to stand it, he was mistaken!

Fortunately, John loved peace, and was seldom rebellious for long; so the tempest passed, and left their domestic horizon as clear as usual.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO TÊTES-À-TÊTES.

St. Simon was full of business in these days, and enjoying it for the time as much as he would have done some new species of dissipation. He was constantly receiving letters and telegrams from New York; his *cabinet de travail* became the daily resort of Americans with a taste for speculations, and always a liberal sprinkling of foreigners, dazzled by the glitter and apparent soundness of his prospectuses and plans.

The wonderful Nevada Company was attracting a great deal of attention; paragraphs concerning its might and certainty of success had already crept into the Paris newspapers, as a rule little given to paying heed to such matters. But St. Simon's wide-spread and eccentric circle of acquaintance stood him in good stead in many ways at this period. He ranked among his friends several powerful Bohemians connected with the press, and he knew how to turn that intimacy to his own benefit.

Fanny declared this society, *sub rosâ*, was all that kept her spirits up. It was a great relief to listen to the witticisms of Monsieur D—, the famous dramatist, after the platitudes of the heavy people St. Simon courted so assiduously. Those very droll stories which C—, the brilliant *littérateur*, told so trippingly, were, compared to the conversation of the Philistines and respectables, as highly spiced meats to the most meagre Lenten diet, and gratified Fanny's mental palate exceedingly.

She was glad of any thing which occupied and excited her into passing forgetfulness of her personal hopes and fears. Ever since that idea of becoming rich, with the chance of happiness it presented, had fastened upon her mind, Talbot Castlemaine had haunted her thoughts night and day. She had long believed him hopelessly lost to her; had tried persistently to put his image out of her fancies and her heart, but now she ceased to struggle. Once convinced that St. Simon's schemes possessed a sound foundation, with those stocks he had presented her securely locked in her trusty desk, and the belief in her mind that the time was not far distant when they could be turned to a golden fruitage, Fanny let her imagination have free rein.

She was restless and anxious because she could

not immediately inform him of the change in her prospects, but she knew he would be little affected by any hope held out for the future. Any hour evil news might come to her: that was the thorn in her bosom now. She racked her brains for some pretext to drag him away from Miss Devereux's dangerous vicinity, but her craft was powerless here. There was nothing she would have hesitated to do. Had there been any possibility, she would have blackened him hopelessly in the heiress's eyes; but neither anonymous letters nor vague hints from acquaintances would produce any effect upon a woman like Helen Devereux.

She could only wait and curb her fiery impatience as best she might, trusting always to the fact that Helen would be very slow to decide in so important a matter as marriage, especially with a man of whose reckless past she knew as much as she did of Castlemaine's.

She had but an inkling of the truth, in reality, else she would have rejected even his acquaintance; but she knew enough to render her careful. She would want proof that he was really changed, and determined to make a better use of his future.

Fanny smiled sometimes to picture Castlemaine doing a revised version of the Prodigal, and rather enjoyed thinking how tiresome he must find it. She smiled, and then rushed into one of her insane fits of temper or grief to fancy him looking into Helen Devereux's face with those dreamy eyes of his, whose light thrilled her own heart, addressing the woman she hated in the honeyed tones which had roused such delicious music in her own soul.

More than once, under the influence of these feelings, and her fears that Castlemaine's witcheries must rapidly soften the heiress's scruples, she was sorely tempted to destroy all possibility of his winning her. She could do it. Late as it was, she could clear up the night which separated Helen and Gregory Alleyne; do it without danger to herself. That letter which lay in her desk, if sent to its rightful owner, would bridge the gulf without delay, and no mortal would ever know where it had been hidden during this long season.

But Fanny, even in her impetuosity, could not forget her craft. The future was not certain yet. She had seen so many notable schemes fail at the very moment when their success seemed decided. Without her fortune Castlemaine was beyond her reach. If she attempted any reckless venture, she might be forced, in impotent wrath and anguish, to watch Helen Devereux serene and happy, while she groveled in outer darkness.

She could do nothing; she must wait, and if the bubble burst—in her morbid moments she still gave St. Simon's project this disrespectful name—she must marry Gregory Alleyne by fair means or foul. The bare thought that she might

be obliged to plot, scheme, maybe humiliate herself, to accomplish this end, caused her to hate the man almost as bitterly as she did Helen Devreux. Otherwise, in many respects she quite liked him as their acquaintance went on. She had expected to find him priggish, sententious, and tiresome, and he was nothing of the sort. Then, too, she had a genuine admiration for his perfect honesty and truthfulness. Fanny was capable of appreciating high moral traits, unless they interfered with some plan of her own, and always believed that she should have been the possessor of the same good qualities had her life been different.

She succeeded in making Gregory Alleyne very fond of her society, and he spent more hours in St. Simon's drawing-room than poor Roland Spencer approved. Fanny was sorry for the boy—genuinely sorry; she was such a mass of contradictions! She used to take infinite trouble to give him pleasant interviews; let him walk out with her, sit quietly in the Tortoise's sanctum, and help amuse that chaotic body; and altogether found means to offer a great deal of happiness, in spite of the jealousy toward Alleyne which began to torment him.

Alleyne thought Fanny's kindness to this youth, and the pretty arts she employed to keep him out of mischief, among the nicest points in her character. He would gladly have been friends with Roland too—went to see him, invited him to his lodgings. But Roland retreated from his advances, and Alleyne decided that it was because the young fellow found him too old for a companion.

"And I suppose I am," he said one day to Fanny, in speaking of the matter. "Do you know, I am two-and-thirty?"

"You will soon need crutches and a wig," she answered. "But please don't talk about ages; it is very American, and a delicate subject with me."

She laughed secretly at Alleyne's blindness in not perceiving the true reason of Spencer's avoidance of him, but deemed it unnecessary to throw any light upon the matter. The boy was jealous. Fanny knew it; though, to do her justice, she did not suppose that his fancy for her went beyond the caprice which a youth of his age often has toward a woman older than himself. She still persisted in her theory of meaning him no harm, and his naïve admiration was agreeable to her. She kept him easily upon terms of friendship, for he was shy in regard to this beautiful dream that filled his soul, and was glad to accept any conditions which allowed him the bliss of her society.

He came in this very morning on which Alleyne had been speaking of him, but, fortunately for his peace, the ogre had departed. Fanny, aware that Roland was coming, invented a pretext for sending the other away.

"I thought you had forgotten your solemn engagement to come and help me wind T.'s netting silk," she said. "I was just getting vexed with you, and wishing I had kept Mr. Alleyne; only he is so high and mighty that I could not have ventured to ask his assistance on her behalf."

"I wonder you remembered me if he was here," returned Roland, rather pettishly.

"You are in one of your bad moods, I see," she said, mischievously. "You wicked boy! You look as if you had not slept! You were off with some of those wild young Americans I have forbidden your frequenting."

"Indeed I was not," he answered, eagerly. "I didn't sleep, but I was safe in my room very early—went there straight from the ambassador's."

"And yet, in spite of your moral behavior, you did not sleep! What a shame that your *sagesse* should have met with no better reward!"

"You promised to be at the Minturns," he said, complainingly. "I waited and waited, till there was nobody left, thinking you might come. You are always so late, that I did not give up hope till old Minturn went fast asleep in his chair."

"I could not go," Fanny answered. "If I had known in time I should have sent you word—though you did not deserve it, I perceive, because you are cross with me."

"I was so disappointed," he pleaded.

"And I was sorry; but poor T. had one of her neuralgic attacks just as we were ready to go, and I passed the time rubbing her with liniment."

She had told Roland that she should expect to meet him at the Minturns' on purpose to keep him away from the house. She had spent a charming evening—the doors had been barricaded, the Tortoise sent to bed, and St. Simon and Fanny entertained the dramatist and the *littérateur*, and pretty Madame F—, who once held a good rank in society, but had slipped out of it. Fanny enjoyed her company immensely; and though she never visited her for fear of meeting compromising people, madame was often invited when only the Bohemians were present, and was wise enough to keep her own counsel.

"I did not get to sleep until almost morning," she added, by way of utterly overwhelming Roland with contrition. "Now, aren't you a little sorry you misjudged me?"

He was very penitent; so she forgave him, and talked pleasant nonsense, while he held the netting silk for her to wind, and looked in his face till he grew fairly dizzy. Sometimes, as she labored to undo vexatious knots, her head was bent so low that he could feel her breath warm on his cheek, and once a stray curl touched his hand. Roland was in Elysium; and she could see plainly enough her power over him, and en-

vied the boy the ability to be so young, and so delightfully foolish.

"But you have not thanked me for sending Mr. Alleyne away," she said, suddenly.

There was so much of the feline element in her nature—she resembled St. Simon in this—that she could not resist tormenting her prey a little, after having for some time allowed it to repose in a state of ecstatic peace.

"You did not say you sent him," he answered. "You only told me you were almost vexed that you had not kept him."

"Oh, then, you think I tried and failed! Dear me, I did not imagine you had so poor an opinion of my powers of persuasion."

"You know that was not what I meant."

"There, there! Don't bounce in your chair (bless me, if the Pattaker heard me use such an inelegant word!). You will tangle the silk, and I have almost got it in order now."

Then Roland deliberately did bounce, and throw his arms about, so as to arrive at that result. Masculine nature is capable of executing wiles, but it usually needs to have the artifice clearly pointed out by the acuter feminine intellect.

"I believe you did that on purpose," said Fanny, tapping his fingers.

"So I did—just to prolong your work."

"What a promising youth! Paris air is having its effect on you! But another time don't be so energetic. I must cut the skein now; these knots are beyond my skill and patience."

"Did you really send that man away?" asked Roland, holding the silk out of her reach.

"I really did. Let me cut it! Had I not promised you that you should come and help me this morning? Don't I always keep my promises?"

"Oh, I have not accused you of that. I know you are truthful—"

"Indeed, I am not. I've told you so forty times! But we are brothers—jolly good fellows, and I don't mean to tell you fibs."

She uttered the improper bit of slang so archly that Roland was delighted. She could do and say a variety of things, and still appear lady-like, which would have been dangerous for another woman to attempt.

"I don't see how you can tolerate that fellow," continued Roland; "he is so conceited and proud."

"Now you are a little unjust. If you would get acquainted with him, you would find that he is very agreeable."

"I don't wish to have his acquaintance," said Roland, impatiently.

"And I am miserable if my friends do not like each other!" returned Fanny, piteously.

"So you call him your friend now?"

"At least he is St. Simon's, and I have to be nice to him."

"Perhaps some time you mean to marry him, because he has millions and millions," cried he, with an angry flush.

"Perhaps some time I mean to go to the moon," replied she, calmly. "Though I think it is you I shall have to send there in search of your wits. No, no, Roland! By chance I know a little about Mr. Alleyne—this is a secret, remember!"

She tapped his fingers, this time with her dainty scissors. The very word "secret" was bliss to his ears.

"Yes, indeed! Well?"

"No, it is not well! Mr. Alleyne's heart is elsewhere, so I have no hope of enjoying his millions. Now, then, are you satisfied, you bad boy?—you naughty big tyrant of a brother, always suspecting me of some wicked design!"

She knew that perhaps in a few weeks she should have to own she meant to wed this man; but she did not scruple to use every means to tranquilize Spencer for the time. According to her creed, it was good-natured to make him happy as long as possible; she quite regarded it in the light of a meritorious action.

"I'll never suspect you again as long as I live," he cried. "I never do, really."

"I shall tell you another secret as a reward. It is very important that Mr. Alleyne's name should be among the directors of the silver company. Oughtn't I to be nice to him, and help my uncle all I can? You would not have me worse than a heathen and a publican, refusing to do my best for my own flesh and blood?"

"I wish it was I who had the millions. I would be president and director and any thing Mr. St. Simon wanted," he said.

Fanny thanked him with a smile, listening rather absently as he talked. Still she was thinking about him—thinking what a relief his youth and earnestness were in the arid desert of her life—thinking, too, that, no matter what came, she would preserve him from St. Simon's talons. She was likely to have enough troublesome memories on her conscience before getting through this world; at least she would give herself the comfort of remembering that she kept this boy from coming to shipwreck through her relative's wiles.

"I don't believe you heard a word I said," he exclaimed.

"I can repeat every syllable, if you are sufficiently enamored of your own sentences to wish it," she replied.

"But you look so absent."

"You wretched boy! When you can't quarrel with me about any thing else, you find fault with my looks! You are getting worse than the dragon of Wantley—who was that beast, by-the-way? I get the dragons of history dreadfully mixed up always, and somehow I invariably fancy them looking like the Pattaker."

Poetical dreamer though he was, Roland enjoyed nonsense greatly, and never failed to appreciate Fanny's most absurd sallies. But his hour of contentment had ended. While he was still laughing at her words, a servant entered with a note. The lady read it, and said, regretfully,

"I shall have to go. St. Simon wants me to do something for him."

Her worthy relative had written these words:

"Come into the study to look for the newspapers—Alleyné is here yet. He is better disposed than usual, but I can't bring him to the point. I actually believe he would do it for you. Put it as a personal favor—coax. You could wheedle the devil if you choose—may be some time you will have to try! Come at once; I'll take myself off. Now, then, to work in earnest! 'Charge, Chester, charge,' and let Alleyné pay the expenses."

St. Simon would have scribbled a jesting letter if he had been on the road to the scaffold. That reckless spirit of fun which he and Fanny possessed had been a great resource to them under many trying circumstances.

"What does your uncle want?" asked Roland, in an aggrieved tone.

"Some help in his correspondence. He writes nonsense, to put me in a good humor. I must go; I am a selfish monster, but I hate to refuse people. Good-bye for to-day."

"And I shall not see you again?" demanded he.

"We are going to the Gymnase to-night—a stage-box—if you have nothing better to do, and choose to hunt us up."

"But there will be a lot of people about you—"

"You promised not to be so *exigeant*."

"I beg your pardon! And you are sure we are friends; you do like me a little?"

"Better than all my friends put together. How abominably I spoil you! You mustn't kiss my hand twice—it is not proper. Good-bye."

So Roland had to take himself off. Fanny looked in the mirror, arranged her hair, gave a nod of approval at her own reflection, and passed down the corridor.

"Don't be cross! I want the newspapers—poor T. has not seen them; you carried the whole off, you dreadful man!" she cried, half opening the door of the study.

"Come in, come in," called St. Simon.

"You are sure you will not scold at my intrusion? I have waited and waited. Antoinette said the men were all gone."

By this time she was in the room, and saw the visitor. "Good gracious, Mr. Alleyné!" she continued; "why didn't you speak, and assure me that it was safe to enter the ogre's den?"

"A fine idea you are giving him of my domestic tyranny," laughed St. Simon.

"I am only afraid of you here. In my own territory, I acknowledge no rebellion," she replied. "I thought you had gone to the Louvre, Mr. Alleyné, and here you are still, and such a cloud of smoke!"

"I met your uncle as I was going down-stairs," he said, "and came back to be guilty of helping fill the room with this smoke."

"I have been hunting up that book we were speaking of," she continued; "and I find you were right."

"I will take the newspapers to my poor wife and make my peace with her, while you acknowledge your mistake, Fan, whatever it may be," said St. Simon; and away he went.

"I see that you don't even care to hear that I am convinced," observed Fanny, as the door closed. "You look tired; have you been bored again with accounts of this silver mine St. Simon takes me down into six times a day?"

"We have been down in the mine, but I was not bored," Alleyné replied, with a smile.

Woman's looks possessed little power to move him of late years; but, from the first, Fanny St. Simon had produced a certain effect upon his mind. He did not think of loving her—he was long past such weakness, he believed; but he admired her as he might some fine picture, and regarded her in point of intellect as one of the most remarkable feminines he had ever encountered. Besides, her manner and style were a new revelation; her very caprices interested him. He could not resist her conversation even when she deliberately uttered sentiments of which she knew he disapproved; and he liked to argue with her. Then, too, she let him see that she was not happy; and perhaps this fact formed the strongest claim upon his regard. He excused whatever he heard to her disparagement from the Pattaker clique by setting her coquetties, her numerous faults, down to that score.

"I am glad if you were not bored," she said; "but I must say your looks belie the statement."

"Perhaps it is because I am somewhat annoyed—"

She interrupted him with such a pretty cry of dismay.

"Why, I thought you and St. Simon got on so well together."

"So we do, just now; that is another reason for my annoyance."

"Please don't talk in riddles, else I shall lose my temper in a minute!" she exclaimed.

"I will explain what I mean; only I am afraid it is you who must suffer boredom. Indeed, I should like to talk with you about it."

"Then you shall," said she, seating herself in St. Simon's easy-chair in an attitude as graceful as if she had studied it for a week. "But what is the mysterious 'it'—you quite pique my curiosity."

"I had refused, before leaving America, to

have any thing to do with the silver company," he went on. "I have retired from business—don't mean to be mixed up with it again; and I could not conscientiously allow my name to appear as one of the directors when I did not propose to pay any attention to the matter, or know how affairs were conducted."

"That is plain enough, even to my feminine intellect. Don't frown; I am listening, if I do jest."

"I don't mind your jesting; I know you understand. I like your uncle very much—better than I ever expected to. He tells me frankly that my name, added to the list of directors, would enable him to do all he wishes here without delay—I mean, bring in so many stockholders that the company would commence operations at once."

"And you are sorry to refuse him?"

"Naturally, since the making of his fortune depends on the success of his efforts in this matter."

"You have no doubt of the real value of the mines—no fear of the stability of the company?"

"None; all that has been proved beyond a doubt. But I had given myself a promise to let business alone. To tell you the whole truth, I have been ordered so to do by my physicians. I have used my miserable brain incessantly for a good many years, and need rest. All this sounds selfish—"

"It sounds nothing of the sort; you *will* make me rude! I understand perfectly; you hesitate because if you let your name be used in an affair of such importance, you would feel it your duty to watch that the interests of all shareholders were protected. Half these schemes ruin every body but a few principal men. I know that."

She leaned her head on her hand in deep thought, and he sat watching her. She burst suddenly into a merry laugh.

"You'll think me a goose," said she, "and decide that my opinion is not worth hearing; but I'll tell you what idea keeps starting up in my mind."

"It is—"

"That I should like immensely to be rich. We have several times been awfully poor. St. Simon's schemes never made much money for him, though they may have for others. He is a visionary, and lavish, and also too generous. Now, I had a little fortune once. I thought I was very wise; part I invested to please myself, part went when St. Simon was in difficulties. Don't blame him, it was my fault."

"If one can call it a fault," he said.

"I don't believe you do, at all events. Where was I? Oh, wanting to be rich! I did not have faith in the mine at first, but I have now, and I should like a share of the ingots. Would you have supposed me such a mercenary wretch?"

He thought her frankness and honesty the prettiest sight he had witnessed in an age, yet it was deliberate acting. St. Simon—concealed where he could overhear the talk—knew this well, and began to see what she was getting at, though in the beginning he had felt inclined to step in and choke her slightly.

"But what do you wish to prove by assigning to yourself this character?" Alleyné replied.

"That my opinion of what you ought to do is regulated by a selfish view of the matter, and so not worth having."

"Will you let me have it all the same?"

She hesitated—only because she knew she looked well in that apparent perplexity. What she meant to propose was perfectly clear to her mind. Her acute brain had already regarded every side of the question. Suppose the worst came to the worst—that is, if her hope in regard to Castlemaine failed—she meant to marry this man. She would not have his wealth run any risk from St. Simon. That there was something doubtful hidden under the fair exterior of the plan, she had never ceased for a moment to believe. That there might come a fortune out of it for St. Simon and herself in the beginning, she hoped ardently; but if not, then let Alleyné's money be kept safe from St. Simon's fingers, or from the consequences of his recklessness.

"I beg you will give me your advice," Alleyné said, earnestly; "it will have great weight with me, much as you seem to undervalue it."

The look of doubt changed to a charming smile.

"You don't pay compliments," she said, "but you manage to compliment very neatly, nevertheless. Since you believe in the company, become one of the directors for a certain time—six months—a year. Have a distinct understanding that you are to retire at the end of the period if you choose; limit your actual responsibility. I can't put it in the right words, but I know it can be done. Whatever happened, your documents would keep you clear, not only from loss—I know that is not what you are fearing—but from blame."

He sat for a little in silence, apparently weighing her proposal.

"Well?" she cried, with a pretty impatience. "Don't look so serious, else I shall run off in a fright."

"What do you wish me to say?" he asked, smiling.

"Whether the matter could be arranged as I proposed. You seem very doubtful."

In truth, he had not been considering her words. His silence had arisen from a sudden consciousness of how sweet this girl's society had grown to him, and he was wondering thereat—glad, too, in a sort, that it should be so.

"I don't think I looked doubtful," he said.

"No? Then it could be done?"

"Yes; or something similar would be practicable."

"To think of my turning out a genius in business affairs!" she exclaimed.

"I imagine no one but yourself would feel astonished at your doing so in those or other things."

"Fie, fie!" laughed she. "Then you could manage to oblige St. Simon—or me—I like best, in my selfishness, to put it that way—and be at rest, no matter what happened, not only in the eyes of the world, but where your troublesome conscience is concerned?"

"Certainly, as you propose. But, after all, I fear the way would not quite suit me."

She felt herself grow hot and angry at the idea that even yet her witcheries had not wholly subdued him, but she only said, in a tone of mingled disappointment and contrition, "I beg your pardon. It is very selfish of me to tease you: don't let's talk any more about it. I am ashamed."

"You misunderstand me," he replied.

"I'd rather do that than have you misunderstand me, because I should prove the less severe judge of the two," returned she, more lightly.

"I did not refuse—"

"But my plan would not suit you. No, no, Mr. Alleyne, I will not have to remember that I worried you into something against your will. We are beginning to be friends, and one has not friends enough so that one can afford to torment them."

He smiled again at her energy.

"Now, you shall let me explain," he said.

"Oh! oh!" she cried, holding up her hands. "You are accusing me of rudeness; you intimate that I interrupted you."

Her blending of fun and earnestness he thought very graceful; but he was too anxious to set her mind at rest not to speak seriously.

"I only meant that in becoming one of the directors I should not limit myself to a certain time. I could not give much attention to the business, but I have entire faith in your uncle."

"You would not feel it necessary to bother and worry yourself to death?"

"No; there are enough wiser heads than mine to manage the business."

"Then, if you please, I want to be rich," she exclaimed. "You will help me?"

If she had entreated the sternest woman-hater in the world with that face and in that voice, he would have found it difficult to refuse; and all the suffering Alleyne had endured, poignant as it was, had failed to leave him this odious character.

"I trust the riches may bring you more happiness than they do people in general," he said.

So Fanny had conquered! Her quick fancy rushed off to the hope which for weeks had persistently haunted her. Castlemaine's face rose so distinctly that it fairly shut out the grave, sad

countenance beside her. Still, she heard his words, and could answer.

"Better wish me the ability to use them rightly—though, after all, your wish would involve that," she answered, and, excited and triumphant as she felt, could be amused at her own hypocrisy.

"I think you would so use them," he said.

"Who can tell? They might help me bring a little good to others—perhaps, though, I should not try. Do you really believe I would?"

"I do, indeed."

"Well, I hope so; at all events, I hope I shall have the opportunity of finding out;" and she began to laugh again.

"I think there is no doubt of that; I am sure of it, indeed. The mine can not fail to be a success."

"And in a great measure I shall owe it to you," she said, softly. "Do you know I rather like that? I believe I am glad to feel under an obligation to my friends. Did I thank you? See how selfish I am—I even forgot that! But I do thank you, Mr. Alleyne—indeed I do."

"I have to thank you for talking freely with me—"

"And what a time St. Simon has given us!" she broke in.

"I must go away now," he said. "I will write to your uncle or see him to-morrow."

"And I may repeat our conversation?"

"Of course; my mind is made up."

She could have wished he entered into the matter on her terms. Still, if his fortune became necessary to her, she would find means to get him out of the affair in time, should the grand promises prove a myth; she could trust to discovering a way in spite of his Quixotic ideas.

They left the study together, and met St. Simon sauntering leisurely along the corridor.

"I have been reading to my wife," said he; "there's devotion for you! I left Alleyne with you on purpose, Fan. I had badgered him this morning until he was almost cross. I thought you would talk nonsense, and put him in a good humor."

"She has," said Alleyne, and took his leave.

Fanny walked straight on to the *salon* without paying the slightest attention to her uncle; he followed, humming an opera air.

"Haven't you any thing to tell me?" he asked.

"I saw by your face that you knew," she answered, disclaimingly. "It is disgusting, that habit of listening."

He laughed, not in the least offended.

"The prospect of wealth makes you very decorous and rigid," said he. "All right, Fan; we'll not quarrel. You did it very well. I do enjoy your histrionics."

"I don't wish to quarrel," returned she. "I don't know what made me turn rusty for a minute; I think I must have my nerves. Now, St.

Simon, I want those extra shares you promised me the day Alleyne became one of the directors."

"I'll make them over to you as soon as Besson comes; the new maid will do for witness as well as another. Why, Fan! do you know that, at the very least, you will have a quarter of a million? You can't say I've not dealt fairly. In fact, a good deal more than that, when the mines are really under way."

She smiled complacently.

"When I find somebody who wants to buy at that price, I'll sell," said she.

"What to do?"

"Oh, build an asylum for old maids, against I wish to enter one."

"Now, see here: I don't interfere with you," cried he, "but if you're getting any nonsense in your head, and mean to let Alleyne slip—"

"My dear St. Simon," she interrupted, "have you perceived any signs of lunacy in me? Haven't I done the best so far?"

"Yes, you have managed him beautifully in every way," he answered; yet his voice had a dissatisfied tone. After an instant he added, "Perhaps it is only a fancy, but you've seemed to me plotting something. I've watched you."

"It is not worth while," she said. "Devote your mind to your company; it will pay better."

She took up one of the newspapers he had left on the table, and began carelessly glancing down the columns, to avoid further conversation. St. Simon leaned back in his chair, and allowed himself a few moments' luxurious idleness, as a reward for the fatigues of the past weeks. It was plain sailing now. Alleyne had carried him nearly into port.

He was roused out of his reflections by a sudden exclamation—almost a cry—from Fanny.

"What the deuce is the matter?" he called.

"I hit my foot against the table," she replied; but he caught a strange quiver in her voice, and he saw that the hand which held the newspaper before her face trembled nervously.

She sat still for a few moments longer, then rose and passed quietly out of the room. St. Simon had his head easily pillowed on the cushions, and his eyes were shut, but he watched her stealthily until she disappeared.

As soon as the door closed he got up and went to the table—the journal Fanny had been reading was gone. He looked over the sheets which remained; with his wonderful memory for trifles, he recollected noticing that it was a copy of the *Standard* she had held.

It was time to go out. Several hours passed before he had leisure to enter the club, but once there his first act was to hunt up the latest *Standard*. He found the paragraph which served to make Fanny's emotion clear—the account of the steamship disaster wherein had perished old Sir Howard Castlemaine and his heirs.

"She's a fool, after all," he thought. "It

was for Talbot she wanted the money. Bah! the baronetcy is a poor one, and if she had the wealth of the Rothschilds it would not do. No, no, Fan, it would not do. We shall have our little romance, but we shall marry solid Gregory Alleyne all the same."

CHAPTER XIII.

FACING THE CONSEQUENCES.

As the surgeon had anticipated, Castlemaine was feverish, and partially delirious the whole night; never exactly recollecting what had happened, or where he was.

It would be poetical to describe him discoursing in long periods of his love and treachery—imagining Miss Devereux between him and Marian—haunted by some agonizing recollection, and conducting himself generally after the fashion of young men in romances. Unfortunately for poetry, in delirium people almost invariably talk nonsense, and Castlemaine proved no exception to the rule. He had a fancy that his fall was the result of an accident in the hunting-field, and though he recognized the surgeon perfectly, and occasionally wondered how he chanced to be there, he gave him several elaborate accounts of the misadventure, usually supposing himself at Castlemaine Park—a place he had not set foot in for at least six years. In some way the accident had been Ralph's fault; Ralph was old Sir Howard's son, and he and Talbot had not been on speaking terms since they were boys. Ralph had mounted him upon that horse in the hope of breaking his neck. Ralph always was a cad, he informed the surgeon, and he doubted there being an ounce of Castlemaine blood in his veins. It sounded strange enough, and not just pleasant to his companion, to hear him vituperate Ralph and the baronet, while the telegram and letters which announced their death lay on the table near. But the surgeon was too practical a man to indulge in fancies, and as the evening passed without any change for the worse in his patient, he prepared to go to rest, leaving him to the care of the nurse he had summoned. He dispatched a message to Miss Devereux to say that every thing was going nicely—in a couple of days the young man would be as well as ever, barring a few contusions and bruises.

Castlemaine slept a good deal—restlessly enough, of course, to keep the nurse from getting any repose. Whenever he woke, something in her appearance invariably struck him as so deliciously droll that he laughed aloud, more than once rousing the surgeon in the adjacent chamber. It was the Tortoise who had come to take care of him, Castlemaine informed the doctor; adding that Fanny had sent her, and she had come in such a hurry that she had on St. Simon's boots.

Fanny had gone to a ball at the great Panjandrum's, and had been caught stealing some lobster patties to bring him to eat—it was very absurd, was it not?

The surgeon thoroughly agreed, and laughed so heartily that Castlemaine pronounced him no end of a jolly old brick, and said that his nose was dreadfully crooked, but he must not mind it. He was very earnest on this point, and much relieved when the surgeon gravely assured him that he did not in the least mind. Toward morning he slept more quietly, but the fates had decreed that the poor doctor was to have no rest. As the dawn began to break dismal and chill, there came a tremendous pounding at the window of the room on the ground-floor, where honest Roper and his spouse lay sleeping the sleep of the just in their broad connubial couch.

The din woke Mrs. Roper—it would have been easier to pull the house down than to rouse honest Jacob by hammering on his casement at that hour.

"Fire! murder! thieves!" was Mrs. Roper's first agonized cry, strangled among the bed-clothes.

But in one instant she was wide awake, and sitting up in the gloom to listen. The noise continued, and she recognized the voice of old John from the cottage. That she had all her senses about her became evident, for she began to pinch Jacob unmercifully, and shout in his ear. He bounded up like a great India-rubber ball—he had lived too many years in wholesome awe of that voice not to waken when it sounded.

"Get up!" said his wife; "there's something wrong at the cottage—it's old John calling."

But she was out of bed, and had thrown open the sash before Jacob could move again, nearly knocking the unlucky messenger down by the shove she gave the shutter.

"What on earth!" she cried, leaning over the sill, and shaking her night-cap at John in the dim light.

"I want the doctor—Miss Marian's took dreadful bad," explained John. "Tell him to hurry as fast as he can."

Mrs. Roper was not a woman to waste time asking questions. She lighted the candle, got into her clothes quicker than ever female did before, and was upstairs bawling in the surgeon's ears by the time slow Jacob had his senses straight enough to reach the window, where he began to pour out inquiries sufficient to justify an assertion often in his wife's mouth, "that he was good for the talkin' part, if he wasn't for any thing else."

Half-way measures were not in Mrs. Roper's line; so she accompanied the surgeon and John to the cottage, aware that Mrs. Payne was absent, and having slight opinion of Deborah's efficiency in a case of illness so sudden and serious.

"As for Miss Devereux," thought Mrs. Roper,

as she stalked silently on, "she's like all them gentlefolks—they'd any on 'em let each other die, and do nothing but wring their hands, unless it was to run away for fear of catching something."

But Miss Devereux disappointed her by coming down-stairs to meet them, calm enough, though deathly pale. Marian had been rapidly growing worse for some hours; she feared an attack of brain fever, and from her description the doctor shared her alarm.

The old gentleman did not get home early that morning as he had promised himself to do. He could not leave the village until nearly night, and during the next three days he was obliged each day to return, for Marian remained very ill.

Miss Devereux watched by her constantly, soothed Mrs. Payne, kept Deborah from losing her senses, and showed herself so thoroughly capable that Mrs. Roper rushed out of her prejudices into an ardent admiration for her powers and skill.

The morning after the accident found Castlemaine doing well, though sufficiently weakened to be capable of no thought beyond the consciousness of bodily pain. If he tried to remember what had happened, the attempt caused his head to throb and ache to such an extent that he was glad to relinquish the effort, and lie on his bed in the darkened room, and yield to the effect of the narcotics which the nurse had administered.

He was equal to little more during the two following days, but on the morning of the third he woke with a full recollection of every thing that had occurred.

Sudden as the accident had been, he remembered it; remembered falling from what seemed a great height—down—down—with Marian's shriek ringing in his ears; for as he went over the details again and again, he was certain he had heard her voice crying out in anguish and frenzied alarm. He could not recollect Miss Devereux's being near—he reached her name, and then other reflections than wonderment in regard to his mishap quickly asserted themselves.

Nobody to his knowledge had come from the cottage or sent to inquire concerning his welfare. What did this mean? The answer came as rapidly as the question had arisen. Marian had spoken—perhaps unintentionally—revealing her secret in her terror and grief. Marian had spoken, and then the whole disgraceful facts of his duplicity had been revealed. Miss Devereux was not a woman to spare him—he knew that. Fortunately for his throbbing brain, the doctor's arrival interrupted this reverie for a little.

He took refuge in a sullen silence, but was evidently so much better that he received permission to sit up a while.

The nurse was needed at the cottage, because

Miss Devereux was sorely fatigued, and Castlemaine could now safely be left to Mrs. Roper's care; indeed, the doctor said that in a day or two he might get out again. Castlemaine received the information in the same dogged silence, and the doctor departed, thinking him a very cross-grained chap, after all, not half worthy the good fortune which had so unexpectedly befallen him.

Alone with Mrs. Roper, Castlemaine became more communicative; but that worthy dame had received instructions from the surgeon not to mention Marian's illness. Certain words which escaped the unconscious girl in his hearing convinced the doctor that there were closer ties than mere acquaintance between his patients. Miss Devereux had taken great pains to explain away any real meaning from Marian's broken exclamations, and the surgeon appeared satisfied with her efforts. He held to his own opinion, nevertheless, and determined that Castlemaine should not be agitated by any knowledge of what was going on at the cottage.

After receiving a charge to be cautious, the tortures of the inquisition could not have forced Mrs. Roper to approach anywhere near an indiscretion. She was too wise to run the risk of irritating Castlemaine by seeming to avoid clear answers, but she appeared to take it for granted it was Miss Devereux he wished to hear about.

That lady had witnessed his accident, she said, had arranged for his removal to the inn, had summoned the doctor—done every thing, in fact.

"I will say she showed a deal of sense. I'd not have looked for such from a lady," Mrs. Roper declared, feeling that the admission was magnanimous enough to do her great credit. "She didn't have hysterics nor nothing, and she was down here almost as soon as the doctor himself."

"But not since?" Castlemaine asked.

"I expect she's had news," Mrs. Roper replied, shrewd enough to catch the anxious inflection of his voice. "You see there's all sorts of odd rules for young ladies that I don't understand. But she'd have her news regular, you may be sure, with people back and forth half a dozen times a day."

"And Mar—Miss Payne—has she sent to ask how I fared?"

"I've been too busy to know who sent and who didn't," the landlady answered; and her voice sounded sharp now.

Mrs. Roper had formed her own idea in regard to Marian's illness, as well as the doctor, and no longer felt her old liking for Mr. Castlemaine. Indeed, in her thoughts, she unhesitatingly declared that,

"Agreeable as he was, he was tricky; and there was more under all this than met the eye."

Castlemaine began to speak of other things; but before long he brought Miss Payne's name

up once more, and Mrs. Roper again grew rigid and stony.

"It's time you took some broth, and chicken too," she said. "It's no way to get strong letting your insides stay as empty as a bell."

She rose with great decision, and Castlemaine asked no further questions. Somehow, his darkest doubts seemed answered.

Mrs. Roper presently appeared with a bowl of soup which might have tempted a saint, but Castlemaine would only swallow a couple of spoonfuls, and then she decided he was obstinate, and left him in dudgeon.

He sat in his easy-chair, and looked drearily out of the window, thinking his gloomy thoughts. It was a dark, rainy day. The wind surged up from the distant sea, complaining and chill. The leaves blew in showers from the trees; and a honeysuckle, which hung sere and yellow about the casement, tapped restlessly on the window-pane, as if in querulous complaint at being kept out in the cold.

Within, the scene looked pleasant enough; a fire burned cheerfully on the hearth, crackling with a heartiness which irritated Castlemaine's nerves. The crimson and white curtains, which were Mrs. Roper's pride, cast a bright glow about; but Castlemaine fairly hated the home-like air the good woman's art had given the chamber, and stared persistently out at the dismal landscape, feeling a perverse desire to annoy the doctor by going forth into the rain and wet.

He knew that the whole truth must have appeared. In any other case Helen Devereux would have been beside him. She was not a woman to stop, under such circumstances, for people's opinions, or to regard what might be strictly correct in the eyes of petty moralists. The whole disgraceful truth had become plain to her; Marian had revealed enough, in the horror of witnessing the accident, to make the quick-witted heiress understand the truth. In her turn, Miss Devereux had offered revelations which had exposed his treachery to Marian. He had lost every thing—his chance of wealth, his place in Marian's regard.

If he could only have been killed—gone straight down to perdition—anywhere, for there was no hope left to him in this world! His creditors, kept in grumbling abeyance by the reports of his good standing with Miss Devereux, would descend upon him more furious than ever. The heiress would go to London or Paris, and so render patent the fact that he had no chance where she was concerned.

All this was bad enough, but there was a pang deeper and sharper than these fears—the intolerable shame of knowing that his duplicity was discovered—the idea of feeling himself an object of scorn and contempt. At that moment he would have done any thing to recover his hold on the esteem of those two women—toiled, ac-

cepted the hardest penance. It was too late; his punishment had begun.

I have said he was a man capable of remorse. He experienced it now always, though with a strange pity for himself under his abasement and misery.

Marian's pure love seemed better worth having than aught else fate could offer. The treasure of that innocent heart brightening his stained, soiled existence, might have made him another man. He could not help believing in himself even at this crisis. But it was too late! A case of pistols lay in his portmanteau. The best thing he could do would be to load one of them and blow his brains out, with as little delay as possible. At the worst pass to which life ever brought him, he had never before thought of self-destruction; but now the idea came into his mind, and haunted him with dreadful persistency.

The loss of Miss Devereux's fortune ruined his last hope, but he did not think much of this—it was Marian he deplored. The idea that her love had gone from him roused his passion to a burning height. If he might only be reinstated in her eyes, he could bear all the rest. Expiation, hardships, looked easy to him now. He said penitence and suffering had so utterly changed him, that he could never be the same man as of old. He only wanted her affection to help him on toward the light, and he had lost it! If he had only told the truth, as he was so strongly tempted to do, on his parting with Miss Devereux! Had he done this—been manly and honest—how different the future would look now!

Possibilities which at another time he would have considered madness to indulge presented themselves as things easy of accomplishment. Out of the wreck of his fortune he might have saved hundreds enough to establish a business of some sort in Australia. He might have taken Marian and gone out to that New World, far from the reach of old associates and old temptations, and begun afresh—worked hard, paid his debts, perhaps have accumulated a competency.

To be straightforward and courageous, and lead an existence free from the follies which clouded the past, appeared very beautiful to his impulsive fancy just now. But he had thrown away his last chance; no hope of expiation or amendment remained.

The day dragged by. Castlemaine vowed that he would not sit there and spend another of such torture, though going out were to prove certain death. If it only might! Then he thought of suicide again, and wondered whether he shrunk from it in sheer cowardice, and was half inclined to try it, if only to find out.

He spent a horrible night. Could Miss Devereux have witnessed his mental struggles she

might have decided, stern as her verdict was in regard to him, that they had proved almost a sore enough punishment even for his great offense. But Miss Devereux was passing a sleepless night too, by the bedside of her poor friend; and each time she looked at that sweet, pure face, drawn and changed by suffering, her heart hardened still more against the man whose sin had only begun its awful work.

To think that she should live to gaze upon Marian's beloved features, and wish she might see them set in the chill repose of death! Yet if she could die, it would be the greatest mercy in God's gift. What a life lay before her, if consciousness and strength came back!

Miss Devereux was a strong woman, and she knew from an awful experience what it was to bear existence under the first shock of knowing that an idol had proved the vilest clay. And Marian was not strong—a tender, clinging creature. Oh! how was she to bear it?

And always, as she asked these questions, Helen Devereux's soul grew sterner toward him who had wrecked this beautiful young life, and her shaken faith in human nature wavered anew, under the added blow given it by a man whom she had liked and learned to trust.

CHAPTER XIV. IN THE WOOD.

EARLY in the morning the doctor stopped at the inn, on his way to the cottage. After daylight Castlemaine had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion, and was still slumbering so heavily that the surgeon felt his pulse, and answered Mrs. Roper's shrill whispers without waking him.

"He will do well enough," the doctor said, as they descended the stairs. "Give him plenty to eat; let him go about if he likes. He's as good as cured, except his bruises and weakness."

This happened to be a very busy day with the bustling housewife, so the verdict caused her joy. There was baking to be done, there were rooms to put in order; and many times during the night had she wondered how all this was possible if she must sit watching Mr. Castlemaine, instead of descending to spur the maids forward by her sharp tongue and the effect of her example.

Now she was free. Somebody must be at the convalescent's beck, she thought; and there was Jacob, the useless, doing nothing, as usual.

"He'd keep on a-doin' nothing if the last trumpet was to sound," Mrs. Roper declared to herself, with an acidity which was the invariable accompaniment of enjoyable hard work, though on other occasions she was wonderfully tolerant of her spouse's inclination toward ease. But at present Jacob must gird up his loins and straight-

en his back. He could attend to the guest's breakfast, help him dress, give the support of his arm if Mr. Castlemaine wanted to go out—in fact, show himself of some mortal use for once in his life. Jacob had not a word of excuse to offer, and sought for none. He knew that on baking-day a spark from the fire caught Mrs. Roper's temper, and she was not to be roused with impunity.

Jacob was glad of an opportunity to talk. His little knot of friends were acquainted with Mrs. Roper's baking-days too, and never came to sit with him in the porch and drink ale on those occasions.

It was a beautiful morning after the rain; the sun had appeared in great pomp; and as it was past noon when Castlemaine woke, the garden paths were already dry.

Poor Jacob was disappointed in his hope of a chat. During the progress of his toilet Castlemaine never opened his lips but once.

"No letters for me?" he asked. "No message?"

"Nothing, sir," said Jacob.

All this while the telegram and the epistle from the lawyer in London lay in a desk downstairs. When they arrived, the doctor had desired Mrs. Roper to keep them; he had forgotten to rescind the order this morning, and Mrs. Roper was a woman who obeyed to the letter a physician's commands. Mr. Castlemaine might have sat in his room for a month—he would hear no word from her lips concerning those documents until permission was given by the medical man.

The old surgeon meant to go back to the inn from the cottage, but he staid so long he had only time to catch the return train; so there was nobody to give Castlemaine a hint of the change that had come so unexpectedly into his life.

He remained in his chamber until the solitude and silence became insupportable. There was no sound but the steady ticking of the clock, which irritated him to a degree that made him long to break the odious machine. He had dismissed Jacob very curtly when he panted upstairs in search of the breakfast tray, and felt so hopelessly obstinate that he would not ring to summon his aid to get down-stairs—a feat he must accomplish, or go mad, without delay.

He succeeded, though his steps were unsteady, and his bruised arm hurt him a good deal. There was a kind of savage satisfaction in suffering the physical pain. He astonished Jacob by appearing on the porch at the back of the house, and Jacob broke his pipe in his agitation, and was so grieved thereat that Castlemaine laughed; an annoyance to any body, however small it might be, was a comfort.

"I didn't hear you call," said Jacob, confusedly.

"I don't suppose you did. It is quite warm and bright here."

But Jacob said he must have a hat and great-coat, and toiled up in search of them. Jacob thought if Mr. Castlemaine's convalescence dallied he should become a skeleton; he had already this morning mounted the stairs more times than he had done in a year.

Castlemaine sauntered through the garden, and Jacob followed. A cigar having humanized the young man somewhat, he condescended to address the landlord, whose efforts in his behalf he did not in the least appreciate, unaware that Jacob was almost as much accustomed as he to taking life easily and being waited on luxuriously.

Of course, in less than twenty minutes poor Jacob let out the one secret his wife had ordered to be kept religiously. Castlemaine learned that Marian had been dangerously ill, and was still confined to her bed, though the fever had lost its alarming symptoms, and seemed more nervous than any thing else.

Two or three hasty questions, then Castlemaine was on his feet and hurrying toward the gate, though agitation rendered his step so unsteady, that Jacob waddled after in terror.

"Where did you please to be going?" he asked.

"Let go my arm—to the cottage!" returned Castlemaine, impatiently.

"Patty'll be outrageous—she will, indeed; she told me I wasn't to say a word, and it come out quite promiscuous."

"Who the deuce is Patty? Look here, Jacob, if you don't quit your hold, I shall inevitably do you a mischief."

"I shall get the mischief if Patty finds out I told," groaned the luckless Roper. Then despair rendered him brilliant—he positively found an idea. "Let's go down the back path, sir," he pleaded; "we can get out by the wicket; it's shorter to the cottage. I'll show you the way; you mustn't go alone."

Castlemaine found that he really needed assistance, and was fain to accept Jacob's arm and stout stick into the bargain.

The path they took led through some green pastures, then a pretty bit of woodland, up an ascent, from whence the cottage could be seen nestled among the great trees, about which the rooks circled and cawed, while the autumn sun lighted the quiet nook with tranquil beauty.

Why was he going thither? What did he propose to himself by this step? The question struck suddenly upon Castlemaine's feverish excitement, and sent a chill through his whole frame.

"I want to sit down," he said, wearily; "I am tired."

"It's a goodish pull for you, considering," returned Jacob.

His dull brain had been pondering over the

agitation his news occasioned the young man, and for once he had arrived at a conclusion unaided by Patty. It was Miss Marian the gentleman had a hankering after, and not the American miss, as people had said.

"And only nat'ral," thought Jacob, "to take to what's his own flesh and blood, as one may say; for who knows where them 'Mericans really come from?—though this one is fair-spoken enough, and a likely sort of a gal, and I never seed her with a hatchet."

Jacob's ideas of Americans were principally derived from a picture-book he had seen in his youthful days, representing a lusty savage, awful in war-paint, and brandishing a tomahawk. I have met others of his countrymen in a far different sphere of life whose impressions of their relatives across the great waters were not much more clear or correct.

This fancy that Mr. Castlemaine was captivated by Marian softened Jacob's heart completely. He revealed another secret—one of his own this time. Cautiously he took out of his breast-pocket a small wicker flask. It held good sherry, which he had purloined from Patty's stores for his private delectation: Jacob believed his health feeble, and considered himself in need of more stimulants than Patty permitted.

"Take a sup of this," he said, in a mysterious whisper. "Nobody need be the wiser;" and he jerked his head so significantly in the direction of the inn that Castlemaine comprehended he was receiving a great proof of confidence and friendship.

He was glad to rest on a mossy log with his back against a tree, staring drearily out at the cottage, and asking himself why he had come, while Jacob struggled to light a pipe.

"There's the 'Merican miss a-walkin' down the path now," he exclaimed, suddenly.

Castlemaine looked—saw her strolling listlessly along toward the very place where he sat.

"I want to see Miss Devereux," he said. "Go back to the stile and wait for me, Jacob."

The old man nodded and moved away, his mind again disturbed. If Patty should be right, after all! Jacob almost wished that he had not treated the gentleman to sherry, if it was true he must lose the satisfaction of informing Patty that for once in her life she had been mistaken.

Castlemaine sat still and waited in dreary expectancy. He hoped for no money—had no thought of pleading for it. Let Miss Devereux say what she would; he wanted news of Marian—wanted to hear from the heiress's own lips that she had revealed his treachery, ere he slunk away out of the spot forever.

She was close to him before she perceived his presence. She stopped short, gave him one glance of contempt and aversion, then turned to move away.

"Miss Devereux," he called.

He had risen, but his bodily weakness and his mental pain mastered him—he was obliged to sit down again.

She paused, then moved a few steps nearer. In spite of herself, his changed appearance softened her for an instant. Indignant at her own folly, she asked, in a hard, stern voice,

"What are you here for? How dare you come? Can you be so utterly insane as to suppose the truth has not reached me? If you had been killed outright, as I believed for a moment, I would appeal to heaven against the injustice of your spirit haunting me. As it is, if you cross my path again, I will find means to protect myself from your intrusion."

He sat still, his head bowed, though his eyes met hers—not defiantly, not in shame even, but with a helpless, hopeless expression, such as his ghost might have worn had it indeed come back from the mystery of the beyond.

"I expected this," he said; "but I wanted to see you; I wanted to tell you the truth. I knew it would be too late, though."

"Much too late, even if you were capable of it," she replied, with a bitter laugh.

"How is Marian?" he asked.

"What right have you to inquire—"

"Does she hate and despise me too?" he interrupted. "Oh, Miss Devereux, you might at least have left me a pure place in her mind! I did not mean to see her. I could not bear to read the truth in her eyes; but I just heard she was ill. I—"

He paused and turned aside his head. Miss Devereux stood watching him in dumb perplexity.

"I meant to have gone away," he continued, in the same heavy, monotonous voice; "but to go knowing that she was ill—that— She is better, is she not—out of danger?"

"Yes, much better," Miss Devereux answered, still regarding him in the same wondering, puzzled fashion.

"I wish I could tell you how it happened," he continued, slowly, "but there's no way. I didn't mean to be despicable. I can't tell how it came about, but I found that I cared for her, only I told myself it was a fancy—it would pass. I asked you to marry me—I meant to be fair. I thought so poorly of my power of loving that I believed I should be a decent husband."

"And you wanted ease and wealth—you did not care what Marian suffered. I put myself out of the question," she added.

"Yes, that was it—only I did care about her. When I was going away I met her in the wood—it all came out. I thought I intended to let you know—I do think I did. Then came that dreadful fall. I heard her voice; I knew I was going straight down to hell, because I had flung away the last chance of righting my soul."

Helen Devereux could not listen to his words

without a thrill of womanly sympathy springing up under her wrath.

"The chance was still given," she said.

"I went straight down to hell just the same," he answered. "Look at me, groveling there now while I confess my shame to you. Ah, Miss Devereux, you might have been merciful; you might have kept her from me without telling the whole story out."

"If I had, what would you do now?" she asked, still studying him.

"I don't know. I came here partly to tell you the truth—to hear your sentence. I am a worthless dog, but it does seem as if all this must have changed me. I really think with her I might have done something with my life—worked. But it is of no use now; I have no inducement—"

He broke off and rose, walking a few steps up and down, then came back, and stood near her. All the while her eyes had never left his face.

"You will laugh," he said, "but I have actually been thinking that if I had her I would take what little I could find out of the wreck of my property, go to Australia, turn farmer—any thing. In time I might pay my debts, and make a decent home. I'm more fool than knave, you see."

He knew nothing of the change in his fortune, that was evident. She believed in him now—believed he was capable of amendment, believed there was force enough in his character for repentance to work a radical cure of his faults.

She sat down on the moss-covered log, and motioned him to seat himself beside her.

"You are not fit to stand," she said; "you had no business to stir out."

"I may as well go away now. Good-bye, Miss Devereux."

"Have the goodness to sit down, as I bid you," she ordered. "You have no right to go; you have not heard my sentence."

He obeyed in silence.

"Talbot Castlemaine," she said, "you and I did a wicked thing—I as well as you, though I meant to be honest. Seeing how I failed might have made me a little more lenient in my judgment of you."

"You did nothing wrong; you were frank and truthful."

"To a certain extent. But that's not to the purpose. You went off and got your neck broken, instead of coming back to the house and saying you had made a mistake—"

"I was so cowardly!"

"There I can do the vituperative part. You behaved abominably. No wonder, after the lives you and I have lived! We have grown so warped that we don't know right from wrong. If you had been killed, and I could see your soul suffer as it does, I should say it was enough—I should believe you would be helped toward the

light. You are here yet, and I still say it is enough! You can find a better light than that you and I have hitherto walked by."

"It is too late," he answered, sadly. "Marian could never regard my evil doing in this way."

"Dear me, that's polite! Who told you she was so much better than I, if you please?" Helen cried, seeking to conceal her emotion under a show of playfulness.

"She is better than any body, except some saint such as one reads about in old legends. Do you know, as I fell, I was only conscious of thinking how, for all eternity, I must stare up through the darkness and see her face in the sunlight, and know that I lost her and heaven by my falsehood!"

"Let me remind you again that you did not go to the very unpleasant place you talk so much about."

"No, I found it here."

"And you would really have courage, if Marian could forgive, to take up a new life—to work even—enter a profession?"

"Indeed I would; but it is no good thinking of that. From the moment I could think—I could feel certain that the truth must have come out—"

"Don't I say I have been hating you devoutly!" she interrupted.

"And Marian?"

"Oh, Marian! I forgot to tell you. She knows nothing about the matter. Come, we are neither of us so black as the other believed. Don't look at me like that; I shall cry in a minute."

She was so touched and alarmed by the varied emotions in his countenance, and the pallor which increased upon it, that she gave way to a burst of hysterical weeping, which helped to restore them both to composure.

"I must go to the house now," she said.

"Marian will have wakened. Perhaps to-morrow you can see her."

"She is really better—you are sure?"

"To-morrow she is to sit up a while. Now I can't talk any more. Go back to the hotel, and just ask for your letters, if you please. What a goose you are!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You will, if you go home and read them. You are not fit to walk back by yourself."

"Old Roper is somewhere about; he came with me."

Miss Devereux called with all her might, and when Jacob appeared, she desired him to take Mr. Castlemaine to the inn without delay.

"He'd not ha' come out if he'd heerd to me, ma'am," replied Jacob, rather gruffly. The length of the interview had convinced him that Patty was right, and it upset Jacob's temper a little to have lost this opportunity of glorying over her.

Castlemaine tried to utter a few whispered words of gratitude—to frame a message for Marian. This last effort would have proved somewhat awkward to another man under the circumstances; but it was quite like Castlemaine to find no difficulty, and Miss Devereux was too much in earnest to notice this little evidence of utter selfishness. She hurried back to the house as light-hearted as if she had stepped suddenly into another world, unable to be thankful enough that she had kept silence to Marian.

Castlemaine walked slowly homeward, leaning on Jacob's arm. After his remorse and subsequent elation, there had come a certain despondency—a feeling as if a cold wind had suddenly blown over his good resolves. He had righted matters; he could have Marian's love. He longed for her, burned to hold her to his heart, to warm her innocent mouth with such passionate kisses as she had never dreamed of; but—

The exigencies of his position came back—a cattle farm out in the heart of Australia did not look a smiling future. Ah, well! it was no use to think now. Perhaps he could arrange his debts; perhaps, through family influence, secure a diplomatic appointment somewhere; they should see. He forgot these cares in the picture he drew of Marian's face, and then they were at the inn.

Seeing Mrs. Roper reminded him of Miss Devereux's words.

"Will you give me my letters, please?" he said.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for not thinking of them this morning. The doctor had said you wasn't to have them till you was better," observed Mrs. Roper, as she produced the package, afraid to refuse his command.

She thought Jacob seemed enjoying her slight discomfort, and she marched sternly up to him as he stood peering in at the door-way.

"I know where my sherry wine went to," whispered she. "It's usually the cat, according to you, that takes things; but the cat don't smell of sherry, and you do."

Jacob retreated, and Mrs. Roper immured herself in the kitchen, to prepare dinner for her guest.

Castlemaine walked on into the parlor, still so busy with his reflections he had not noticed that one of the missives he held was a telegram. Even when he did perceive it, he tore open the envelope carelessly, thinking only that it was a message from some tiresome people who had been teasing him to come to their place in the North.

He read, and sat for many moments positively confused and stunned. Then he opened the lawyer's letter. By the time he had mastered its contents he comprehended the change which had come into his life. The impossible was realized. Still a third letter awaited him, almost as unex-

pected as the news that the baronetcy had fallen to his share. The relative whom he had gone on the Continent to visit was in London, and desired to see him. The old man was very ill, but he wrote himself, requesting Talbot's presence without delay. Glancing again at the envelope, he saw it was directed to Sir Talbot Castlemaine, and understood that in the eyes of his mother's cousin he was a very different personage from the ruined scape-grace who had vainly pleaded for aid a few weeks previous.

He must go up to town in any case. He would go in the morning. He quite forgot his aches and pains and his bruised arm. Then he recollected Marian; he could not be too glad of what had happened where she was concerned. In his present position a man ought to marry; it was time to have done with follies. A whole life was a long time to be tied to one woman, but Marian was so sweet and yielding that the chains would sit lightly. Besides, she was a new experience; he should positively find a fresh sensation in teaching her what love really meant.

He went to the cottage in the dusk of the evening, and found Miss Devereux walking to and fro on the veranda. She blamed his imprudence, but was cordial as of old, and greeted him merrily by his new title.

Marian had insisted upon sitting up, and she was so well that Miss Devereux had given way. So after taking Castlemaine in to receive the old lady's congratulations, and be tearfully granted the guardianship of her treasure, Miss Devereux went away to prepare her friend.

Presently she returned, and conducted Castlemaine upstairs, opened the door softly, and said,

"Just twenty minutes, good people; the wicked fairy is not to be coaxed out of a second more."

Castlemaine pushed by her into the room, and in another instant Marian lay pillowed in his arms, wondering that she did not die from sheer excess of happiness.

Would the time ever come when she must marvel bitterly why Heaven could not have ordered it so? More than one weary soul has asked that question, looking back through a horrible night to a bliss as unreasoning as hers. Poor Marian!

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE DREAM ENDED.

THE weeks had got by until winter was fairly established in republican Paris, and a colder, drearier season than that month of December, 1871, could not well have been found short of St. Petersburg. More snow fell during the first days than usually suffices the capital for a whole winter; and though there was a little set of people, mostly foreigners, who brought out their

sledges and tried to revive something of the gaiety of the old days, it was a poor attempt, disheartening indeed to any body who remembered the gorgeous later years of the empire.

But there was no trace of sadness or gloom in the pretty salons where Fanny St. Simon held sway; decidedly a glorious summer of content reigned at this period in her breast, and was enjoyed by her uncle likewise. Not that all their hopes were realities yet, but enough so that to their visionary minds the rest seemed equally sure of fruition.

The Nevada silver mines were actually in operation; the first yields had proved enormous, and the stock sold like wild-fire in Paris, London, and New York.

Though he still preserved an appearance of great circumspection, Fanny felt sure that St. Simon was already losing his head a little; but she was too dizzy with her own plans to remonstrate, even if remonstrance would have been of any avail.

They had left the apartments in the Avenue Friedland, and were established in a private hotel; a luxurious nest that had belonged to some famous Bonapartist, for whom Paris was not likely to prove a quiet abiding-place at present. Perhaps this new train of expense by itself might not have been dangerous. St. Simon said it was vitally important they should show the world that the harvest had actually begun; but there were other outlays.

Fanny always managed to know every thing, and she knew that in a rather less exclusive *quartier* there was another hotel, wherein dwelt Madame M—, enshrined there lately; and Fanny, imitating St. Simon's agreeable habits, had taken bird's-eye peeps of certain bills and letters which made the matter plain. But this and other weaknesses, such as the taste for gambling (too long a master-passion to be kept in abeyance), were secrets from the circle in which they lived. St. Simon was sane enough to keep up his new rôle of respectability, and still appeared occasionally by his niece's side in the Rue Bayard chapel, where gorgeously attired crowds gossiped pleasantly between the solemn responses in which they expressed such deep regret for being "miserable sinners."

Gregory Alleyne's name had accomplished all St. Simon desired—brought to book the half-dozen capitalists who knew Alleyne personally, and were needed to set the ball rolling. Of course, any active participation in the business matters on that gentleman's part must be deferred until his return to America; but the list of directors in New York was a guarantee that every thing would be openly and honorably managed.

The two men were on the most friendly terms, and Alleyne was a frequent visitor at the house. When he crossed the ocean, he meant to remain

only a short time in Paris, yet winter had come, and he still lingered. He began to understand why; and as he liked to treat himself with the honesty which was his rule where others were concerned, he studied his own motives closely.

Should he ask Fanny St. Simon to become his wife? Love—as he had once interpreted the name—was out of the question, but life looked cold and solitary; he yearned for companionship and affection, proud and self-contained as he appeared. This woman had been ill regulated, ill brought up, but she possessed great capabilities, and was weary of the empty, frivolous existence she led. He would have hesitated to offer the battered remnants of his heart to a girl just beginning youth; but this woman, he was certain had passed through troubled waters, and perhaps could appreciate and be ready to accept the esteem and calm affection he had to offer.

Skillfully enough Fanny St. Simon played her part, growing in earnest about it too; for though as the weeks went on the hope in her soul waxed brighter, there was a satisfaction in trying to win this man. She would like, before claiming her happiness, to show him to Miss Devereux, oblivious of the old dream and the old pain.

It was hard to wait for the attainment of her other aims, but the end was near now. A little while, and she could summon Castlemaine; his accession to dignity made her task easier. The fortune which came with his title was not a large one, but the *dot* she could add to it would enable him to listen to his heart—for he loved her, she never doubted that; worldly, capricious, *blasé* as he was, he loved her.

Indeed, buoyed up by her hope, this season was one of the pleasantest in Fanny's recollection, always excepting the brief weeks which seemed so completely apart from her real existence that she could not count them as an actual part of her ordinary life. When she looked back on those days spent with Castlemaine in Italy, it always seemed to her that she had for a time been lifted out of this dull sphere into a new world, dazzled for a while by the glorious sunshine, then flung ruthlessly back upon the common earth.

Life was fuller of interest than it had been for years. Eager as she was, she could wait almost patiently for the fulfillment of her hope. Never during an instant, by night or day, did that aim and dream lose possession of her mind; but instead of rendering the present suspense irksome, the constant companionship of her contemplated bliss helped her to enjoy the new luxury and repose. The veriest trifles attracted her; her geniality and merry spirits increased always. It was amusing to watch this serious Gregory Alleyne in his earnest study of what he believed her character; how Fanny laughed at the word as she told herself that mystery was not one, but legion.

It interested her to observe Roland Spencer, to take the boy's heart in her hand, and play with it as carelessly as in her childish days she used to tear the petals of her roses to discover where the perfume was hidden. Still, to do her justice, she did not mean in this instance to be cruel. She persisted in her resolution of doing no harm, and was fonder of him, in a superior, pitying fashion, than she had ever been of any human creature. His youth and enthusiasm were delightful to her. She loved to hear his aspirations and his visions; it was like reading a wonderfully original romance, or conning the measures of a poem which bore the stamp of absolute genius. Why, even Besson's meek adoration touched her in these days, and she was very good to the old man. His idolatry was so patient and profound that she liked to probe its depths, and wonder over it in a kindly way as over some *lusus nature* not hideous in spite of its grotesqueness.

Poor Besson, whose face even in his youthful days probably resembled a comic mask more than any thing else, and whose frame was apparently composed of parts belonging to several men thrown together at random—she was very kind to him. Some lowly worshiper of Diana of Ephesus in her popular days would as soon have thought of aspiring to the goddess's love, as Besson to gain more than compassionate sweetness from Fanny; yet many a woman famous for her triumphs has gone through life without ever winning a title of such entire unselfish devotion as he lavished upon her.

She intended to turn his plans for her to good account, but she would have been just as kind had she seen no probability of his ever having a son to give her; it was one of the peculiarities of her complex character. Since he had money, of course she would take it. The chance must have come in his old age, in order that he might be of use to her; she believed this as firmly as Besson did himself.

He possessed more of her confidence than any body else; it was a relief to unburden her mind, even if vaguely done. But the day came when Besson betrayed an intimate knowledge of her projects and feelings which astonished her, though she was not troubled. They had been talking of the mine and its success, and he spoke again of his happiness in the thought of having a fortune to leave her.

"A fortune for you to live and enjoy, I hope," she said.

"Yes; I do not want to die quite yet," he answered. "But I must not keep you from possessing what is yours."

"Then if some time I was to say, 'My good Besson, you are in the way; you must take a dose of poison, and let me have my money; you would do it, I suppose,'" said she, laughing.

"Yes, I would," he replied, simply.

"Why, I think you must be in love with me," she said.

"I have loved you ever since you were a little girl; but you always knew that."

"This dear old Besson!" returned Fanny. "Why, most men would have tried to buy me with the money, instead of being willing to go out of the world to let me enjoy it."

"You can't think I would commit such a sin," he said, in a pained voice. "I never thought of that—I know it could not be! I am content to love you; it is happiness enough for an old crooked monster like me."

"You look on me as your child—"

"Yes, that too; but more—I love you in all ways. Sometimes I think in the next world I shall be young and straight and handsome. Do you know, thinking that has made me believe there is something hereafter."

"Then I have done a little good in bringing you out of your heathenish French materialism," said Fanny. "But, after all, you know there are two sides to the next world doctrine—there's a very unpleasant place talked about, as well as a good one."

"I'd go there if it could insure you the paradise," Besson said, as quietly as if he were speaking of a journey to Italy. "I'm sure you would come now and then and smile at me over the great gulf; that would be bliss enough for me."

"But you must have loved somebody else, Besson. You were young once—you had a wife."

"I never was young," sighed Besson; "that is another reason why I try to believe in eternity; perhaps I shall find my youth there. I was born old, and nobody wanted me to come into the world."

"But you had money?"

"Yes; and my parents hated me because it was mine instead of belonging to their handsome children; but they all died—there was only I who had to live."

"And your wife—didn't you love your wife, Besson?"

He shook his head.

"I married her because she was very unhappy, and it was the only way to protect her."

"But she was fond of you and grateful?"

"She spent my money and hated me! When I would not let her quite ruin me, on account of the boy, she ran away," said Besson. "Then the boy grew up, and he treated me worse than she did, and spent every thing—except those hands, which he could not get rid of, because nobody would buy them. You are the only person who has ever been good to me."

He told his little story quietly, with no French gestures or excitement; and his face looked more like a caricature than ever, seamed into wrinkles, with two tears rolling slowly down his cheeks.

"I haven't been happy either, Besson," Fanny said, impulsive enough to be touched by the piteous simplicity of his narrative, though she laughed at the oddity of his countenance while her eyes were moist.

"I know that," he said; "I know every thing about you. It was that handsome Englishman—you hope to marry him yet. He is a bad man, I am afraid; but I can't hate him, because he is your choice."

"Why, Besson! you're a sorcerer!" she cried, in alarm.

"Don't be troubled because I know. I can't tell how it is, but I do," said Besson. "I'm afraid you will not be happy, but you must have your way. He is like a young god, the Englishman. Well, it seems sure we shall have the money; you can tell him he is to add my share to yours."

He wiped the tears from his eyes, and blew his nose sonorously.

"What am I to do to thank you, Besson?" she asked.

"Only to be happy, and let the old man see it."

"I'll tell you, dear; you shall live with me. You like Italy—we'll go there; we'll have a palace at Florence, and a villa at Sorrento, and we'll all live a hundred thousand years. Do you like that?"

"You mean it—you will be sure to let me go?"

"Yes;" and she put her hand in his for an instant. He did not offer to touch it, but afterward he kissed the spot on his wrinkled palm where her fingers had lain.

"I'm seventy-two," he muttered, "seventy-two! It will be a long while to wait, if the priests' stories are true. May be they'll let me sleep quietly till she comes."

"You don't find it easy to give up your pagan notions of turning to dust and ashes, and that being the end," said Fanny.

"Not always; I began so late. Do you ever read that book they call the Bible, Fanny?"

"Not often, I'm afraid," she answered; "but the Tortoise has one. They used to make me say my prayers, though, when I was a little girl in the convent, but I didn't like it."

"Well," said Besson, "I have been reading your English Bible. If any part of it is true, all that about the Christ must be, and he will always feel sorry for us—always."

"Do come back to this world," said Fanny, actually growing nervous. "I hate to think about death."

"Because you are young," he sighed; "but sometime you will be seventy-two, as well as me, Fanny."

"Don't suggest such unpleasant possibilities. I'd rather talk of Italy."

From this time Fanny found a new rest in

poor old Besson's society, and she was as frank and open with him as her nature would permit. When waiting grew difficult, and the days seemed to stand still, she could send for him and plan for the future, while his positive assurances that every thing was going well restored her courage.

So the weeks had got by to December, as I said, and Fanny felt that her destiny was almost in her own hands. An adventurous Englishwoman, driven frantic by the excitement in regard to the Nevada Company, could not rest till she had invested a portion of her funds therein. Through Besson's aid, Fanny was able to do a little business on her own account without St. Simon's knowledge. There were no shares to be had, Besson informed the rash dame. He was truthful enough in the ordinary walks of life, but he had no scruple in uttering a falsehood when Fanny bade him; indeed, if she had ordered him to commit a murder he would have attempted it with just as little hesitation.

Fanny's invention was at no loss for artifices, and Besson had his story prepared to recite. He could find ten thousand pounds of stock for the bold lady, but she must keep the secret for the present. The shares belonged to Mr. St. Simon's niece. The young lady had debts which she dared not allow to come to her uncle's knowledge, and under that pressure she was willing to dispose of a sufficient amount to cover her embarrassments—at a premium; and very lucky the Englishwoman thought herself.

Fanny had actually ten thousand pounds in her possession—no wonder that she felt the future was close at hand. If this excitement in regard to the shares continued, she would be able, through Besson's help, to realize a large sum before St. Simon had the slightest inkling of her plans.

She went nearly mad with joy in her room that night as the check lay on the table before her. She could wait no longer; she must write to Castlemaine. He was sanguine enough to be attracted by the prospect, now that this first installment was actually in her hands.

When morning came, she decided to wait a while before sending her letter. She knew that Castlemaine had been for some time at his country-seat, afterward in London, living in complete retirement. As he was no longer near Miss Devereux, no immediate danger need be feared. Ah, perhaps he was arranging his debts—thinking of her as he did so—endeavoring to see if there would be fortune enough remaining to come and claim her—for he loved her—he did love her! No other woman had ever taken, or ever could take, her place. Well as she knew his capriciousness, his infirmity of purpose, she believed this.

She scarcely recognized her own face as she saw it in the glass this morning, it was so rejuvenated and transfigured by the entrancing

visions of her sleepless night. St. Simon saw her, and was positively dumfounded.

"What on earth have you been doing to yourself?" he asked. "You're no better dressed than usual, but you are positively beautiful! That color is not from violets, either. Why, Fan, you are splendid!"

"I always told you I should come out wonderfully under favorable circumstances," returned she, laughing so gayly that he marveled still more at the change in her, and, for once in his life, was too much puzzled to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion.

"Are you planning some outrageous folly?" he asked, suddenly.

"My dear St. Simon, I am just resting in perfect content; I do not even look forward a day. Perhaps you will not believe me, but I should think you would have the same feeling yourself. This is our gala season, and I mean to enjoy it to the utmost, no matter what comes after."

"That's right; every thing is secure enough, too. I did not see Alleyne yesterday."

"He was here, though. He took T. and myself out in his sledge. No chance to-day—worse luck—for it rained in the night."

"And you are making no mistakes? You have not let any caprice come between you and common sense?"

"Look at me," she said, laughing again.

"My dear St. Simon, we are very elegant and proper in these days, but I can only express my sentiments by a bit of Colonel Judd's Western eloquence, 'Take care of your own end of the schooner.'"

He laughed too, and glanced at his watch.

"I must be off," he said. "What are you going to do?"

"Eat my breakfast. Then I must take the carriage and T., and drive to the Rue de la Paix. Don't forget you have several men at dinner, and it is our reception night. I have made a point of inviting every body, and I mean to dance."

A little later Roland Spencer caught sight of her as the clarence rolled down the Champs Élysées. She saw him too, and, being in a frame of mind to make every body happy, stopped the carriage, and begged his company.

"We are only going to shops, to be sure," she said; "but T. is sleepy, and I want to talk or be talked to."

Her appearance struck Roland even more forcibly than it had done St. Simon; his head fairly turned under the light in her eyes and the magic of her smiles. He spent a morning in the seventh heaven of delight, and went to his lodgings to dream of her until the night should again bring him the bliss of her presence.

The whole day was just as bewildering and unreal to Fanny. She could not be kind enough to every body about her; she would have lavish-

ed the choicest gifts of fortune on the whole world, if such had been within her reach. After dressing for dinner she went into the Tortoise's room, and found that animal so unusually miserable under the hands of her maid, that she put the Frenchwoman aside and set to work herself.

"Oh dear!" said the suffering creature, with a sigh of relief, when the robing operation was nearly finished, "you've made me look like somebody else. I don't feel a single pin, and I really believe my hair will stay up all the evening."

"Not if you shake your head like that," said Fanny. "Just let me pin your *coiffure* with these two diamond stars;—why, you are gorgeous, my good old T.!"

"I keep these new diamonds hid in my shoe every night," whispered the Tortoise. "St. Simon won't find them there. I dreamed he came hunting for them, and pinched me dreadfully because I wouldn't tell where they were."

"He does not want them. I have told you over and over, T., that we have really lots of money this time."

"Yes; but we've thought that so often. Don't you tell about my shoe—I keep it under my pillow."

"I'll not tell, T. There, you are dressed. Now come into the *salon*, and keep quiet—so that you will not fall to bits."

"Yes, dear— Oh, where's my pocket-handkerchief? Just turn your head a minute, Fanny—I want to sneeze."

She looked wonderfully well in her silvery satin and delicate lace, and absolutely got from one room to the other without losing any portion of her draperies. St. Simon considerably paid little attention to her; she was never so much disturbed by any thing as his flatteries.

"I always feel as if he meant me a mischief," she confided to Fanny.

Sitting near the girl at table, Alleyne marveled, as others had done during the day, at her new beauty and brilliant spirits. Her soft, gold-colored draperies were singularly becoming, and her face was so softened and beautified that sundry hard lines and expressions which had sometimes displeased his taste were not visible now. She looked like one's ideal of some gorgeous Eastern queen—full of warm, sensuous life, though that way of putting it would have been displeasing to Alleyne's fastidiousness, and does not give the idea I wish to convey, only, as I can invent no other simile, this must stand.

While she talked and laughed, Fanny was thinking of him too. He was a very different man from what she had fancied. She was in a mood to like him—to sympathize with his lost hopes—even to forgive her old enemy. Why should he not have his happiness? Fanny was willing that even Helen Devereux should be al-

lowed to share in the general amnesty she felt inclined to pronounce. She would see. In commencing her new life she should be glad to have no cloud from the old, misspent existence overshadow it. Why should she not give those two their happiness?

This thought was in her mind as she rose from the table. The idea made her kinder and gentler to Alleyne; and it was not astonishing that, though free from puerile masculine vanity, he should believe, if he decided to ask Fanny St. Simon to be his wife, she could come to him at least content, and ready to help render their united future something better than the stormy night of the past.

The first arrivals interrupted their conversation. As Fanny chanced to be standing near the door, a servant whispered to her that Monsieur Besson desired to speak with her at once. The old man never appeared at any of their festivities; Fanny wondered what could induce him to select so inopportune a moment. No premonition of evil struck her as she went out. It was more good news; happiness, like trouble, never came singly. Some other chance had opened—some new aspirant eager to hold the magic stocks had arisen, and Besson, in his kindness, wanted her to receive the tidings without delay.

He was waiting for her in a little morning room she had appropriated to herself in the *rez-de-chaussée*. She went down by a back staircase to avoid meeting any guests who might chance to arrive. She was humming an air as she entered the room—a Venetian *barcarolle* Castelmaine used to sing away off in those golden Italian days; a song that had of late often sprung involuntarily to her lips after a dreary season, during which a single echo of it had been enough to drive her almost mad.

She caught sight of herself in a mirror as she entered the room. Long afterward she was haunted by that passing vision, radiant with a positive beauty which she had never before possessed, the like of which never came again, because in this moment Fanny St. Simon saw her face transfigured by happiness for the last time.

The side-lights of the mirror were the only ones burning; the rest of the apartment was so shadowy she could not distinguish Besson as she turned from that rapid survey of her own dazzling image.

"*Eh bien, où est il, ce cher vilain?*" she called, gayly.

Besson's voice answered her from the farthest and darkest end of the room, speaking as slowly and painfully as if the accents of his native language were difficult to frame. "I am here! come this way."

"Are you ill? What is the matter, my poor Besson?" she asked, hurrying toward him, yet not troubled, in spite of her sympathizing question.

He stretched out his hand and laid it on hers—the quivering fingers were like ice as they touched her throbbing palm.

"It is not about me," he said, in the same changed, difficult voice; "it is—it is—oh, my poor girl—oh, Fanny!"

He leaned his head on her hand and burst into low sobs—those terrible sobs of old age, which bring no tears to relieve them.

Still no warning struck Fanny St. Simon. She was surprised—sorry for him; but the tones of that beloved melody were ringing so loudly in her ears she scarcely caught his words.

"Tell me what it is, Besson," she said. "I can't stop long; we have guests. Dear old soul, don't sob like that."

"I'd sooner cut my heart out," he groaned, "but I must tell you! I didn't know there were people here till I had sent for you, or I would have waited."

Still she was not much disturbed.

"There is nothing wrong. The company is—"

"It is not that. Oh, Fanny, try to be brave! It is too late—the young Englishman is married."

There was a sound as of a person breathing heavily after great exertion—a quick movement—a gasping cry.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe it!"

"It is in an evening paper that has just come."

She heard the rustle of the sheet as he took it from the pocket of his coat; she snatched it out of his hand. He heard her voice again in an awful whisper,

"Helen Devereux—Helen Devereux!"

"It is not the name," Besson said.

She did not hear him. She had fallen forward upon the sofa where he sat—fainting away for the first time in her life.

Castelmaine had found no great difficulty in gaining Mrs. Payne's consent to a speedy marriage. Miss Devereux had aided him with all her eloquence, convinced that it was wisest. Lady Laura's rich cousin was dead, and had bequeathed his fortune to Talbot. He was wealthy enough now to pay his debts and have a large fortune left. There was a new and pleasant excitement in setting himself straight with the world. November passed—nearly half of December. He was back and forth at the cottage, growing more eager each day; as wild to claim his new toy as a child.

"Why should we wait?" he said to Miss Devereux. "I am a weak wretch; I want all the help I can have to persevere in this new path. To wait a year for Marian—why, it is an eternity! I can't stay here. Who knows what follies I may get into, just from habit?"

Miss Devereux believed she was acting for the

best. She had perfect faith in his resolves; so had he, for that matter. Marian's health was still delicate; the physician had recommended change, and Mrs. Payne detested traveling. Helen joined in Castlemaine's plea that he should be allowed to have his bride and take her away to Italy.

It was natural enough that Mrs. Payne, dazzled by the prospect of Marian's future, should put from her mind how brief the time was that the girl had known this man—should regard the worldly side of the argument, well as she loved her grandchild. As for Marian, she only wanted to do whatever Castlemaine wished. She only lived in his presence; whatever he decided must be the most desirable thing in the world.

The preparations for a quiet wedding went rapidly on; Castlemaine had no leisure to grow weary of his new part. This fresh pleasure was as gratifying for the time as a draught of pure water to the lips of a man fevered with wine.

"Helen Devereux! Helen Devereux!"

The name Fanny had uttered, as she sunk down in that sudden insensibility, was the first word on her lips when she recovered consciousness. The fainting fit passed very quickly. Before Besson, in his terror, could do more than dance about like a maniac, upset a chair, deluge himself with a *carafé* of water he was carrying, she came to her senses unaided. She sat up, holding one hand pressed close against her head, the other over her heart.

"Give me that paper," she said.

Besson put the journal in her hands. She made one or two ineffectual efforts, then rose, and crossed the room with a steady step. She sat down near the lights, and read the long, fulsome paragraph which described the nuptials of Sir Talbot Castlemaine with the daughter of the late Mordaunt Payne. The marriage had been strictly private; but though the young baronet had so lately come into his title, under such painful circumstances, the lack of delay violated no rule of decorum. An accident he met with had been the cause of a severe illness to the lady—a warmer climate was ordered by the medical authorities—it was only natural and fitting that she should go under her husband's care.

Fanny St. Simon read the whole—slowly. She was not conscious of any poignant suffering. She felt dead and cold, that was all; as if some sudden shock had killed her before she found time really to comprehend what it was, and her ghost had come back to take account of the matter.

Besson watched in an agony of dread and misery, uttering broken exclamations, which she did not even hear. As Fanny folded the paper, another paragraph met her eye. Miss Devereux was to spend the Christmas holidays at Barton Castle, the seat of the Duke of Dunallen; from there coming to Paris.

Fanny rose, and gazed in the glass; she looked like the phantom she had almost thought herself during those terrible minutes.

"Good-night, dear Besson," she said. "Come and see me to-morrow, and—and—we have done with this."

He stooped, trembling in every limb, looking older and feebler than ever, and pressed his lips upon her robe; in his great humility he could not even venture to kiss her hand.

"Dear old Besson," Fanny said, softly, and passed out of the room.

She made her way to the Tortoise's apartments, found some *rouge*, rubbed it carefully on her cheeks, arranged her dress, and walked toward the *salons*.

Her absence had not been lengthy enough to attract notice. As she passed, St. Simon spoke some jesting words; she answered, and laughed gayly. Mrs. Pattaker was coming in. Fanny had to stop and receive her salutations as the grand lady turned from St. Simon, who had hurried forward to meet her.

"You are positively radiant to-night, *ma belle*!" cried the Signer's descendant, greeting Fanny with unusual warmth, and demonstrations of positive affection.

Fanny, more than ever on her guard, felt certain that the woman meant mischief.

"I must have caught a little brightness from you," she replied. "I was thinking, as you came in, that I had never seen you more dazzling."

"Flatterer!" sighed Mrs. Pattaker, patting Fanny's shoulder. She liked the compliment, but that did not give her any inclination to spare the young lady the blow she had in store. It was not often she found an opportunity to give Fanny a telling thrust under her almost impenetrable armor, but this time she was sure of a complete victory. "I have a bit of news for you by-and-by, when you have time to listen," she added, pleasantly.

Then Fanny knew that Mrs. Pattaker had seen the evening paper, and hoped to take her by surprise. St. Simon, Miss Langois, and several other people were close about, all of them aware of her old intimacy with Talbot.

"More news!" cried Fanny. "But I have just been stunned by such wonderful tidings, that any other will fall dull and flat. Only fancy, dear Mrs. Pattaker! Mr. Castlemaine has fallen into a baronetcy—into matrimony, too."

Mrs. Pattaker looked crest-fallen enough at having the wind thus taken out of her sails. There were numerous exclamations from the surrounding group, Miss Langois' voice pre-eminent, of course.

St. Simon stood positively stupefied; watch Fanny as he might, even his eyes could discern no emotion under that smiling front.

"She must be hit hard," he thought; "but

how she bears it! Upon my word, she is a wonderful creature."

Fanny saw Gregory Alleyne approach within hearing distance; her demons rose more fiercely in her breast; he should have his stab—she would spare nobody this night. The blow would serve a double purpose, too; quicken that slow decision where she was concerned. The thoughts came like lightning; she was addressing Mrs. Pattaker again.

"And Miss Devereux is coming to Paris next month—fresh cause for congratulation to us all, is it not?"

Her words had told; the quick glance she shot unperceived at Alleyne assured her of this. She moved on to greet some new arrivals, but while she smiled and spoke fitting compliments, her mind was busy with the reflections Alleyne's face had roused. Before the new year came, she would have an opportunity to accept this man's hand. The very fact that the utterance of Helen Devereux's name had still power to move him, would be to his mind an additional reason why he should irrevocably decide his fate before her arrival. At least Fanny would have her revenge; she had lost every thing else—she would have that.

It was a brilliant evening. Fanny's art had secured the scions of a princely house, which might at any time become regal again if France wearied of her republican enthusiasm. The whole affair was a complete triumph, and the most admired woman the young hostess, who fulfilled her part with such ease and grace.

A few hours later she stood in her own room, tearing the letter she had written on the previous night, crushing the fragments under her feet as she felt her fingers actually burn at the touch of those pages on which she had poured her whole heart unreservedly forth.

"It is war to the knife now against the whole world," thought Fanny St. Simon. "Fate and Helen Devereux would not let me be a good woman—and I wanted to be—I did want to be! Well, I don't know about fate's chances, but I do know the other will get the worst of it before the battle ends."

Once again there floated across her ear the notes of the old Venetian melody, clear and distinct, as if Castlemaine's voice rang out the tender measures; and in all the universe that man was the one human being whom Fanny St. Simon would not have trampled ruthlessly under-foot to win her triumph against destiny.

CHAPTER XVI.

CIRCE.

FANNY ST. SIMON sat cowering over the fire in her morning-room—a refuge into which even St. Simon did not venture without considerable

ceremony, or a special invitation. The atmosphere of the luxurious nook was like that of an Italian spring day, yet Fanny had drawn her chair close to the hearth, shivering as if the cold wind that moaned without had sent its keenest blast through the apartment.

A week had elapsed since in this very room Fanny stood face to face with the ruin of her hopes—a ruin more complete than a similar suffering might have brought another woman. It was not only the anguish to her heart, the desolation of her love, which during these past weeks of anticipated success had grown a more absorbing passion than ever; she had lost every thing, and she realized it. The determination to rise out of the untruthfulness and errors of her old life—the last trace of softness and gentleness which might yet have redeemed her womanhood, were gone too. The black, corroding thought which started up in her mind, even in the first moments of agony, remained to make itself the abiding principle of action. The world was a battle-ground, every hand against her, and she must fight her way, sparing none who crossed her path.

It had been a rather gay week—that is, for this dull season in poor, changed Paris—and Fanny had missed no dinner or ball. These were days of constantly increasing triumph to the St. Simons, and in their quality of foreigners they were able to claim a wider scope for their successes than any French people could have done. The grand hotel where the most prominent of the Orleans princes had established himself was open to them; the scattered knots of dissipated elegants once noted at the imperial court were glad to welcome them; the American colony, with Mrs. Pattaker at its head, was devotedly fond of their society; and they had been bidden to several dinners by the little obstinate brown frock-coat, who held his sway at Versailles undismayed by the royal ghosts, to whom this fact of seeing the courtly city become the very stronghold of republicanism must have appeared the crowning desecration.

It was all dull and odious enough, and, turn which way she might, Fanny knew that life had nothing better to offer. She was so tired of society and its petty successes and failures, its sickly friendships and decorous aversions. She wished devoutly that St. Simon had never come back. She might have carried out her project of going on the stage or singing at a *café*. Any thing would be better than the future which stretched before her. She hated monotony; there was more excitement in the ups and downs of the past years. A hand-to-mouth sort of existence—one month surrounded by luxury, the next hiding from creditors—possessed a certain zest which appealed to the Bohemian instincts in Fanny's blood.

There could be nothing more of all this. She

was to have her old craving for wealth gratified; to become a power in society; make a rich marriage! As this thought presented itself more loathsome than the rest, the mysterious-voiced man at the head of the new domestic staff brought her Gregory Alleyne's card. It was like an answer to her last reflection—she felt perfectly certain what errand had brought him. Her first impulse was to fling the piece of pasteboard into the flames, and astonish the elegant servant by a torrent of abuse. Just then only one position would have suited Fanny—to be an Eastern pasha and bowstring the innocent disturber of her quiet, and every other living soul in the house, Gregory Alleyne included. The very exaggeration and absurdity of her ideas brought a smile to her lips; but the meek-faced domestic, who never seemed to see or hear unless personally addressed, observed afterward to the lady's-maid that he believed mademoiselle would be capable of stabbing a man with the same smile on her lips.

"Show Mr. Alleyne into the *salon*," she said.

She had half risen; her glance wandered about the apartment, rested on the spot where she had fallen like a dead woman under the shock of that final and fatal blow. She would receive Alleyne here. If she could not torment any one else for the moment, there would be a savage satisfaction in stinging herself. She would listen to his avowal in this room, which had grown to have a terrible fascination for her—haunted by the ghost of her murdered hopes.

"I am too cold to stir, Alphonse," she said; "you may bring monsieur here, if you please."

The man bowed and went out as cautiously as if he must suffer instant martyrdom should his boots chance to creak. Fanny turned her back entirely upon the door, and edged her chair closer to the fire, trying to bring a little color to her face and warmth to her chilled frame, but in vain.

She heard Alleyne's step, and called,

"Can you find your way? Don't expect me to move or speak—I froze to death several hours ago."

He walked slowly down the pleasant dimness of the room, thinking what a pretty picture she formed in the fire-light.

"It is very cold," he said. "How do you do, after the fatigues of last night?"

"Don't ask! They helped kill me as much as the cold. And to think there is no law to prevent Mrs. Pattaker giving *soirées*, and all the while a law which prevents one's putting her to some dreadful death—such an absurd prejudice!"

"What a very misanthropic mood I have found you in!" he said, taking a seat on the other side of the hearth.

"I am just in the humor to say all sorts of things that will shock you," she answered. "Admit that you do disapprove of me signally."

"I think we of this generation have all too much a habit of talking at random," he said.

"Please don't scold me," returned she, in her softest voice. "I'm a poor, frozen, dead creature, and can't defend myself."

"I had no thought of doing so—"

"But it might bring me to life by rousing a spirit of contradiction! Do you know, I think you are a great deal too good—I believe I'm a little afraid of you; I wonder it does not make me hate you."

"I trust you have not reached that point; I—"

"No, I have not, but I'm afraid of you! I never talk so wickedly or do such absurd things as before you; I think to irritate myself by seeing you look outraged and superior."

"But I am sure you never did see me look so."

"Then, it must have been conscience; only I didn't know I had one. Well, if you will not scold, at least talk and take me out of myself. I am horribly stupid, and shall not understand a word, so don't be either profound or witty."

"I am afraid neither effort is in my line," he replied.

He stopped speaking, and gazed into the fire, while she sat watching him with her eyes cast down. He looked nervous and disturbed in spite of his self-control, and she enjoyed it.

"Are you trying to read your fortune in the embers?" she asked. "Our old Antoinette is very wise in that way. She discovers the most wonderful things for me sometimes."

"I came here to-day to learn what it is to be," he said, gravely, glancing toward her again.

She laughed, affecting to regard the words as a jest.

"But I have no skill in reading the embers," said she. "You must send for Antoinette."

"I must trust to you," he replied; "no one but you can decide the question I came to ask."

She gave a start; a sudden, shy, half-frightened look, checking her laughter quickly. She did it well, too.

"Perhaps you will think me bold, impertinent," he went on in the same rather measured voice; "perhaps I ought to have waited longer—but I have come here to ask you to be my wife."

She lifted her white hands with an appealing gesture, then let them fall in her lap, turning her face partially away.

"At least you are not angry?"

Another troubled gesture of the white hands answered him.

"Perhaps I have been abrupt—rude; but listen to me—try to believe that I mean to tell you the exact truth."

She turned toward him again; looked full in his face, and there was the faintest, most touching quiver in her voice as she said, "Why did

you come here on such an errand, Mr. Alleyne? You don't love me a bit."

"If that were true, I should not have spoken," he replied. "Let me tell you; then you shall decide."

"Decide what?" she asked.

"Your future and mine."

"A little while ago I was telling myself that I had none," she murmured, as if thinking aloud.

"I did not suppose any woman could ever be to me what you have grown during these weeks," he continued.

"You are not just yourself to-day," returned she, dryly. "You have never approved of me, Mr. Alleyne. I have been wretchedly brought up; or, rather, I have never been brought up—I have been pushed along like a bad weed. I have been accustomed to petty artifices for years. St. Simon is the best-hearted man in the world, and the most improvident and careless. I know all sorts of things and people that I oughtn't to know! I have a thousand ideas and habits which would shock you. I can smoke a cigarette and dance a bolero—"

She had spoken rapidly, half in a deprecating, half in a defiant tone; she broke off to laugh again.

"Why do you tell me these things?" he asked.

"Because I want to be honest, too; besides, it will spare you the trouble of saying any thing more. You can forget your little *lapsus lingue*, as Mrs. Pattaker would say."

"Do you want to stop me? Is it to save me pain, feeling that you can give no hope?"

She struck her hands together, crying,

"I'd give my life to be loved! See, I'd burn my ten fingers off in this fire—suffer torture—any thing—to be loved! I'm so lonely—my life is so empty! Oh! why do you come to torment me? It is cruel; it is like showing a mirage to a desert-benighted traveler, parched and dying with thirst."

He caught the cold, quivering fingers in his; a more passionate emotion than he had ever felt for her throbbed at his heart.

"I do love you," he said, his slow, grave voice warming into eagerness. "You charm and fascinate me. You have come into my life, and brightened it so that I can not cast you out, if I would."

She did not draw her hands away. Her head sank against the cushions of her chair, and he heard her whisper,

"I must be dreaming—I must be!"

"I was a very desolate, lonely man when I met you," he went on; "for a good while I had thought my heart utterly dead. I had loved once—loved as a very young man does, and believed that I must carry the suffering of my self-deception through all time to come. I know better now; I know that you can help to make my

life brighter. Will you try?—could you be willing to try?"

"And if you found you could not forget; if—"

"The past I spoke of is dead and buried," he answered; "there is no possibility of a resurrection. I am neither weak nor false. If some day you could marry me, you will have no half allegiance, no measured affection."

"It sounds very tempting," she said, with a beautiful smile. "Are you sure you are making no mistake? Don't rouse me out of my chill apathy, my dull patience, into a dream, from which I must wake to suffer. I can suffer so! Careless and reckless as I seem, I have such capabilities for pain."

The smile died in a look of terror; she hid her face in her hands. She did suffer. She was recalling words that Talbot Castlemaine had uttered; she was remembering the last awful blow; she was torturing herself in every way she could. She had a pleasure in so doing, as she had in bewildering this strong man by her fascinations.

"I know," he said; "I think I understand you better than you can suppose. It sounds vain and conceited, but indeed it is not that; only, from the first you interested me so strangely that I could not help studying you."

"But you believe me better than I am, and you will not let me undecieve you. If you had only met me long ago, when I was a mere girl, before this weary life had taken my freshness and youth away!"

"With that impulsive nature you will always be young," he said. "Why, you have your whole life before you; you are only just out of early girlhood now."

"I'm a hundred thousand years old," she answered; "but I'm a child all the same. Oh, you frighten me! I am so afraid you will be disappointed when it is too late! I want to tell you so many things, and I can't get my poor head straight."

"I have been too abrupt."

"No, it is so sweet—I didn't mean to say that! But it is so odd to think you could actually love me—and I have loved no one. Once or twice I have fancied I did, and wept and raved and suffered, to find my idols only clay. I can suffer so!"

"And now," he asked, "can you care for me?"

"I don't know," she answered, with another of her marvelous smiles. "Downright love would be such a serious business to me. I'm afraid of it. I like you so much—you are so strong and honest and decided, and I am such a weak, wavering wretch! And oh, if you deceived yourself—if the old dream were to come back!"

"Let me tell you about that season, and you will see how impossible it is."

"Don't tell me!" she pleaded. "Don't let me ever know who the woman was; tell me she is dead—any thing! I should hate her, if we were ever to stand face to face, and I recognized her!"

She loved him—already she actually loved him, this excitable, finely-organized creature! He would have been harder and colder than stone if this assurance which her disconnected words and irrepressible emotion brought home had not kindled his breast with a flame so eager that for the time he could forget the whole dreary past in the charm of her influence.

"Have no fear," he said, and she could hear his voice tremble. "A whole new world opens before me—a new life—a new heart; you will be queen there, Fanny. Mayn't I call you so? Such a pretty name—just made for you, my Fanny, my own!"

She leaned toward him as he took her hands again, then drew quickly back.

"I wish you would go away!" she cried, petulantly. "No, I don't mean that—I beg your pardon! I wish I could believe you; but I'm so afraid of you and myself! I should be jealous—exacting; ice one minute—hating you almost; ready to die the next to prove my repentance. There are no half feelings in my nature, and I am full of caprices, suspicions. Oh, you had better let me alone! Life did very well; it was stale and tiresome, but I knew how to manage it."

"You may trust me, Fanny, and I am not afraid."

She turned almost savagely upon him.

"You come to offer me a calm, quiet affection," cried she; "esteem, friendship, all that—it would not be enough! The man I marry must love me with his whole heart and soul. I'll have those or nothing."

"And I think you may be sure of it," he said, his face so changed and tremulous that it scarcely looked the same.

Truly, all this was very different from the picture he had drawn! Well, so much the better, perhaps. He would like to be eager, to feel his heart bound into new warmth from under the cold ashes where it had lain so long.

And he should love her—Fanny would have her vengeance complete! She would show him to Helen Devereux so helplessly enchained, that the proud woman should see that not even a memory of her former empire remained.

"Only a little while ago, Fanny," he said, "the feelings you ascribe to me might have been my real ones; but I have gone beyond them. You have promised me nothing yet; still already you have carried me into a new world."

"If we could stay there!" she murmured.

"Surely it depends on ourselves. Put your hand in mine, Fanny; come with me into the new path; don't be afraid."

"I am sorely tempted to say yes," smiled she; "and with my usual inconsistency, almost as much tempted to send you angrily away. I'll do neither—I won't give you any answer at all."

"You are right enough; it seems hard, but I must not complain."

"Give me a little time—let me think; I'm dizzy and confused," she pleaded.

"I am going to Lyons to-morrow morning," he said. "I have some business to attend to there for a friend. You shall have the three days of my absence to decide."

"Oh, I don't think I want you to go away!" cried she, laying her hand on his arm, and feeling it quiver under her touch. A wiser man than Solomon in his most penitential moments could not have resisted the witcheries of this woman.

"That is a little encouraging," he said, feeling somewhat as one does in a hot-house while inhaling the perfume of gorgeous Eastern plants as poisonous as they are beautiful.

"But I am glad too," she added. "I shall get my mind steady before you come back. Ah, monseigneur, I warn you that I shall weigh both you and myself in the balance! It is like a fairy dream, all the possibilities you suggest; but I'll have it looked at in the prosaic light of this world, which we must live in, after all."

"A few days ago I should have said that would be wise," he replied; "but I don't half like it now."

"But we are old people, worn, *désillusionnés*: we must not run any risks, as a boy and girl might."

"We will insist on our youth, and it shall prove eternal!" cried he, vaguely wondering the while if it could be actually Gregory Alleyne who spoke, and was in earnest too.

"And if during this journey you come back to reason, and—and if you think of her, oh, don't let us ever mention the past again!"

"I think this last hour has swept it out of existence," returned he. "I shall have only one thought in my mind—the return. Give me a little hope, Fanny. Tell me—"

"I shall tell you nothing," she interrupted. "Say good-bye now. I'll not trust you a moment longer. It is late; poor T. will think I am lost."

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"Shut myself in my room. And you?"

"I have a tiresome engagement—a man's dinner; but I must go, because I have to see some of the people before I leave."

"Of course you must. Now, good-bye."

She let her hands rest for an instant in his, let him press his lips on them; then, as he still lingered, ran laughingly away.

Alleyne departed, feeling a good deal as if he had taken a huge dose of hasheesh, and was conscious of being under its effects, even while the

visions it brought before his eyes seemed so strangely real.

And Fanny St. Simon, in the silence of her chamber, was kneeling before a picture of the glorious face which had long ago blinded her, weeping and moaning in an agony of despair. So much acting had left her nerves unstrung, and she was forced to allow herself an hour's insane outburst. But she was ready for dinner all the same, floating in as gay and unconcerned as a gorgeous butterfly. The famous dramatist was there, and Fanny and St. Simon were going with him to see a new play destined to fascinate republican Paris by its wickedness, even while the great city, with a newly awakened sense of virtue, railed against the improprieties of the stage under the imperial *régime*.

Fanny's talk was almost as witty and daring to-night as the play, which the dramatist had already seen at rehearsal, and he and St. Simon were in ecstasies with her.

"You must have been at some outrageous bit of mischief to-day," said the latter.

"Yes, I came near committing the crowning sin of my life," she replied; "it has put me in great spirits."

"Lor, Fanny!" cried the Tortoise, in English, with her mouth full of *vol-au-vent*.

"Have you found out a new one?" asked the dramatist. "It would be only charitable to share the secret; we are so tired of all the old affairs."

Then the two men began guessing what it could be, and, accustomed as the Tortoise was to all kinds of conversation, even her hair stood on end at their remarks and Fanny's replies. She gurgled and choked till St. Simon said,

"Have you any last words to offer, T.? This seems a final gasp."

"I wish Fanny wouldn't talk so," she shivered.

Fanny immediately translated the remark into French for the dramatist's benefit, and the three laughed more hilariously than ever.

"Some Champagne, St. Simon," said the dramatist; "we'll drink to the success of *la belle*."

While they were smoking their cigarettes, Fanny went into the *salon* next, and wrote a note to Alleyne:

"I meant to have staid in my room and tormented myself. I am going to the theatre instead. You see I am getting my senses back. Three days, did you say? I am thinking of a Sisterhood; you shall help me decide which has the most becoming dress when you return. Ah, well, I am glad you are gone, for I miss you, and it is pleasant to have the sensation."

St. Simon entered, and read the address over her shoulder.

"He was here a long time to-day."

"Yes; I have sent him to—Lyons."

"What do you mean? Did he propose—actually?" cried St. Simon, with eagerness.

"Your tone is offensive," laughed she. "Did I not tell you I was near committing the crowning sin of my life?"

"*Cinq cent diables!*" groaned he. "You can't—you won't say you did not jump at the chance?"

"My dear St. Simon, I am too lady-like to jump at any thing; I start a little at your coarseness."

"You'd never be so mad, especially now that Cas—"

"Nor you so bold, if you had not drunk an extra bottle of Champagne," she interrupted.

He restrained himself; he had been too hasty. It would not be safe to put her in a rage.

"My dear Fan, you know it is only my interest in you, my one human feeling."

"Tender plant!" said she, amicably. "Tell Alphonse to send this note to Mr. Alleyne's lodgings. He is out, and I want him to have it when he gets home."

"But what did you say?"

"That I was going to the theatre."

"You know I don't mean that. But he may come, and if he should see our friend the dramatist!"

"That is why I waited till now to send the note. He is out dining."

"And he did—did—propose?"

"He did; much as it seems to surprise you."

"And you?"

"Sent him to Lyons, I tell you."

St. Simon looked paralyzed.

"All men are idiots," quoth she; "even you are no exception. Oh, St. Simon, St. Simon, when I told you that I wanted revenge, and Helen Devereux coming to Paris!"

She looked so positively awful that he was glad to leave the subject. He was convinced at last that he need have no fear of her intentions in regard to Gregory Alleyne.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TALE OF VENGEANCE.

TALBOT CASTLEMAINE had taken his wife away to Italy. Old Mrs. Payne left her little cottage and went to the Park, to remain until spring should bring the newly married couple home. Miss Devereux saw her comfortably established there, quite capable still of finding pleasure in the luxury which had suddenly come into her old days; then the young American sent for her step-mother, and set off upon a round of unavoidable visits.

She would much rather have staid with Mrs. Payne, and vegetated in the quiet; but she told herself it was weak and silly to have any such

feeling, and it must resolutely be put by. It was not until after she had decided to go to Paris for a time that she chanced to learn of Gregory Alleyne's presence there; then her pride would not allow her to change her plans. He was nothing whatever to her; the past was nothing; in fact, it was as well they were to meet. If there was the least feebleness left in her heart, she would be obliged to recognize it, and this would give her strength relentlessly to trample it down.

But her society was pertinaciously insisted upon, first at one grand mansion, then another, and these reasons for delaying her journey prevented the necessity of admitting that she shrunk from the possible trial. She was neither melancholy nor dull; the events of these later months had done her too much real good not to leave an added cheerfulness. It was so great a pleasure to believe she had not been mistaken in Castlemaine—to see him rise so quickly and decidedly out of the errors of the old life, and march resolutely forth on a new road. She was very glad this new road could be rendered easy to his feet—that he could even mount in a chariot and ride along it when he listed. The thought of Marian's happiness, too, was a constant source of deep gratification and thankfulness—a certain self-gratulatory feeling naturally enough mingled therewith, as she remembered her own share in the work.

Marian's letters were not too frequent, but so full of ecstatic enjoyment when they did arrive, that they invariably made a kind of festival in Miss Devereux's heart; for this woman, under her cold, somewhat haughty exterior, possessed a warm, affectionate nature, and friendship meant a great deal to her.

Yes, on the whole, these were the pleasantest days she had spent in a long while. She had her seasons of loneliness and discouragement, of asking herself what good she was in the world, what her life signified, what she was to do with it—all those troublesome demands people, not forced into real exertion by necessity, are given to utter when the first bloom has worn off existence. Helen Devereux had loved and suffered; neither had been an unreal or imaginary sentiment. Through all time those memories must leave their impress, and shadow the years with their weight.

But she had firmly fastened upon the resolved day of Castlemaine's accident. She would have nothing more to do with marriage. Neither loneliness, interest, nor ambition should ever tempt her again. If she could find no heart to give, she would rest one of the attendants of Saint Catherine to the end of the chapter.

This rendered her part in society easier at once. There were few instincts of coquetry in her nature; and at the beginning of her ac-

quaintance with any man who showed himself attracted by her fortune or her beauty, she made it evident, as a woman can if she chooses, that he need hope for nothing beyond tolerance and pleasant companionship. Somehow other women instinctively perceived this, though there were few capable of penetrating the reason; the rest only marveled what inordinate hope the creature indulged when they saw her turn indifferently upon the gleam of more than one coronet which its owner showed would be gladly enough placed upon her republican forehead. But, whatever her motive might be, this coldness left her presence much less dangerous; and even the most rampant mothers with marriageable daughters whom she encountered at this period were loud in her praises. Indeed, she seemed to take a pleasure in aiding these latter innocents, provided she could believe them influenced by any real feeling; and she thought, laughingly, that her late success had developed a decided match-making spirit.

This round of visits among some of the most charming country-houses in England was a sufficiently new experience to be very agreeable, and I might crowd several chapters with the stereotyped accounts of hunts, dinners, county balls, and the like. I might add to the list three days spent at the royal castle which overlooks Windsor town—rather long, heavy days Miss Devereux was forced to admit, under her breath—and a week in the quiet of Chiselhurst, where her old admiration for the most gracious, winning woman of our century warmed into a higher homage at the sight of the uncomplaining fortitude which ennobled that uncrowned brow.

But all these matters would be mere episodes; and I have a story to tell and none too much space, so need not fill up my pages with unnecessary details.

One morning Miss Devereux woke to the fact that her late season of contentment was disturbed. She felt weary, listless, and wanted change—something new, to take her out of herself. There was neither sense nor reason in this sudden restlessness; she knew it, and was angry at her own folly, but this did not better matters. All of us going out of our youth have learned what it is to try for patience and contentment, and have stood aghast and indignant often and often to find ourselves swept back into the whirlpool of unrest just when we believed repose and ability to put thought aside had been attained.

Miss Devereux decided to go at once to Paris; perhaps from there she would wander on to Italy and join the Castlemaines. She longed to see the newly married pair, to enjoy their companionship and happiness, and forget therein her selfish broodings and dismalness generally.

"Do let us flit, mamma; I am tired of the fog," she said; and that quietest, most indiffer-

ent of women, her step-mother, was perfectly willing to depart.

Had Helen proposed a journey to Siberia or South Africa, it would have been all the same to the placid lady, provided she took her companion, her pet dog, and the last new novels; was sure of her game of piquet, and a *chauffrette* for her feet.

"I want an apartment for a month—longer if I choose; the one we formerly had in the Champs Élysées, if possible. They must send from the Café Anglais to manage the dinners. Every thing can be ready by Thursday, I suppose. You can meet us at Calais."

Thus, on Monday, Miss Devereux to her faithful Jules—the most wonderful creature, ready to be courier, major-domo, man of business, or any thing else his young mistress might chance to require, and fulfilling whatever position assigned with perfect skill and faithfulness.

An order for a bouquet of flowers could not have been more carelessly given, or received with greater composure; though every thing, from apartment to servants, must be secured in the space of two days, and look, when the lady arrived, as if the haunt were her home.

Miss Devereux had no idea of being unreasonable, but she was so accustomed to wielding the true enchanter's wand—at least of our prosaic age—great wealth, that it had never occurred to her the command was enough to take away the breath of ordinary people just to hear.

There was no haste or worry or other annoyances which remind most persons they are mortal when it comes to a journey. A special train took Miss Devereux and her step-mother, and the companion, the pet dog, the maids, the mountains of luggage, and the under man, who lived in abject fear of Jules, to Dover in time for the day boat. There was Jules to meet them, and with the soul of the under man anew by his baleful glare, and away they all sped toward Paris.

The weather had changed; the unusually severe December snows had given place to steady rain and mist, and poor Paris seemed fated never to be treated to another gleam of sun.

"We must have brought the English fog with us," observed Miss Devereux, as the carriage crossed the Place de la Concorde and turned into the Champs Élysées, where the wind moaned and shook the leafless trees in a remorseless fashion. "Cordy, I am sure you hid a little in your pocket, just to remind you of England."

Miss Cordy was the companion, good to read to Mrs. Devereux, to work monsters in Berlin wool, to talk mildly when required. After all, unimportant as most people would have thought her, Miss Cordy was of some use in the world, which is more than can be said of quantities of others.

Miss Cordy, accustomed to the heiress's whim-

sical, good-humored sallies, only shook her head in reply—too busy keeping the pet dog quiet for words. The pet was an ungrateful beast; Miss Cordy was devoted to him, but whenever any thing disturbed his comfort he invariably tried to bite her. His nerves, as usual, had been upset by the journey, and it seemed that nothing but a taste of Miss Cordy's scant flesh could soothe them.

"I wonder you don't let him bite you and be done," observed Miss Devereux; "you know you will in the end."

"Poor thing, he's only tired," returned Miss Cordy and Mrs. Devereux in the same breath.

They both had always as many excuses for the little wretch as if he were a spoiled child, and Helen a hard-hearted guardian, with small patience for his vagaries.

"How dreary it is!" sighed the young lady. "Mamma, I almost wish we had gone straight on to Italy; I am sure Paris will be as dismal as a tomb."

She shivered, drew her furs about her, and relapsed into a silence from which she did not emerge until they had entered the luxurious apartment, rendered perfect by Jules's genius. Then Miss Devereux said,

"It is all as comfortable as possible; thanks, Jules. Tell them to have dinner rather early. Mrs. Devereux is tired, and I know Miss Cordy has a headache."

Jules retired walking on air; praise from his mistress was the one thing that could make his wooden heart throb. Miss Cordy felt the young lady's kindness, for during her struggle of thirty years, from twenty to fifty, with the world, she had been governess or companion in too many families not to appreciate the invariable consideration which rendered her present existence so placid and restful.

It was a long, dull evening to Miss Devereux. Again and again she regretted that she had undertaken the journey, and grew cold and nervous, though she would not attempt to analyze her feelings. She staid resolutely in the *salon* and played agreeable—talked with her step-mother, joked Cordy into forgetfulness of her headache; and was repaid for her exertions by an ability somewhat to overcome her uneasiness and vague dread.

In the silent watches of the night, before sleep came—for Miss Devereux, of late years, had a mighty struggle to secure that blessing—she asked if it was possible she could be moved by the fact of finding herself near Gregory Alleyne. It was not true—it should not be true. The composure with which she would meet him at the earliest opportunity should convince her conscience. But sleep was long in coming, and when she found that her vagrant fancies had gone wandering back into the groves of the haunted past, she was so disgusted and indignant

that once more she took refuge in the multiplication-table, and this time dreamed she was a school-boy's slate, and that Mr. St. Simon kept adding figures on her with a very scratchy pencil, while Fanny looked on, laughing at her efforts to escape, and pointed her out to a man who stood near. Miss Devereux—still a slate with a little wooden rim which had a hole in it and a string run through—was trying to get sight of this man's countenance as she shivered under the touch of St. Simon's pencil. She wanted to, and yet dreaded it, and was aware of wishing that she was not a slate, so that she might see more clearly. Suddenly Fanny turned him round, against his will, it seemed, and the face was that of Gregory Alleyne. It was his face, for an instant full of love and trouble—only an instant; then Fanny, with a shriek of rage, caught her (always a slate) and tried to break her in pieces on a marble floor, while Alleyne pleaded in vain. Then as she was thrown down, down, and knew she must be mashed to atoms (the marble floor suddenly retreating several hundred feet below), she woke, and found herself in bed, with the morning light straying coldly in through the closed curtains.

That these people should haunt her dreams—these three in company, too! Miss Devereux was so outraged at her own absurdity that she vowed never to sleep again, and thumped her pillow almost as revengefully as Fanny had treated her when a slate.

Still rainy and cold and detestable! All day long Miss Devereux wished herself leagues away, but in her changed mood could fix upon no spot which looked tempting to her fancy. What was the use of removing—what was the use of any thing, in fact? She put this demand as an answer to every suggestion her mind offered, and you and I know from experience that when one is in this mood life looks a very miserable business indeed.

Helen Devereux was too important a personage in the world of idle fine people for her arrival to be a secret many hours. Jules had gone to the bank this morning for her letters. There were always Americans lounging there eager for news; and the fact of her appearance in Paris was soon known, and creating almost as much excitement as if she had been a two-headed woman, or a rope-walker, or some other marvelous monstrosity.

There were calls and cards and notes, and a pleading billet from the pretty Marquise de Belancourt, beseeching her adored Helen to grace a *r union* at her house that night.

"I should come myself to tense you," she wrote, "but I have a sore throat, and am afraid to stir out lest I should croak like a raven all the evening. Do come, else I will go to bed ill. I want to astonish people by showing you; it will make a sensation for my *soir e*, and you can not

be cruel enough to disappoint me. The dear mamma shall have a tranquil game of whist with a good partner. I know she will not refuse."

Mrs. Devereux, when consulted, was well disposed to yield to the attractions of the promised whist, and Helen felt that any thing would be better than remaining at home.

It was late when they entered the rooms, filled with a party of the most agreeable French people Paris could boast this winter; a few English notables, and a sprinkling of Americans, for whom the marquise professed a decided weakness. The heiress's entrance created the sensation the pretty Frenchwomen desired; and had Helen only kept the bloom of her first season, she might have believed herself the most enviable person in the world, in the matter of possessing real friends. Late as she was, there was a later arrival. While Miss Devereux sat listening to the chatter of a merry group, St. Simon and his niece entered, accompanied by Gregory Alleyne.

Fanny and the marquise were rather intimate just now. During the day the Frenchwoman had written to her asking some favor, bidding her not to forget her engagement for the evening, and adding that Miss Devereux was in Paris, and had promised to come. Fanny decided to make Alleyne accompany her. It was currently reported now that she was engaged to the man; but whether to let him thus appear in her wake was quite in accordance with French etiquette, mattered little to her. People could call it an American girl's freedom if they chose; she must and would enter that room side by side with him, utter her greeting words to Helen Devereux, still standing by his side.

The first warning Miss Devereux had of the propinquity of this woman, whom she felt to be her enemy, was in St. Simon's approach. He bowed over her hand, and uttered such graceful, friendly welcomes, that all observers must have supposed them on the most cordial terms. Miss Devereux was perfectly civil, and asked at once for the Tortoise, only giving her the name which legally belonged to her, instead of that tender pet name.

"My poor wife was not well enough to come out," he said; "always somewhat of an invalid, you remember! She sent volumes of loving messages, and means to see you to-morrow."

The Tortoise was often indisposed when the St. Simons were invited to houses where her spouse did not care to take her.

"Fanny is here," continued that gentleman; "she will find you presently: she is wild to see you. We only learned since we came in of your arrival. And how well you look! English air has agreed with you."

He turned to some French people near to reiterate his remark in their tongue, and did delight and enthusiasm so neatly that Miss Devereux wondered if he really forgot she knew him,

at least partially. But there was slight space for thought. On through the curtained *port ere* which separated the boudoir from the outer *salons* came Fanny St. Simon, exquisitely dressed, and in the very height of her capricious, changeable beauty. Miss Devereux gave one glance, then a sudden mist seemed to gather before her eyes. The floor exhibited an odd tendency to waver up and down, the shaded lights to dance, the groups about to totter, as if unsteady on their legs. Then through the mist, the wavering radiance, and the odd dizziness, Miss Devereux saw the man upon whose arm Fanny leaned; looked (as if straining her eyes from a great distance) upon the cold, proud face of Gregory Alleyne.

At the same instant an old acquaintance standing by the sofa where she sat bent over Miss Devereux, and whispered,

"St. Simon's niece has done famously for herself at last; she is engaged to that icicle of a man."

The weakness and dizziness passed as rapidly as they had come; the floor remained stationary; every thing resumed its ordinary appearance. Not a pulse quickened, not a throb smote her heart. It was the heat of the place, not the sight of this man, which had affected her; or, if one gust of memory did for a second threaten, the words opportunely whispered in her ear dispelled it. She was talking easily to those about, and could watch the pair as they walked up the room. She saw Alleyne's face light into a smile at some words his companion spoke; saw him bend to her with a quietly absorbed manner he was at no pains to hide.

Another moment, and they were close to the sofa. Alleyne looked up and saw her, and the pride and coldness came back to his countenance. In the time, however, he had nothing to do but wait. Fanny was holding Miss Devereux's hand, and uttering pleasant greetings, not so enthusiastic as St. Simon's, but very prettily worded. Then, as if struck by a sudden remembrance, she said,

"My dear Miss Devereux, let me present—oh, I forgot! I am sure I have heard Mr. Alleyne say he used to know you."

"Yes; it needs no introduction on my part, though he looks rather as if he had forgotten me," returned Miss Devereux. "I am very happy to see you, Mr. Alleyne; pray shake hands."

It was the work of a second; he bent over the gloved fingers, speaking decorous words; there was nothing for any body to notice or wonder at. But Fanny St. Simon studied the two with a cruel satisfaction. Miss Devereux was perfect in her *r le*. Alleyne did as well as a man could—of course showing a little stiff and grim. Her scene had not missed its point. Fanny was certain of that, and she exulted.

She hated them both, as she gazed: the girl, for having crossed her destiny; the man, for being moved by this apparition from the past; the pair, for this very suffering, even while she gloated over it, which she felt confident they endured.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPENCER'S FAREWELL.

GREGORY ALLEYNE's absence was unavoidably prolonged beyond the time he set for his return. The business which he had promised to attend to for his friend proved unexpectedly troublesome, necessitating a journey as far as Marseilles, and, between delays and divers other annoyances, he remained twelve days instead of three.

He wrote Fanny frequently, and she answered his letters; bright, sprightly epistles she penned, too; with now and then a touch of seriousness or feeling, a burst of weariness and loneliness, though she reserved for his re-appearance the reply to the question he had asked at their parting.

During that season, occupied as he was, Gregory Alleyne found leisure to dwell upon the new turn he had given his future. Removed from the spell of Fanny's presence, the prospect did not show so bewildering as it had looked the day she charmed him with her siren ways. But he was convinced that he had done well, and he believed she cared for him—had cared for him before he spoke. He was not a vain man, even if he did think this; he had a right to believe it after her disconnected words—her manner, which seemed to reveal much that she meant to keep secret.

He said that by this step he should secure more happiness than he had ever hoped to find. He knew that Fanny was far from perfect—that she spoke the truth when she averred she had been badly trained. He recognized serious faults, though in no carping spirit, or with any sensation of fear for his peace. She was coquettish, spoiled, capricious, hasty-tempered, but honest and womanly at the bottom; and all these faults would fade in the peace and higher aims their wedded life was to bring both.

He could not account for it, but during this period, when he thought of Helen Devereux he felt more anger than he had done either in the freshness of his grief, or the chill apathy which followed. So he told himself that the last faint ray of the old love was dead. He was surprised that it should have left a ghost so like hatred; rather shocked, too, and got away from the idea, for he had no mind to cumber his life with enmities. The idea of vengeance, which was Fanny St. Simon's one fervent creed, he held in the utter abhorrence that any really broad, noble mind must do. A man may err and sin, and

still leave hope, still retain high qualities; but the human being who harbors that desire of revenge is no more capable of struggling toward the light than Lucifer was to scale the heavenly ramparts from which he had been flung.

Gregory Alleyne returned to Paris, and again stood by Fanny St. Simon, and asked the question he had put that fatal day.

"How is it to be, Fanny?" he demanded, after telling her how long and dark his season of absence had seemed.

"I have been in so many different minds since you went away, that I hardly know which I had decided should be the abiding one," she answered, having no intention of losing a single point of a single scene while the new state of affairs could in the slightest degree amuse her weary hours.

"Does that mean you can not care?—that my affection brings no hope of rest and peace?" he inquired, anxiously.

True to his masculine instincts, the fear which rose in his mind made the possible loss seem very great.

She gave him one quick glance, and turned away her eyes.

"If we both live to be old and paralytic and decrepit, I'll answer that question honestly, whatever I may decide now," she said; and her voice trembled so prettily in this effort at playfulness.

"And am I to go on alone till then?"

"Oh, if I could be sure," she interrupted.

"Of what? of yourself—of—"

"Of you," she interrupted again. "If you should deceive yourself! I warned you, Mr. Alleyne, that I am capable of being insanely jealous."

In the beginning of a love affair no man was ever annoyed at the idea of a woman's jealousy; though when the passion comes actually into play, there is little under heaven so inexpressibly wearisome to the sons of Adam.

"You ought to have let me tell you all my story as I wished," he said. "You must let me do so now; then you will be satisfied."

"I wouldn't hear it for the world!" she cried, putting out her hands like a frightened child.

"Not a syllable—not a sign that could ever make me recognize the woman if we met. She is dead—I have settled that. Let her lie in her grave."

"Let us say *requiescat* for the past of both," he said, smiling, once more encouraged by her words and manner.

"Oh, mine! Why, I've a dozen ideals dead and buried; if I was really to marry you, I dare say every time I was cross I should bring them up to overwhelm you by their perfection!"

If he had known it, the forbearance with which he could support her jesting at this moment might have warned him there was less grave depth to his feelings than he believed. Her lev-

ity teased and tantalized him, rendered him a little more eager, stoic though he was, but brought no pain.

"Ah! now be serious," he urged.

Her face grew grave, almost sad.

"Do not suppose me quite so selfish as I seem," she said. "I talk of my own feelings—my possible jealousy—my dread of suffering. Oh, do believe that I am generous enough to think of you!"

She leaned forward, rested her hand on his, and looked in his face as she had done on that other day.

"Think," he said, "that you can make me happy."

"If I could believe it—if I could! But I know myself so well. I am so difficult to live with—one hour gay, the next as sullen as if I had a great trouble; perhaps most forbidding when my heart is tenderest. Oh, my demons are so strong!"

Had it been the case of another, Gregory Alleyne would have said that to love this creature with the character she drew might be very bewitching, but to have her for a wife would offer little hope of the tranquillity that so indissoluble a bond leaves desirable. In his own case he only thought she looked very charming—that she had talents and soul far beyond most of her sex.

I confess to a fondness for describing a sensible man allured by an enchantress; there is something delicious to me in his idiocy just when he believes himself the wisest.

"You could not be convinced," she said, presently.

"I can not go back from my wish," he replied. "Nothing you could have to tell would change that."

"And if I consented, and disappointment came, you would not blame me; you would remember I warned you—would say I tried to do my best; pity me if I failed?"

"Yes," he said, "I can promise that too. Whatever apparently impossible chance our lives may hold, I will remember what I say now, Fanny."

His words touched her—really touched her. There were tears in her eyes; a wish in her mind that she were different, but neither hesitation nor remorse.

"It shall be as you please," she answered, softly.

As he pressed his lips to her forehead, with many hasty words which would not bear setting down in cold black and white, Fanny St. Simon was remembering her dream of a few weeks past. She had sat in that very chair, and fancied the door opening, and Talbot Castlemaine entering the room; had felt his breath on her cheek, his kisses on her brow.

Fate had flung her back from the portal which

led to Paradise—flung her down into endless night, and barred the door. Let Fate answer for the consequences.

Fanny decreed that every thing was to go on as usual—at present, anyway. People would discover the truth soon enough; there was no hurry. It was a pleasure to think of keeping Helen Devereux deceived until her arrival, if she could only tell the news herself. She should know how the creature writhed under it, in spite of her ability to be calm.

When this hour of their meeting did come, Fanny had her sensation of enjoyment, quiet as the scene was. She lingered there for some time; she forced the pair to talk.

At last Roland Spencer came toward them—changed a good deal during these last days, which had been full of trouble to him. He could not bear to approach Fanny while Alleyne was beside her, yet he could no more resist than a moth can avoid a flame.

The groups had gathered about. Alleyne managed to get a little away from Miss Devereux's neighborhood; Fanny beckoned Spencer.

"Please give me your arm," she said; "this room is stifling with the odor of flowers. I want to move about."

"I have not seen you for two days," he began, in a voice of eager reproach, as they walked down the apartment.

"I have been so busy, and out so much; but I missed you," she replied.

"Oh! what is this I have heard? I couldn't believe it—I don't!" he exclaimed, his voice sounding the more passionate and troubled from the repressed tone in which he was forced to speak.

"I can't talk to you here," she said; "let us go on through the *salons*. There is a conservatory back of the tea-room, and there's no one there yet."

They met the marquise on the way.

"I am going to show Monsieur Spencer your lovely gardenias," said Fanny; and by her tone the marquise knew she did not wish to be interrupted.

Now, in her time Fanny had often obliged the marquise; famous for her flirtations, and troubled by a jealous husband, the two women were quite *sous gêne* with each other.

"Go through the *salle à manger*," said madame; "I don't want the other doors opened yet."

She gave a rapid, amused glance at Spencer's face.

"Poor little fly!" she thought, as she passed on. "Ah, well, at his age men suffer; later, they make us suffer. There's compensation in all things."

Fanny and her companion crossed the ante-chamber and the dining-room, and entered the conservatory, dimly lighted by colored lamps

and heavy with the scent of exotics. She sat down, and motioned Spencer to sit beside her; but he shook his head.

"It isn't true—tell me it isn't true!" he cried, breaking silence for the first time since they left the boudoir.

"My dear Roland—my best of brothers," she said, "what is the matter with you?"

"Is it true that you are engaged to Gregory Alleyne?" he interrupted.

She bowed her head. He stood absolutely stunned for an instant, then flung himself into a chair, and covered his face with his hands, shaking from head to foot.

"Roland, Roland!" she exclaimed.

She was shocked and grieved beyond measure; she had not meant to make him suffer. Some boyish pain he must feel, perhaps; but she had never intended to deal him a deadly blow, to become the fate which should fling him out of his careless youth forever upon the bleak, sharp rocks of reality.

He lifted his white, agonized countenance at her appeal, and a phantom of his old joyous smile parted his lips.

"I'm a fool!" he said, brokenly. "Perhaps you did not know how mad I have been. I love you, Fanny, I love you!"

She sunk on her knees beside him, and seized his hands. She was perfectly earnest; she would not have stirred or hesitated if Gregory Alleyne himself had appeared.

"Oh, my poor boy, my poor Roland!" she sobbed. "I did not mean this—I did not! I meant to be like a sister to you. I am fonder of you than of any body in the world! I'd sooner have cut my hand off than done you this wrong! Don't hate me; don't think I have been false!"

He was so touched by her emotion, that the tears which he could not find for his own misery rose to his eyes.

"I know, I know," he said, hastily. "Get up, Fanny. Oh, don't kneel to me; I can't bear it! You are not to blame. I am an idiot, that is all! You thought I was a boy! I'm a man, and I love you with all my soul—I love you!"

"Don't say it; ah, don't!" she cried, rising slowly. "See, Roland, you have your whole existence before you, and I am going out of my youth—"

"You are scarcely two years older," he broke in.

"I am a whole life older," she answered, sadly. "I am no more fit to be loved by you than—than—oh, there are no similes! It is only a fancy; you will forget it. You will find out what love really is some day, and see the difference."

"I may live through it," he said, hoarsely; "people don't die easily, I fancy. But there's

no hope of my forgetting; I would not if I could! I am proud to love you; I honor myself therefor."

I believe nothing in the world could have humiliated Fanny St. Simon so utterly as this confession. If the knowledge could have eased his pain, she would have shown herself to him as she really was—let him hear every secret of her dark, revengeful spirit.

"I'm not worthy; I'm not fit," she said. "Listen to me, Roland. There's nothing so dear to me as your affection. I would rather stand well in your esteem than that of the whole world; but I can not let you think of me as you do."

"You could not change me," he replied. "You might make me sorry—for I don't believe you are a happy woman, Fanny—but you could not alter my faith, my pride in loving you."

"And I have wrecked your life," she went on; "and you were the only person I would not have gladly hurt! I always thought if I had a brother—and you seemed like one— Oh, Roland, Roland, what a miserable wretch I am!"

"Do you love this man?" he asked.

She laughed bitterly.

"You will despise me," she said. "Well, at least, then, you'll not suffer. Love him, Roland! Why!—never mind; I must marry, I am growing old. He is rich, pleasant enough, generous enough. Don't you see? I am selling myself—following the rule laid down by this world I live in, and pretend to scorn."

"Poor Fanny!" he said, sorrowfully. "May be I should have hated the man if you had told me you cared for him. But I am sorry for you now."

"Don't be," she replied; "I am not worth it."

"Why, at least you *like* me," he began.

"Don't finish, Roland," she cried. "My dear boy, I would not do you the wrong of marrying you; there is nothing I'd not rather suffer!"

"I know; I understand. You are very good to me, Fanny. I shall remember it when I am gone," he said, sadly.

"Are you going away, Roland?"

"I can't stay here. You don't think I can stay here and see—and see—"

He could not finish; he struck his forehead violently with his clenched hand, enraged at his own weakness.

"Yes, you must go," she said, slowly. "I must lose you! I had nothing else left—I must lose you!"

She was not acting. Never, except during the days when she had let Talbot Castlemaine read her heart under the silver radiance of the Italian moon, had she been so perfectly truthful, so thoroughly in earnest as now.

"If it could do any good I would stay, Fanny," he answered, trying to calm himself when he saw how she suffered.

"No, no; you are right to go. But you will not leave me always, Roland?"

"I'll come if I can be of the least use to you, Fanny. Wherever I am, you need only speak; I shall come."

"But, anyway, after a few months you will be back? This will pass—you don't believe me, Roland, but it will."

"We'll not talk about that," he said. "I am sorry I have distressed you."

"Don't you speak about being sorry," she cried; "that hurts me worse than any thing."

"I don't want to see those people again," he continued; "I shall slip off. You must not stop any longer, dear."

He employed the tender epithet unconsciously, but Fanny noticed it. She knew, too, that it came not from his love, but his brotherly solicitude with her weary, solitary life, and the dismal future she had chosen—dismal, because she had not even the bond of friendship or a single sympathetic impulse to draw her toward the man whom she had accepted for her future husband.

Roland kissed her cold hands, and led her to the door. His face looked so changed, so much older. Something of assertion and control in his manner struck her painfully. The doubts of the past days, culminating in the suffering of this night, had driven Roland out of the last of his boyhood.

She knew the house well, and made her way into madame's dressing-room. A couple of ladies were standing there in conversation. Fanny returned to the *salons* in their company. There were several young girls, ay, and several married coquettes, who missed Roland's handsome face, crowded as the rooms had become; but no one except the marquise knew that Fanny had any thing to do with his departure.

"I'm afraid the poor moth's wings are badly scorched," that lady whispered, as she chanced to find herself near Miss St. Simon.

"Indeed not," Fanny answered. "Why, he is like a younger brother to me; he's only in a little difficulty just now—nothing of consequence."

She had never kept any man's secret, but she meant to keep Roland's. She was thinking, as she walked back to the company, that if he were to die suddenly, his pale, suffering countenance would haunt her more dismally than the recollection of many an intentional wrong.

The number of people present allowed Alleyne to avoid Miss Devereux without difficulty, nor had that lady the slightest intention now, or at any future time, of conducting herself toward him other than as the most casual acquaintance. A few words she meant to speak, and as soon as

possible. She felt it incumbent upon her to congratulate him on the report whispered in her ear as he first approached, and was several times repeated during the evening.

St. Simon himself managed to speak of it in one of his frequent returns to her neighborhood. He had not forgotten Fanny's revelation, and he had a singular enjoyment in stinging any body when he could; a weakness often observable in men of his temperament, though custom has set it down among the rank of feminine foibles.

"I was charmed to receive a letter from you," he said, "though you were not in a mood to consider business proposals."

"I am very well content to leave my affairs as they are," she replied; "and I have rather a fancy for owning land, even if it brings me in nothing. By-the-way, you have been in Nevada—the scenery is said to be magnificent."

St. Simon launched forth in its praise, and he could give wonderfully fine descriptions. She was interested, wishing almost that it were possible to like the agreeable man. He brought the conversation round to the mines, and she congratulated him on his success.

"But you are not tempted to join us?" he asked.

She laughed. She could not resist letting him see that she perceived the drift of his amiable attentions.

"I am as obstinate as ever," said she. "I hate mines—such dark holes! and I mean to keep my Nevada lands to build a cottage on, when I go back to America. How well your niece is looking!" she added, by way of changing the subject.

"Dear Fanny! these are very happy days for her," returned St. Simon, enthusiastically. "Perhaps you have not heard—I believe she is rather shy yet about having it known—"

"But such pretty secrets always get out," observed Miss Devereux, as he paused. "Allow me to congratulate you for her. I think your niece and Mr. Alleyne admirably suited to one another."

She spoke in the sweetest tone, and looked genuine satisfaction; yet St. Simon felt that she meant something derogatory to both. He would have liked to pinch her as he did the Tortoise, her composure aggravated him so much.

His next thought was of a certain paper which lay in his escritoire. He was thinking that Miss Devereux had good reason to congratulate him on his success; in another case, dangerous as the attempt might have proved, that document would scarcely be lying unheeded where it was now.

Miss Devereux was more determined than ever to utter to Gregory Alleyne the few words she had it in her mind to speak. She found an opportunity before the evening ended. She had seated herself in a deep window recess of the music-room while some professional people were

singing delightful melodies which she wanted to hear in peace, undisturbed by exclamations or applause. As she rose to leave her nook, she saw Alleyne near—was obliged to pass close to him. He said something about the music; she answered: a brief conversation was unavoidable, Fanny St. Simon watched it all from a distance. She liked to see them forced to talk, because confident the necessity was torture to both. She had not the slightest dread, if they met each day for the next year, of any approach to an explanation. She knew them so well that she was aware either would sooner die by inches than refer to the past.

"You have every reason to like England after your success," Alleyne said, in answer to some remark of hers.

"Insolent!" thought Miss Devereux. "He speaks as if I were a dancer or rope-walker." Then aloud, "And you, to like Paris. Pray allow an old acquaintance to congratulate you—I do heartily. I never saw two people who seemed better suited to one another than you and Miss St. Simon."

He perceived, as St. Simon had done, the honeyed sting. He was angry; not on his own account, but Fanny's.

"You honor me beyond my deserts," he said; "but I shall try to be worthy of the prize I have won; at least, I am aware how great it is."

"In that fact, then, your future wife possesses a great hope of happiness," she replied, calmly. "You are doubly a fortunate man, since you appreciate your good fortune."

Then, of course, he could do nothing but bow. Miss Devereux had said all she meant or wished to say, and so remained silent. Women always endure such awkward pauses with a provoking ease that men can only envy and grow irritated in watching. Fortunately, other people came up, and Miss Devereux flouted away.

More than once during the evening he found himself regarding her from afar, and wondered if he actually hated her—he who had always vowed never to load his soul with this most intolerable of human burdens. He feared that it was true, since her presence had power to stir tumultuous feelings in his breast. Love had long since died out; therefore, the storm must be the rush of bitterness and hate. He despised his own weakness; what he wanted was to meet her without emotion of any kind, and he would learn to do it. The woman who had so cruelly deceived him was worthy of no sentiment beyond indifference.

"What a beautiful creature she is!" Fanny St. Simon said, softly, as he stood looking at Helen Devereux, annoyed by such reflections as I have set down.

Fanny had come up unnoticed, and spoke so suddenly that a nervous person would have started. Alleyne turned calmly toward her. He

did not attempt either subterfuge or lie, as nine people out of ten would have done.

"Yes, very beautiful," he answered.

Fanny rather admired his courage, and did not try further to tease him just then, partly because he had not taken refuge in falsehood, and partly because some man drew near at the instant to whom she wished to speak. But she was safe not to forget; and if her mood changed, she might term his truthfulness impertinence, and punish him sorely therefor in the numberless ways she always had ready to her hand for people who vexed her.

She was thinking more of Roland Spencer, however, than any body else; savage with herself for the pain she had wrought his gallant heart.

"I declare," she thought, as she sat alone in her room that night, "it seems to me I do the most harm to those I like and want not to injure. It is too hard, but in keeping with all the rest."

The next day St. Simon took the Tortoise to see Miss Devereux, as he had said he should do. Fanny did not accompany them: she had flatly refused when her uncle had requested her society.

"There is nothing to be gained," she said. "Don't waste your time in politeness to that creature. She hates you, and you know it."

"I am not to blame if she will hold unchristian sentiments. I only pity her," laughed he. "Besides, I think she rather likes me, even if she will not trust me with her money."

"I would not forgive a person thinking me dishonest," retorted Fanny.

St. Simon laughed more heartily than before.

"I like penetrating people," said he. "Then, take my word for it, civility always pays."

"I'll go and see her when I have something disagreeable to say, not otherwise," she answered.

"Don't be childish, Fan; it is unworthy of your broad head. Come, now. A sacrifice on the altar of politeness."

"Go and be civil, if you choose, but let me alone," cried she. "I've the devil in me this morning, and so I warn you."

He saw that she was telling the truth, and left her in peace.

Fanny had passed a sleepless night on poor Roland's account, and was incapable of disguises or proper behavior at present.

Miss Devereux was oblivious of the young lady's absence; and so busy talking to the Tortoise, that she avoided noticing the elaborate excuses St. Simon offered her step-mother on behalf of his niece. But St. Simon was determined she should listen, so he turned directly toward her.

"She is a good deal occupied in these days, as you may imagine," he said.

"Oh yes; and you too, I suppose," replied Helen, pleasantly. "Take care not to break

your neck in that mine—though I am told it is a wonderful success."

"And Fanny is going to be married," gasped the Tortoise, not having heard a word either had spoken—just going on with her own chaotic bits of thought.

"I have already congratulated her," said Miss Devereux, "or else her future husband; but it would be all the same, of course."

"Quite the same," observed St. Simon, in his suavest tone. "I never saw two people more attached; it is really beautiful, even to an old stager like me."

"I am sure of it," said Miss Devereux, and smiled at him.

St. Simon devoted himself a good deal to the elder hostess after this. Helen Devereux's smiles were very sweet, but sometimes they angered St. Simon almost beyond self-control.

Miss Devereux was as nice as possible to the Tortoise; and at dinner that dull animal chanted her praises until both uncle and niece were thoroughly exasperated. The Tortoise might have suffered sorely, only each listener saw how her remarks irritated the other, and so the Tortoise was allowed to continue her monotonous song.

"Is it not delightful to hear her?" cried St. Simon at last. "Do you not enjoy it, Fan?"

"No," replied she, coolly; "but I enjoy seeing you writhe under poor T.'s rhapsody, bearing it because you think it annoys me."

He tried to laugh, but she knew by the expression of his face that he was mentally uttering horrible anathemas. She had got the best of him, as she usually did. The small triumph restored her good-humor, which had been severely shaken all day. She persuaded the Tortoise off upon another topic—no easy thing to accomplish; but Fanny's resources were infinite. St. Simon sufficiently appreciated her efforts to make a display of magnanimity.

"I'll tell you a secret," he said, when the Tortoise was too busy with some candied fruits (which were her special weakness) either to talk or listen. "I am beginning to dislike that Devereux girl as much as you do."

"Beginning!" quoth Fanny. "Well, I need not put myself in a passion. So much the better if we agree; and now don't let us mention her name for a week, no matter how much we may happen to want to torment each other."

"A bargain," said Simon.

The visit had to be returned, and was in due season. Fanny did enjoy that, because Gregory Alleyne happened to be sitting beside her when the cards were brought up. He kept his place as Miss Devereux and her step-mother entered. Fanny was talking eagerly to him, and had her hand on his arm. Of course, the scene lasted only a second after the opening of the door, but long enough to show that a tender interview had been interrupted.

Then Fanny moved forward to utter pretty welcomes in her graceful way, and Alleyne followed, to fill his part as well as masculine attributes would permit.

Mrs. Devereux was not aware that an engagement had existed between her step-daughter and Alleyne. She was a good, kind woman; but so weak that even in her early girlhood Helen never dreamed of leaning upon her—indeed, she had always been forced to act as prop to her relative.

"I saw your card, Mr. Alleyne," she said, after the first greetings. "I was sorry we were out. We shall always be home now of a Wednesday; I hope you will not forget us."

For once in her life she had stumbled on the right thing to utter; and Helen was grateful, because there remained no necessity for her to say any thing.

Then the Tortoise came in; and by the time she got settled in her chair, and could talk intelligibly, St. Simon appeared.

"So your old admirer, Castlemaine, is married, Miss Devereux," that gentleman observed, after the first necessary talk about the weather and the dullness of Paris was over.

"Absolutely married," she replied.

"It took us all here by surprise," he continued. "People had said you did not mean to persevere in your noted cruelty toward my sex."

"That was good of them," said Miss Devereux, laughing.

"St. Simon evidently does not believe in the right of his sex to have any choice in such matters," cried Fanny, laughing too.

"But they will," returned Miss Devereux, with a meaning in her tone which Fanny caught; so did St. Simon, and waited for the sparring he had hoped his remarks might bring on between the two.

Miss Devereux knew little of Fanny's secrets; but she remembered formerly thinking the girl attracted by Castlemaine.

"He has married the dearest creature," she went on—"pretty as a wood-nymph; and they are very happy. Gay Sir Talbot was really in earnest at last."

"He suddenly developed a taste for bread-and-butter," said Fanny.

Another retort rose to Miss Devereux's lips, but she checked it, feeling ashamed that she had employed the weapons her enemies—as she instinctively felt uncle and niece to be—wielded so ruthlessly. She changed the conversation by asking Fanny some question about a Russian friend.

The idle chatter held its course. Alleyne's principal share consisted in exchanging common-places with Mrs. Devereux; only when Fanny now and then appealed to him to confirm or dissent from a remark of Helen's, showing her customary art in teasing the pair.

The visit did not last long; it was dreary work, Miss Devereux thought.

"Paris is not like itself," she said to her step-mother, as the carriage drove from the door.

"We will end our month, and then, if you don't mind, go on to Italy and join the Castlemaines."

Mrs. Devereux would like it. She was pretty certain to approve of Helen's proposals, having a vast opinion of the young lady's talents.

"I love Italy, and so does Cordy," Mrs. Devereux said. "Wherever you fancy, dear, I shall be sure to content myself."

Helen looked at her, and wondered if she should ever reach a similar state of tranquillity. Project her soul as far into the future as she might, no such period presented itself in the dull stretch of years. So far from it, indeed, that neither as regarded the present nor the time to come could she find any satisfactory reason for being called on to exist. But this was silly and sentimental, and she would not think such trash. There must be something to do in the world—some aim wherewith to fill up her heavy hours; and she would search till she discovered it. She had no cause for unhappiness, nor was she unhappy—she insisted much upon this—only she was idle and useless, and so time dragged. Yes, she would go to Italy, and join Marian and Talbot. It would be like sitting in the sunshine to watch their happiness—able to reflect that it was in part her work.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

LET us go back also to Talbot Castlemaine and his young wife. I shall only tell you that Marian had known almost three months of perfect happiness. To more than one of us this may look a long period for that uncertain boon to be the portion of any human being, but Marian did not realize this.

There is nothing prettier or more poetical, we all aver, than wedded bliss; yet if any luckless author ventures to dwell upon such a season in the lives of his characters, we invariably sneer and find him dull: is the fault his or ours, I wonder? I have no mind to argue the question, or elaborate an idyl for you to smile at, since I have only to do with Marian and her husband, as the threads of their lives became interwoven in this web of Fanny St. Simon's existence.

They wandered about Rome, and dreamed in Naples; they spent a week in Sicily; then Talbot was inspired with the idea of showing Marian the Pyramids, the great river whose very name is a dream of romance, the broad sweep of the desert, and all the marvels which six months before she had thought must always remain a mere beautiful dream, so far as she was concerned.

So they hurried back to Brindisi, and sailed across the southern sea, and lost themselves

among the shadows of the gigantic past. Then one day it all grew tedious to Talbot—suddenly, as any sensation came upon him. He knew that he had fallen out of the clouds and was standing on the common earth, while a newly risen distance seemed to extend itself between him and this girl who had found her heaven in the glory of his changeable eyes. The quiet wearied him; the isolation became oppressive; Marian's innocence and enthusiasm a bore. He felt it better they should return to the ordinary world, and essay the life opened by his present position, if he meant, as he still did, to preserve Marian from the ill effects of his altered mood.

There is nothing strange in this: I never told you that the man was changed. He had grasped at the idea of a new and higher existence, as he had always grasped eagerly at any novel sensation; and the reality palled as quickly as the old pleasure had done. It was all natural enough—horribly natural. Poor Marian!

The early spring found them at Nice, and there Lady Castlemaine was guilty of a folly which dragged her idyl down into the ordinary light of day, and left her treading a path as real and commonplace as that which surrounds most wedded lives; her folly was to fall ill.

It is not easy to see how she could be blamed, or have avoided the misfortune, but even in his first hours of anxiety—and he was anxious—Talbot considered it a folly on her part. He foresaw many consequences dangerous to her peace which might arise therefrom, though he adhered to his intention that she should be happy, and thought he was a rather hardly used individual in having personal annoyances to render his part difficult.

For some time Marian remained very ill—suffering and languid during several weeks. In her entire ignorance, the poor child had not known that her journey to the East was a great risk; she was not even aware she had incurred danger until the sharp, sudden pain smote her, and the new, bewildering hope died out as utterly as many another which she was doomed to watch stricken from her life.

Until her illness, Castlemaine had not been made acquainted with this hope. The knowledge had so lately reached her, the idea was so wonderful and so precious, that in her shy joy she deferred telling him until they were in Italy again. Then there was nothing to tell.

Talbot's feelings were as diverse and complex as usual. He was inclined to regard children as a bore, yet he felt vexed with Marian for having cheated him of an heir to his title, and was seriously aggrieved when the physicians warned him that her health would probably remain for a long time delicate. He blamed her for not having told him—what she did not know herself; blamed her for not knowing, and was furious generally with doctors and nurses.

He was very kind, but the sick-room bored him dreadfully, and as soon as she was better he told her candidly that he thought he ought not to stay shut up so much. Marian agreed to this; was afraid she had been selfish, and urged him to go out and amuse himself, carefully hiding her loneliness and desolation during his absence.

Nice was so stupid a hole, too—she might at least have waited to get back to Paris before falling ill. Of course she could not help it, poor child; he was not blaming her, only railing at circumstances; but it was a deuced bore. And what if she should turn sickly, and get thin and scraggy? Talbot felt sorely aggrieved. Nothing to amuse one in Nice, and dangerous, bewitching little Monaco within easy reach. Distraction enough to be found there; any number of trains daily to take him backward and forward; numerous acquaintances who had drifted thither delighted to renew their companionship, and the bare sight of the familiar green tables and the hoarse cry of the *croupiers* sounding like music in his ears!

At Nice Miss Devereux found them out. She had missed them on first coming to Italy; then followed their Eastern journey, and after their return she was prevented joining them for several weeks by her step-mother's illness. When she reached Nice, Marian was much better—nearly recovered, she herself said; was able to walk about, to drive or sit in the soft spring sunshine; trying to be happy and content as of yore, and feeling vaguely that some change had swept over her heaven.

Miss Devereux soon perceived this; she learned how Talbot spent a great deal of his time, and was not slow to act.

"How much longer do you mean to stay here?" she asked him abruptly one day. "Marian is able to travel—why not go to Florence? She has not seen it yet, and the journey will do her good."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered; "the winds are very keen there just at this time of year—better wait a little."

"I don't want you to wait," returned Miss Devereux.

"You mean Marian."

"I mean what I said," she interrupted in her straightforward way, though she made her manner pleasant, and her voice friendly and kind. "See here, Talbot, you and I are not old enough in good resolutions to run risks. You ought not to go to Monaco every day; you must not trifle with what was so engrossing a habit. Don't be cross; you know you gave me the right to scold you."

"And it is very good of you to take the trouble," he replied, lazily, not in the least offended—somewhat amused at her energy—just a little bored at the subject of her tirade.

"Go to Florence," she urged; "stay there till Marian is entirely recovered, then return to England. The ministry will go out before long—there will be an election. Remember our plans; you are to enter Parliament and have something to do."

He had imagined that; he and Miss Devereux had talked a great deal about the project during those weeks of grand resolutions before his marriage. How far off the time looked! how dull and wearisome those noble resolves appeared! He was not shocked as he admitted this to himself. He had his customary feeling of personal commiseration, because every thing and any thing so soon became a bore.

"You have not forgotten?" she asked.

"Oh no." Very drawlingly uttered, while through his half-closed eyelids he watched Miss Devereux's pretty hands arranging a bunch of violets, and thought indolently that he would like to kiss them, just because he had no right.

"Nor changed your mind, I hope?" she added, interrogatively.

"I suppose not; but really there is no hurry. My dear Miss Devereux, this is such heavenly weather, and it makes one so lazy. Please don't be energetic and American."

She swept the flowers out of her lap upon the table, with one of her impatient movements.

"I don't wish to jest," she said. "If you think I am troublesome, pray say so at once. You gave me the right to feel an interest in your affairs and to talk of them; if you wish to withdraw that privilege, be frank, and do it in so many words."

"But I don't wish to. I am awfully fond of you, and want your good opinion and advice; but I am lazy to-day, that's all."

"Then I shall talk, and you may listen," said she.

"And you'll not be lazy and idle, and let me look at you? I don't know why, but your face is altered! You are a little thin, but it is becoming; you look more like a Greek statue than ever."

"My dear friend, don't be a goose!" she cried, laughing, though she felt vexed. "You would try to flirt with a barber's block, if there was no other semblance to womanhood convenient. But you don't want to make pretty speeches to me, and it's a bad habit. You will fall into your old ways—and oh! remember Marian."

"By-the-way—yes; suppose we take her out to drive?"

"You will not be serious; you will get away from the things I want to talk about!"

"But you mean to scold me, and I hate to be scolded."

"I am afraid for you, Talbot," she continued. "I know you love Marian, and want to make her happy. I know you were serious when you

planned to lead a new life, to be useful and good. Don't give up; don't let old acquaintances and habits drag you back into the old ways. It will all come about before you know it, unless you are careful."

"Perhaps you are right," he said, more gravely.

"I know I am! Oh, Talbot, if any unhappiness should befall Marian I could never forgive myself."

"But there will not. Bless me, I'm quite a paragon! I thought you would have praised me, instead of lecturing."

"I don't mean to lecture. I only want you to be true to yourself—to the life you have undertaken—to the aims you formed last autumn—to Marian."

"She has not been complaining, I am sure—"

"Of course not. She is happy yet; but I have seen in these few days just what you are doing. Her illness has bored you; you have got the habit of going to Monaco; and if you yield to that passion for gaming, you are ruined. There—I can't help it if you are vexed—my conscience would not let me be silent. You told me, if I ever saw you faltering in your good resolves, to warn you. I have done so. Talbot, Talbot, don't forget!"

"Indeed, I will not. You are the best of sisters; that's your claim on both Marian and me. I am as steady as a church. I had promised De Sard to go to Monaco to-day, but I will not. We'll be off for Florence as soon as you and Marian please. Now, own that I am not a bad sort, and that you are not disappointed in me."

It was difficult to resist the grace of his manner, the persuasiveness of his words; yet, though in a measure she yielded to them, Miss Devereux could not forget her fears.

"You will always be a boy," said she; "only, don't be a bad boy. I've no wish to make myself disagreeable, but I can't sit silent and see you run risks. What you want is occupation; idleness was your chief enemy in the old days. Go home to England. Heaven knows there is enough for a man of your wealth and position to do."

"And I mean to—don't be afraid! Now, let's go to Marian, and see when she would like to be off for Florence."

His very good-nature increased her anxiety; she would rather see him indignant at her doubts; it would at least have shown that he deceived himself. But she tried to believe all might yet end well. If he could only be persuaded back to England, and find something to do, her hopes for him—those hopes which in the past autumn had made her willing Marian should become his wife—might be realized.

So the next week the Castlemaines went to Florence, and Miss Devereux and her mother and old Miss Cordy went too. Marian was

much better, and looking prettier than ever. They were all established at the same hotel, and in Helen's companionship Marian had less time to feel lonely when Castlemaine gradually drifted back to the habits of ordinary husbands, and absented himself frequently. She was not silly, and knew this must be, and Miss Devereux knew it also. Talking in general terms, she helped Marian to see that it was inevitable, and nothing more foolish than for a young wife to sit down and fret about such things.

The court had left *bella Firenze*, but it was very pleasant there, nevertheless, and quite gay. Miss Devereux went out a great deal, and the Castlemaines accompanied her. Marian enjoyed society only moderately; but she tried to like it, and she was enough admired to convince Talbot that she had got her good looks back. He even ventured to hope marriage would not prove the bore he had feared it might a little time previous.

Roland Spencer, straying about Italy to find calm and forgetfulness for his wounded heart, came to Florence. Both Miss Devereux and Marian liked the young man, though the pain and bitterness of the past months had changed him too much for them to think of regarding him as a boy, after that habit of Fanny St. Simon's which had proved so dangerous to his peace.

He visited them constantly; was their cavalier among picture-galleries, churches, and all the sight-seeing generally, which was rather a drag on Castlemaine, in spite of his capability of appreciating beautiful things. His absence from these excursions cast a shadow over Marian's enjoyment, but she did not murmur even to herself. He knew Italy by heart; it was natural enough he should relegate a little of the *cicerone* business to his friends.

On the whole, it was a pleasant month to her; not like the ecstatic dream of those past weeks of married life, but bringing neither fear nor dread for the future. Miss Devereux was less tranquil, still she could do very little; if she lectured or persuaded too far, Talbot would weary of her friendship, and she lose all influence.

Yet during the last ten days of their stay there was a change in him—she could see this; could see, too, that something of importance completely engrossed him. He was unusually deferential to her—attentive to Marian—taking the trouble to account for his absence. So she knew deception was practiced, the worst feature of which, perhaps, might be that he tried to deceive himself, and meant to keep to his good resolutions. Miss Devereux was seriously alarmed.

"Lady Castlemaine seems happy," Roland Spencer said to her one day. "What a lovely little creature, and clever too, shy and retiring as she is!"

"More charming because she really does not know she is clever," returned Miss Devereux.

"A pleasant contrast to the rest of us conceited wretches. I don't mean you, for you really have a great deal of genuine modesty left."

He laughed; but he did not color in the sensitive way he would have done when Fanny St. Simon indulged in such speeches. He perceived himself how much older he had grown, and, unlike most men, it grieved him to see his youth going away.

"Sir Talbot is a fine fellow," he went on, "wonderfully attractive; yet somehow I am sorry for that little wife—she will have trouble yet! I am not wise, but any body who runs may read his character."

These two had grown exceedingly confidential, though Roland kept his one secret; it was too precious in its horrible suffering to be confided even to the warm friendship he felt for Miss Devereux.

"I hope not," she said, earnestly; "I had a great deal to do with that marriage, and should never forgive myself if matters went wrong."

"Hum!" said Roland. "She loved the man, and he had a craze for her. My dear Miss Devereux, you could not have changed any thing, whatever the circumstances were."

"I want them to go to England," she continued. "Talbot ought to have something to do—some real occupation. I am uneasy about him. These two are very dear to me. I don't know of any thing special that I dread; but I am troubled."

He was silent; there were things he could have rendered plain, but he shrunk from canvassing the man who had treated him with such generous hospitality.

"Do you go much to the *cercle*?" she asked.

"Very little; there is slight amusement except high play, and I never touch cards—at least, to risk money."

"But Talbot plays?"

"Not often, I think—"

"Then, what is engrossing him? Mr. Spencer, there is trouble near—I feel it. I can not tell you how anxious I am. Can you counsel me?"

"No; but if you have any influence, I would advise you to urge their return to England," he replied, gravely.

Marian entered at the moment, and the conversation dropped. That night Castlemaine dined out—a man's affair, he said, and lamented the necessity. It was he who had urged Spencer to console the feminines during his absence. Marian was tired, and they were to remain at home all the evening; but the fates decreed otherwise, so far as Miss Devereux was concerned. Rather late some friends called, and insisted on dragging her off to see the dress rehearsal of a new opera—at least, the closing acts of it.

In a box almost opposite that in which Miss Devereux and her party sat was a beautiful

Russian, whom Helen had seen at Naples—a woman who, though still young and belonging to one of the noblest families in her country, had lately put herself outside the pale of pardon possible even to a woman supported, as she was, by beauty, wealth, and position. I have no need to relate her history—it has nothing to do with my story. It could avail nothing to unfold the details of a scandalous chronicle which caused the beholder, when regarding that lovely creature, with her golden hair and marvelous eyes, to wonder how any human shape so perfect could hold a soul so persistently vile and determined to choose the evil.

There she sat throned in her loveliness, and as Helen looked she saw Talbot Castlemaine seated a little behind the lady, partially hidden by the draperies of the *loge*.

Miss Devereux understood every thing now, and the dolorous pang wrung her heart. She knew that Castlemaine had yielded to a second fatal weakness of his nature. It was not only the taste for gaming which had revived, but the old stories she had formerly refused more than half to credit were to find a repetition.

"There's Madame de Warloff," said the lady by Helen's side. "Have you heard she has been here ten days? The last awful business is so recent that she has been living very quietly. They do say the police forbade her driving in the Cascade: people are only just finding out she is in town."

"Do you know who that is in the box with her?" asked her husband. "He keeps in the background—no wonder. It will not be a secret long, Miss Devereux. We men are aware that he is the fair countess's constant visitor."

These were a pair of gay young French people belonging to a set Marian did not visit; it was not necessary to caution them. Helen turned sick with dread. She was too pure-minded in her maidenhood to indulge the fears which must have suggested themselves to a married woman. She only thought that if Talbot began to flirt, there was an end to Marian's peace. It did not occur to her that he would go to the length of actual infidelity; but it was horrible to think of his hanging about a woman like this, of yielding to a caprice which must bring such misery to his wife if a whisper reached her. Besides the present danger, there was that for the future. Talbot was slipping away from his good resolves. No safety—no hope; the blow must strike Marian some day!

Helen spent a sleepless night, wondering if it would be possible to do any thing, and seeing no way. But the next morning Talbot said,

"Suppose we go over to Venice, Marian. What say you, Miss Devereux?"

Helen's heart gave a great bound of joy. He recognized his peril; he was honest enough and brave enough to want to escape from it.

"I say it is a charming idea," she answered. "I am tired of Florence! Marian, do let us go at once while this man is in the mood."

Marian was pleased, and began to dream of the wonderful *piazza* and the moonlight on the broad lagoons, and to wish that she and Talbot could be alone there, then to check the thought as selfish and silly.

Talbot was always in haste when any new project seized him, so Miss Devereux felt no surprise when he proposed their setting off on the following day. Roland Spencer was invited to join the party. Miss Cordy and Mrs. Devereux were mildly acquiescent, as usual. Talbot's man went on to choose the most eligible rooms in the most comfortable hotel. Two days later they were floating down the grand canal in a *bacca*, and Helen's good spirits were only equaled by Castlemaine's.

But after this he remained very little with the rest. He told Marian so much society rather wearied him, though he would not hear of shortening their sojourn. She went about with the others, but all enjoyment was gone, and for the first time she began really to suffer.

Castlemaine staid out late at night, too, but she concealed from him the weary vigils she kept during his absence. She offered no complaint or expostulation; she accused herself rather than him, fearing that she was tiresome and unreasonable. She never doubted his word when he said he frequented a knot of men-friends he had encountered—gruff, women-hating old bachelors, he averred. She was glad he should escape boredom, kept her counsel, and had always excuses to offer for him to Miss Devereux and the rest of the group. But her woman's lot had overtaken her: there were "silent tears to weep," though as yet she was mercifully spared any suspicion that her idol was only common clay.

Ten days like these, then Miss Devereux spoke out to Roland Spencer the suspicions which had become freshly roused in her mind.

"There is something wrong; perhaps it is only that he is bored. Mr. Spencer, I found out what the matter was at Florence, though you did keep silence. I respected Talbot for coming away. May be now he is only a little wearied by his own attempt at self-control; he is not used to it. We must not be too hard."

They were drifting down one of the smaller canals in a gondola, going in search of some carved gewgaws at a *bric à brac* shop, wherewith to surprise Marian, for they were never weary of petting her.

As Helen Devereux spoke their gondola came to a stand-still; they were obliged to wait while a heavily-laden barge made room for them to pass. The gondoliers shouted; the bargemen howled. Helen leaned her head out of the little window and looked about, as Roland seemed in no mood to talk. They were stopped just under

the shadows of a vast old palace. Miss Devereux glanced up to a balcony, shaded by crimson curtains, on the first floor, and saw the beautiful Russian woman. By her side was Talbot Castlemaine.

She uttered a little cry; Spencer followed the direction of her eyes; the boat floated on.

"Did you know?" she asked.

He bowed his head.

"In Heaven's name, what am I to do?" she demanded.

"Nothing; you are powerless."

She was so shaken and troubled that he pitied her, but he had told the truth; she was powerless.

"If you reproach him, you will lose all influence," Roland added. "My dear Miss Devereux, it is useless to deceive yourself; our poor little friend has a weary future before her: that man will never change."

The end came quickly. Castlemaine went to Trieste for a day; the morning after he came back he proposed that they should depart, and a move to Milan was made the same evening.

Before many days Helen Devereux read in a morning journal an account of a duel between a Neapolitan and a noted Englishman; neither of the names was given. The paragraph went on to add that a famous Russian had been the cause.

It cost Talbot Castlemaine a good many hundred pounds to keep the names from appearing in print, but he succeeded, though there were few people except his wife who did not know his part in the affair.

He had wearied quickly enough of the Muscovite tigress with the angel-face; but the harm had been done. He had taken the first open backward step, and knew in his own soul that his former wise resolves had flown like chaff before the wind. This acknowledgment left the case more hopeless, and it is because it had this fatal effect that I have set the matter down, that you may understand just where this man stood when he again comes into my narrative.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REPRIEVE.

WEEK by week during the spring, each time Helen Devereux opened a newspaper or received a letter from Paris, she expected to meet news of the marriage of Gregory Alleyne and Fanny St. Simon. Though neither knew of the other's expectation, the same thought was in Roland Spencer's mind; but the news did not come.

The Castlemaines went to England; Miss Devereux and her mother removed northward also; Roland Spencer drifted away upon a solitary pilgrimage; the companionship of the past weeks ended.

Fanny St. Simon was not married; there had

been a reprieve granted her; she called it so, and accepted it gladly, since there was no danger of harm to her plans: from these she never for an instant wavered. But there was a sufficient reason why the marriage should be deferred, and she received it with a quiet exultation which irritated St. Simon almost beyond decency, though he had to bear it as best he might.

Toward the end of February, just as St. Simon was hoping that matters would reach a climax, and Alleyne had spoken to him wishing for a speedy marriage, news of a very sorrowful nature came. Alleyne's only sister had died suddenly, and it was a sad grief to him, for he had loved her dearly. The next steamer brought more tidings. Trouble had arisen between the executors of the lady's will and her husband. The man had never behaved well, and was now trying to deal unfairly by his step-children, for Alleyne's sister had been a widow when she made the unfortunate match which clouded the later years of her life so hopelessly that only the sunshine of a higher sphere than this could sweep the mists away.

It was absolutely necessary that Alleyne should go at once to America; he recognized this, but it was Fanny who put the matter into words.

She had been very kind during the first days of his trouble—sympathizing, thoughtful—a great comfort, he told her; and she smiled to think how odd it was that she should be a comfort to any one, and, of all men, to Gregory Alleyne.

"You must go to America," she said, after reading the letters he brought, "and you must go immediately."

"And must I go alone?" he asked.

She took his hand between hers, and answered, "I must even say yes to that. Think what all your family and friends would say. We could never explain our motives; you would be considered utterly heartless. I can not have you ill spoken of."

"My poor Florence would understand," he said, sadly. "I don't like to leave you, Fanny—not entirely from selfish reasons. I don't believe in lengthened engagements."

"The delay is unavoidable," she replied. "Perhaps it is better; we have not known one another long. We shall get more acquainted in our letters—"

"Our wedding could be very private," he broke in.

"That would not alter the fact: the blame would come all the same. No—I am right; trust me. Besides—besides—don't think me selfish! I would gladly be with you, help you, bear your trouble. But I'm a little superstitious; it would seem an evil omen. Then, I have a horrible fear of the sea—don't smile—I can give you no idea of it."

"But you do not mean that fear to banish you always from America?"

"No, of course not; but to have that dread and this great sorrow for you hanging over our wedding-day!—I can't—I can't; it is not right. We must wait—we must."

In many ways it would be better, and he yielded to Fanny's plea and to his sense of what was fitting. But he was very anxious to have the time for the marriage arrive. He was more and more satisfied of the wisdom of his choice; he enjoyed her society with constantly increasing pleasure; possessing that, he could be quiet and content. Still, there were a good many solitary, restless hours, without any defined cause, and he told himself these would end when Fanny became his wife. It was not that there were any remains of weakness in his heart—he refused to admit the possibility—but the former love and pain had left shadows behind; they would all disappear when his life brightened under new ties.

So it was decided by the betrothed pair that Alleyne should undertake his journey alone. He would be gone three months; between attending to the suit which threatened on behalf of his sister's children, and arranging some business of his own, he could not set a less term for his absence.

Three months—how pleasant they looked to Fanny! three months of entire freedom.

"March, April, May—why, it will be summer!" she said, with a sigh which struck his ear like a tone of regret, though it came from the very fullness of content.

"It is so pleasant to think you will miss me," he replied. "And when I come back, Fanny—then shall I have my wife?"

"You shall ask me that question as early in the autumn as you please—not before," she said. "I can not well say all I think; it would sound foolish; but I'll write it. You will be punctual about your letters? I hate waiting."

"You will probably have quite as many as you can easily read," he answered. "The weather is very fine; I dare say I shall have a comfortable voyage, though it is early."

His words quickened a new thought into action in Fanny St. Simon's mind—not roused it, for she knew now that it had been vaguely haunting her ever since the project of his departure came under discussion. But the thought rose clear and distinct, and grew of immense importance.

Suppose any thing should happen to him!—she put it to herself in this fashion. The weather was always capricious at this season of the year; a sea voyage had its dangers. If any thing should happen to him! She was not his wife; she had no legal claim. If by her refusal to allow the wedding to take place she lost all hope of his fortune! There was nothing left for her in this world except money, or rather the ease and power which money brings; if she should

lose that hope! What would be the fortune she had dreamed of early in the winter, even if realized, compared to the millions this man possessed, and which of late she had regarded as certain to gild her days?

"What are you thinking of, Fanny?" he asked, suddenly. "Don't look so grave."

"I was thinking that the summer looks very far off," she said, softly. "Never mind; don't let's talk of it. I mean to be very brave, I assure you."

This woman loved him; he was really and honestly dear to her; it was a sweet thought to his solitary heart.

"I have a few days yet," he said. "I can not sail before next week."

"So soon?" she cried. "Yes, yes—don't say a word! Well, the sooner you go, the sooner you will come back. We'll at least enjoy these last days all we can. Thank goodness, you will have no business to interfere while on this side the water. I hate business! I remember when uncle went away last year, he made the last days torture to me by his talk—explaining just what we had, arranging his will, settling every thing, he said, so that in case he never came back— Oh, it was horrible!" she broke off, with a shudder.

Alleyne stood reflecting for a moment.

"I have very little to do—nothing to bother us; but I must attend to certain matters. I'll go now, Fanny. May I come to dinner?"

"I should like to see you venture to dine anywhere else!" she said. "But why must you go?"

"Only to arrange what you hate—a little business—and be done." He paused, then added seriously, "Fanny, I shall come back—some way I have no fear of that; but it is only wise to be prudent. I am a very rich man; you have never let me speak of this—"

"And there's no need now, certainly," she interrupted. "I don't want to hear about it."

"Only this: if—if any thing happens to me, Fanny, I can trust you to use this fortune like the stewardship I feel it; and I must arrange all that before I go."

"How can you be so cruel?" she cried, turning away after one tender, reproachful glance.

"Wait, Fanny: you don't understand."

"And I don't want to!" she exclaimed, vehemently. "Why do you choose a time like this to talk about your wealth? What is that to me? I don't care if it be a grant or a million, especially just now. I think you are unkind—very unkind!"

"My dearest Fanny—"

"Am I really?" she broke in, her face growing sunny again—"really and truly, Gregory?"

"You know that—you must know it," he said.

She had come close to him; he passed his arm about her waist and made her sit beside him.

"Then, if I am, don't say a word more of all those horrid matters. Why, you give me a sort of a chill!"

"Only listen for a moment."

"No, no!" She put her fingers in her ears in a childish way, laughing, yet apparently half afraid. But when she saw how serious he looked, she became grave, and added, "I beg your pardon! I am very silly—you took me by surprise. I will listen; only don't say any thing that suggests such awful possibilities in regard to your journey."

"I merely want to talk to you about what it is right for me to do," he said. "This fortune—"

"Ah, Gregory."

"One instant—you will see then."

She sighed, but motioned him to continue. She would have made the loveliest possible study for a picture of resignation.

"It is a great trust," he continued, "and must be wisely employed."

Her face changed again. She laid her hand on his, murmuring,

"Forgive me; I begin to understand."

"Papers which I shall leave will show you what my plans are," he said; "what projects I had traced for the future. All these can, and, if necessary, I should wish to be, modified by your judgment; for the power and responsibility, in the event of my death, must rest with you."

She drew away the hand he had clasped, and shaded her eyes.

"You don't think me cruel?" he asked.

"You see now that it is necessary I should speak of these things."

"Yes," she answered, slowly. "A great trust. Well, I must bear this too."

She was neither shrinking nor eager. He had pointed out the right course, and she was ready to follow it, putting aside her own pain at the possibility suggested by his words; her manner as she listened implied all this. He had never admired or respected her more than at this moment. He felt a warm tenderness, too, for her gentle heart. She looked very pale, but calm—unnaturally so, he thought—and knew that she was making a great effort to subdue her feelings.

After he had fully explained his intentions, he said,

"Now we understand one another thoroughly. When I come back this evening, every thing will be settled and my mind at rest."

"At least this is a comfort," she replied, smiling sadly. "Perhaps mine will be, too, if I can get rid of all the nervous fancies your talk has conjured up."

So then he did his best to comfort her, and spoke of his return and all the events which were to follow; and Fanny told him that he had succeeded in his efforts at consolation.

He came to dinner, and the Tortoise warmed

into unusual animation at his appearance: he was a great favorite with her.

"I wondered why you didn't come," she said. "I've learned a new stitch in crochet, and wanted to show it to you."

"Perhaps you will let me see it now," he answered.

"Yes; only may be I have forgotten it. I do forget things; but Fanny will remember," she said, plaintively. "I had it all in my head this morning, if you had only come then. Where have you been all day?"

"Busy with a very tiresome individual," he replied.

"Lor!" cried the Tortoise. "You don't mean St. Simon?"

It was impossible to avoid laughing; but she looked so serious and puzzled that he hastened to explain.

"It was a lawyer; lawyers are always tiresome creatures, you know."

"Are they the men that sell one's furniture and things?" asked the Tortoise. "Oh no—they've another name, something like scraph, though it's not that."

"Sheriff, perhaps."

"I dare say," and the Tortoise shivered. Probably she had many times made acquaintance with members of that class in the course of her long pilgrimage by St. Simon's side. "So you've seen a lawyer!"

Fanny, just entering, caught the word and stopped. He moved forward to meet her.

"My mind is quite at rest," he said, noticing a look of pain in her face. "I have done what was right and best—put accident out of the question. Dear girl, don't be troubled; we will talk no more about it. I shall send you some papers in the morning which you may never need to read; if you should, you will not be at a loss how to act, for every thing will be in your hands."

The news of his departure came out during dinner, and St. Simon was paralyzed at Fanny's madness in not accompanying him. The Tortoise grew tearful, and sniffed a great deal.

"Dear, dear!" sighed she, "every body goes away. I don't like it."

"You should emulate Miss Fanny's composure," said St. Simon, with a sneer.

Fanny looked a very pretty martyr, and Alleyne eagerly explained why she allowed him to go alone; he could not have her blamed.

"None of my business, of course," returned St. Simon, and had hard work not to give way to his temper.

He made amends for his enforced self-control when the guest was gone, and this was the occasion of his flinging decency to the winds. Fanny allowed him to rave unheeded.

"You're a fool!" said he at last. "Suppose the steamer should go down, and he with it?"

"Haven't I the silver mine and my affectionate uncle?" she asked.

"To run any risk!" he continued. "Why, the mine will never bring a quarter of his fortune. I did think you had some sense. I am utterly disgusted. It is not too late: tell him you can't let him go alone; tell him—"

"Don't waste your invention finding eloquent outbursts, St. Simon. I don't think, with all your craft, you could have done as well as I."

"I can't say I perceive the evidences of your great wisdom," he snarled.

"You'll ruin your sweet voice," said Fanny. "St. Simon, if I were as wicked as you, I should pray to my—no, your—friend, the devil, that the steamer might go down, and this man with it."

"Now what—I do think you have gone mad. What is your riddle?"

"None! Gregory Alleyne is a prudent man, and has made his will. If he were to be drowned, the silly mad woman, your niece, would be the inheritor of his fortune, that is all. Good-night, St. Simon. Don't lose your sleep on account of my folly."

St. Simon at first felt more angry than ever that he had gone into a passion when there was no cause; but this soon yielded to his appreciation of Fanny's skill and tact. He went to bed in a comfortable frame of mind, and slept as tranquilly as if his conscience had never borne a weight and his brain were free from either plot or scheme.

Yet he had enough on his hands at this time—enough to exercise to the utmost all his astute mental powers, whatever their effect on that inward monitor which St. Simon would have considered it a weakness to heed.

He was playing a dangerous game; but he saw his way clearly, and never hesitated for an instant. He possessed two confidential associates just where they were needed—the man who had the sole direction at the mines, and the director in New York, who had in reality the charge of all important matters. Whatever came, these three were certain to win; St. Simon retaining the lion's share, and ruling the others by secrets which left them at his mercy. So it was not difficult to keep back sums of money—to defer, to borrow, to have a double set of books, if necessary, for the benefit of the prime movers in the concern. There was a secret between St. Simon and the agent at the mines which was not even known to the trusted director in New York. If a fear which these two shared was not realized, then there was no doubt of ultimate fortune for company and stockholders alike. A few months would decide. If the fears that St. Simon and the agent held proved correct, at least they would not lose, whoever else might be ruined.

St. Simon believed he could play his part too, in case the worst threatened, so that he should escape without suspicion. It might be requisite

to sacrifice his tool in New York, but he would have no scruples about this. He should not fail. He held the threads of the web securely in his own hands; he could not fail.

To show prudence in his expenditure when large sums of money were passing through his hands, portions of which could cling to his fingers unsuspected, was out of the question. If the mines continued reliable, these could easily be replaced; if failure came, then, in the ruin which awaited the confidential director, these matters would go to load his burden still heavier.

No, St. Simon could not be prudent; he could neither let cards alone nor check himself in other vices which I need not particularize. Madame de M—— still reigned in her elegant hotel, and there were others to claim a share of the spoil, with a talent for spending it equal to St. Simon's own.

But every thing prospered with him. It was the golden triumph of his life, and he was a man to be intoxicated by it. Practical and calm as he appeared, he was a visionary all the same; and having arranged his plans for getting out of the affair with clean palms in case of disaster, he rushed on, and enjoyed his triumph to the utmost.

St. Simon was very popular in these days, and among persons who prided themselves on their wisdom and position Mrs. Pattaker idolized him. Sir John Dudgeon swore by him, and Colonel Judd was his staunch ally. People would as soon have thought of disputing the commonest fact, such as that the earth turned on its axis, or spring followed winter, as have dreamed of casting a doubt upon the Nevada silver mine at this season. The members of the company had as much faith in St. Simon as the world at large, and he rode easily and gracefully upon the topmost wave, and floated over a summer sea of success in a very gorgeous bark indeed.

The days which preceded Gregory Alleyne's departure were sad ones to the earnest-hearted man. He was sorry to leave Fanny behind; he dreaded the solitude which for so long had been peopled with desolate phantoms. The reasons for his journey were known to every body, so that even the most imaginative gossip could not indulge in a hint that the engagement had come to an end. That excellent woman, Mrs. Pattaker, professed herself exceedingly glad of this; she was greatly attached to Miss St. Simon, with all her faults, and should have been grieved indeed had any trouble arisen. Since she could not lament over a rupture, this was the next most consolatory thing to say; and she said it over and over, and Miss Langois quoted it, and they both suggested to Fanny that malicious people would try to believe she had lost Gregory Alleyne.

Fanny was only amused by their solicitude, but Alleyne waxed indignant when she repeated the

speeches to him, and took care that it should be known he had pleaded against any delay in their marriage, and that it was only the scruples of his betrothed which caused it. So then Mrs. Pat-taker said the trust he showed was a lovely sight in this weary world of doubt and disappointment. She hoped—ah, how earnestly! that no trouble might ever reach him through his affection for this wayward but charming young woman, because she was devoted to Miss St. Simon in spite of her faults.

Gregory Alleyne sailed for America, and Fanny had leisure to study the papers he left—papers which were to be read in case he never returned; but probably Fanny thought it well to familiarize herself with his wishes under any circumstances. These documents told her in what his property consisted, stated the charities and other ends to which he devoted large sums annually. He added, with many tender words, that if it became necessary to open the will deposited with his lawyer (the will which bequeathed almost the whole of this vast fortune to her), he knew it would be her pleasure to follow out his plans, and those he had laid down for the future—modified, of course, in any manner which unforeseen exigencies or her clear intellect might suggest.

"He will come back," thought Fanny, as she put the letters aside. "If I loved him, Fate would take a serene pleasure in his drowning; but he will come back."

Gregory Alleyne was gone, and Fanny had her life free once more for a season, though she asked bitterly why she should be glad, since she had no use to make of her freedom. A little later she heard of Lady Castlemaine's illness at Nice. She thought very calmly that if it should please her ladyship to go out of the world, and Gregory Alleyne saw fit to follow, then, indeed, a whole new existence might unfold before herself.

Most persons would have shrunk from openly contemplating such possibilities—would have covered them under specious names; but Fanny was past attempting any deception with her soul. She wished heartily that Lady Castlemaine might go to heaven, and Alleyne set off in pursuit of her. They were both good and virtuous, so heaven was certain to be their portion. But she had no hope of so dramatic a *dénouement*.

"The people who ought to die never do," was her theory, and she expressed it to the Tortoise, because these fancies chanced to enter her mind when she was sitting with her relative, after having read a paragraph in regard to Marian's illness in a late *Galilani*. "No, T., those are the persons that live forever."

The Tortoise looked up from the mass of tangled crochet which she believed a miracle of art, and became tearful at once.

"I oughtn't to die, ought I, Fanny?" she sniffed, staring apprehensively at her niece, as if she expected to be ordered off to instant execution,

and had no sufficient excuse to offer for hesitating. "I am very comfortable; and now that we have a carriage and good dinners, and St. Simon doesn't take my diamonds, I like living well enough. You don't want me to die, do you?"

"Would not have you die for the world, T.!" laughed Fanny. "Live as long as you can, enjoy your good dinners, and keep your diamonds hid from St. Simon in your shoe."

"Sh! Don't say out loud where I have them," returned the Tortoise, winking and blinking. "One never knows what St. Simon may hear."

"But he is not in the house, T."

"No matter—one never knows! Say—let me see—say cupboard when you mean shoe," she gasped, quite exhausted by her brilliant effort at diplomacy.

Fanny watched her, and wondered if in her younger days longings for release had haunted the soul now grown dull and helpless.

"Did you ever wish to die, T.?" she asked.

The Tortoise had resumed her torturing of the worsted, but she laid her work down again, and looked more vague and puzzled than ordinary in the unusual attempt at recollection with which Fanny's question had inspired her.

"Wish to die?" she repeated, in a rather awed tone.

"Yes; when you were young, and things looked black, and there seemed no hope anywhere."

"It seems to me I did," returned the Tortoise, slowly. "When I was young, you know: I was very young when St. Simon married me."

"Yes; and you did wish it?"

"I think so; I had not got used to things. But I don't mind now; that was a great while ago."

She never complained of her husband; indeed, she seldom spoke of him unless his name was mentioned. If he went away, and remained absent several weeks, she gradually became less nervous, and almost ceased to jump and flutter if any one spoke suddenly, or came upon her unawares. Still, she was not uncomfortable exactly in his society, nowadays, and Fanny often felt curious to know whether there had formerly been real capabilities of suffering in her nature.

"Used you to cry, T.?" she asked.

"Oh my, yes! I remember that. Day and night—day and night! But it seems so long ago. Somehow it doesn't seem as if it was me," she replied, in the same slow way. "You needn't mention it to St. Simon, you know; he might not like my remembering things."

"Of course not. But what did you cry about?"

"Oh! I can't tell. Sometimes one thing, sometimes another; and I always did hate to be pinched, Fanny!"

"Most people do, I imagine. But that was

not all; there were debts, and gambling, and all sorts of things—oh?"

"Oh yes," said the Tortoise, shuddering; but still with that same apparent effort at recollection, and the odd uncertainty as to whether it could really have been she who bore those trials. "Well, then the baby died—then I had that dreadful fever! I never minded things so much after. Just turn your back, Fanny; I want to sneeze."

"Did St. Simon like the baby?" inquired Fanny, when the little snuff-taking process was finished.

"Oh no!" replied the Tortoise, in a matter-of-course tone. "He said it looked like a rat; but it did not: it was a beautiful baby."

"What ailed it, T.?"

"I don't know; I was only just up. Where were we? Oh yes—New Orleans. St. Simon said we must go away—we were always having to go away from somewhere—and we had a hard journey, because he wanted to go by land to some city—may be in Georgia. There weren't many railways, you know, then; and I got tired, and lost my milk, and so the poor baby pined and died. It was after that I had the fever; so it's all mixed up in my mind."

She was placid and composed, though she wiped a few tears from her eyes.

"It was such a pretty baby, Fanny. Well, then—oh, St. Simon got tired, for I was a long while before I could get straight. He said he would shut me up if I did not hurry; but he never did."

Fanny's nerves were by no means weak, but she shuddered a little at the dismal history rendered plain by the Tortoise's simple words, though the creature herself was calm, and maundered on in her usual fashion.

"Poor T.!" Fanny said, involuntarily.

"Yes—it wasn't nice," she answered; "I hated the idea of being shut up. I read once in some book that they pinch people there, too. I never liked that, you remember."

Fanny could easily believe that the days had been when the Tortoise lived in actual physical fear. She could herself remember St. Simon much more violent than he showed of late years; but her own temper had even then, child as she was, proved a match for his, and he had soon grown cautious of exciting it.

"Then it is all a good deal jumbled up," the Tortoise said, pursuing the tangled thread of her recollections. "We were always going about from pillar to post, till I got so confused I couldn't tell my night-cap from a pocket-handkerchief."

She looked so perplexed that Fanny hastened to give her a clue, or at least some one important event on which to rest her memory.

"And at last you came to Europe."

"Oh yes—that was it."

"And you have never been back?"

"Oh dear, no—the sea and all! Then it seems to me I never could keep still there—we always traveled so much; and the baby, you know—I should expect to find it, and be disappointed; no, I never wanted to go back," droned the Tortoise. "It was such a pretty baby, Fanny—such a pretty baby!"

She must have suffered in her day. Fanny felt sure of that now. For years little more than the material part of her had been alive. She was neither deranged nor idiotic; strangers simply considered her a stupid, sleepy, dumpy woman, with a genius for losing her clothes. But Fanny knew that some time she had been different. She could picture the life of which that journey was an example.

"I have always been more comfortable since you came over here to us," continued the Tortoise, suddenly. "You are very clever, Fanny. You can even outmanoeuvre St. Simon; and I never thought any body could do that."

Fanny laughed at the honesty of the doubtful praise.

"I should think it must be time for my cup of tea," sighed the Tortoise; "I feel such a sinking. My digestion is so quick!"

She could eat, sleep, and answer when people spoke to her. Fanny reflected that it was well other capabilities had one by one died out; she was contented in a mushroom sort of fashion.

"And it is a good deal to reach that," thought Fanny. "One might be worse off than poor T. I may long for a mushroom stage myself before I die."

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CHAPTER XXV

A DAY AT BADEN.

It was almost August. The latter part of the "season" the Castlemaines had spent in London. Marian, of course, went through the ceremony of presentation at court, and had her part in the whirl of amusements wherewith society dooms unfortunates to bore themselves. She was well received, and called pretty, but achieved none of the success which is so dear to most girls of her age. Her hopeless shyness stood in the way of any real enjoyment, and the round of pleasures and excitements only confused and troubled her. The few people who had leisure actually to become acquainted were warm in their praise, and formed strong attachments for her; but to the world in general she appeared merely a dainty bit of still life; and the gay associates who welcomed Sir Talbot among them again so gladly wondered a great deal how he had happened to choose her as the sharer of his new title and wealth.

His own popularity was immense; his old follies (nobody dreamed of giving to them a

harsher name now) were passed over with considerate leniency, and society elected him one of her chief favorites. Marriageable young ladies and married women with coquettish instincts, half blamed, half pitied him for his choice of a wife, the latter portion of the fair sex inclining much to sympathy, and exhibiting a charitable disposition to console him in his mistake.

If Marian had achieved a triumph, and entered the lists among those queens of the gay world, Castlemaine would have been annoyed; yet she might have stood more chance of keeping a hold on his wayward fancy. Her reserved, quiet manners; her habit of seeking shelter under the hearse-like plumes of massive dowagers; her herding with the ancient wall-flowers who decorate festive scenes, fretted him; and the very fact that she seemed to consider herself a rather unimportant personage caused him to regard her in this light also.

When they were alone—which happened seldom—her loving gentleness became a weariness, and her enthusiasm and pretty fancies, which he had at first found interesting, appeared childish and silly. She was not strong yet, and was often glad to remain at home; but he did not stay with her—still keeping up a sufficient pretense to offer excuses—and Marian never complained. She began to have a dread of his growing bored; she had discovered that his facilities in this line were extreme, though inclined to think she must be in fault.

The bloom was wearing rapidly off her dream, and she was utterly at a loss how to change any thing. But she bore her burden in silence, lest Talbot should be wearied by her reproaches or complaints. She was not conscious of possessing any talent at reading character, yet she began to understand her husband's, still not blaming him in her thoughts. She perceived his weaknesses, his love of adulation, his utter inability to resist flirting with each pretty face he met, and she suffered. But, childish and weak as most people thought her, she was capable of a self-control few women of her age could have shown.

Toward the end of June she grew so weak and delicate that the medical men advised her trying country air without delay. Talbot heard the verdict amiably enough, and went with her to Castlemaine Park. After a few days he told her he must return to town; and for several weeks she remained alone with Grandma Payne, who was terribly indignant at such conduct on Sir Talbot's part, but found no opportunity even to hint her feelings to Marian.

They seemed long and dreary to the poor child, those bright summer days; yet she maintained a cheerful demeanor, wrote loving letters to Talbot, pleasant ones to Miss Devereux, and bore her burden alone. She believed still that Talbot loved her, but she saw that her impor-

tance in his life was slight. She thought sadly that perhaps this must always be the case with a woman; love was not so much to men as to her sex.

If her hope of the early spring could only have been realized—if she had become a mother! No mortal knew how Marian grieved over that disappointment. Life was rapidly growing real enough: sometimes it occurred to her that hers would not be a long one, and the idea brought her no pain.

At last Castlemaine came back. He soon bored himself terribly in that dull place, and proposed to Marian that they should go to Homburg and Baden. This, report said, was the final season of attraction in those gay haunts; the Empress Augusta had inspired her imperial spouse with conscientious scruples, and the gaming-tables were to be abolished. Marian ought to see those famous resorts before they were denuded of their present fascinations, and Marian tried to feel grateful for his kindness, and to believe that his proposal was dictated by the reasons which he gave.

To Homburg they went, and at the expiration of a fortnight Talbot was so disgusted with his ill-luck that he hated the place, and they moved on to Baden.

At the hotel, where they had an apartment so spacious and grand that poor Marian felt lost in it, she met a little party of English acquaintances who liked and appreciated her. Baden promised to prove less solitary and tiresome than Homburg, and she was glad to be there.

It was the third day after their arrival. An Austrian lady whom Talbot knew was giving a *fête-champêtre* at her villa, a few miles from the town, and the Castlemaines were invited. Marian was not well enough to go, but she urged Talbot to accept the invitation, and, as he had from the first the intention of so doing, naturally he acted in accordance with her advice.

It was almost sunset, however, before he reached the house. As usual, he had changed his mind and elected to remain at home, then at the last moment decided anew in favor of boring himself for a while.

He had paid his compliments to the hostess, greeted numbers of old acquaintances, listened and replied to pretty speeches till he loathed every thing and every body, and wondered why he came. Existence was rather a burden at this time, in spite of his having gained the wealth and position which he had always thought would bring content.

The bare fact that he was married and "done for" seemed to render life stale and unprofitable. He hated to think that his destiny was settled; the idea fretted him like a goad. After all, perhaps he could have done no better, since matrimony was an "institution" of civilized lands. At least Marian never teased or worried him;

but she was childish and insipid; a storm now and then might prove an agreeable variety.

There were gay parties scattered about the lawn—the luncheon tents were still crowded—music sounded from the dancing-room. It was all a bore—the women hideous, the men idiots! Talbot wandered discontentedly about, conscious that he was looking dreadfully English and unapproachable, and rendered the more irritable by this consciousness.

He entered the house, strayed through room after room, still meeting people he knew, forced to talk, and wishing that he and the rest of the world were deaf and dumb, and that the language of signs had never been invented for the convenience of mutes.

He found himself on a balcony at the back of the *salons*, giving on the gardens. The sounds of music and laughing voices floated up, softened by the distance. The last glory of the sunset tinted the flowering vines. Here was a quiet nook at last—not a soul in sight. Yes, by Jove! there was somebody at the farther end of the balcony—a woman. Why—

Castlemaine looked again, and his impatient thoughts gave way to other emotions. Sitting there among the flowers and green leaves he beheld Fanny St. Simon, leaning over the railing, and gazing away out at the sunset.

He hurried forward, exclaiming,

"May one venture to call you down from dream-land?"

She turned her head slowly; there was neither surprise nor wonder in her face. The great luminous eyes rested softly on him; her lips parted in a smile whose witchery might well have been dangerous even to a man steeled against feminine fascinations. An emotion so strange, so profound, shook his very soul, that after those first words he stood absolutely silent, till at length her voice roused him.

"I was wondering if you would find me out," she said. "I heard you were coming. I was tired—they made me dance—so I got away here to rest for a little. Isn't that a glorious sunset? Do you remember the sunsets at Sorrento? I can hear the waves now and smell the tuberose that filled the garden; do you recollect?"

Then she touched his eagerly extended hand with her fingers, and laughed softly, adding, before he could speak,

"But you are married and dull and respectable in these days, and have prettier things to think of than sunsets that vanished ages ago, and roses that have been dead an eternity. How do you do, Mr. Castlemaine? Since you have come up like a ghost into the midst of my dream, why don't you behave civilly?—even ghosts ought to do that. Say how do you do, and don't stand there like the statue of the Commandatore, else I shall be afraid."

"I am so glad to see you—so very glad!" he

cried, forgetting his elegant drawl and his aristocratic listlessness. "I have only just come to Baden, and did not know you were here."

Could it be that he had absolutely forgotten her—had not thought of her for months? A place different from that occupied by any other woman she had always held in his memory, when he did think of her, and here she was now more fascinating than ever—the glamour of her eyes deepened—that wonderful smile more thrilling—each curve of the willowy form more graceful and perfect than of old.

Fanny St. Simon read every thought in his mind as easily as if he had given them utterance. She sat looking full in his face with a pensive, abstracted gaze, which somehow made him comprehend that she was dreaming still of those Italian sunsets they had watched side by side, inhaling anew the odor of the white blossoms he had woven in her hair.

"Are you glad to see me?" he asked.

"No—yes—I can't tell," she answered.

"After one's friends have dropped out of one's life it hardly ever answers to welcome them back."

"I don't quite understand that remarkable assertion," said he.

"Because when every thing is changed, the old friendship can not go on as it used; and it's dreary work falling down to simple acquaintanceship. Now you and I were good friends—real friends, who could talk freely, and tell each other the truth."

She spoke with such perfect composure, that it occurred to him he had been presumptuous and rather asinine in deciding so quickly that the memory of the vanished Italian days had any special power over her.

"I hope we may be on the same terms still; I can't perceive why we should not be," he replied, in an injured tone.

"That is delightful!" cried she, gayly. "Didn't I begin by telling you that now you were dull, respectable, married? Men's wives don't approve of their husbands' old friends."

"I assure you that you will find mine an exception—"

"I have no doubt that Lady Castlemaine is perfection! By-the-bye, I forgot to give you the benefit of your title; but I do not forget that of your wife. And so you think the dispenser of your fate would tolerate me? What is she like—pretty, of course? Come, you are still new enough husband to be romantic. You must have her picture hidden somewhere close to your heart. Show it me?"

"One is not exactly a bridegroom after eight or nine months," he said, somewhat annoyed by her laughing at him.

"You frighten me! Does the romance wear off so quickly? Now that fills me with personal dread! I have scarcely the heart to ask you to

congratulate me, and offer good wishes in my behalf."

"I was not aware—I had not heard—"

He looked fairly awkward.

"Ah, you have been living in fairy-land," said she. "Yes, I am going to try the venture also; is it very tiresome?"

"Do I know the fortunate person?" he asked.

"I think not—Mr. Gregory Alleyne; he is an American."

"Young?"

"Certainly—rather handsome too! Did you think I meant to sell myself to some old fright?"

"No, no! And—and—you are very happy, I suppose; you find him an Adonis, and—"

"And—and—you are very happy, I suppose," repeated she, "and very much in love."

"Oh, the cases are not parallel. I have been in the harness so long."

"You asked me if I was glad to see you," said she, gravely; "I find I am not."

"May I ask why?"

"Because you do not come with the old friendliness and frankness. You think you must speak as you would to the world at large. You are ashamed to let me see that you can be romantic, that you are happy; you fear it would look weak and silly—and yet you married for love."

"I don't know why I married: I was just asking myself."

She gave him one quick, sympathetic glance, then shook her head reprovingly.

"Don't say such things," she said.

"Yet you were just declaring that you wanted the truth," returned he. "Ah, it is you who will not let the old friendship come back; and I need it: I am lonely, and weary, and desolate. There, I'm honest enough; scold me, if you like."

"I have not the right any longer," she said, with a sigh. "But your wife—tell me about her."

"She is a child—a baby; the best little thing in the world—much too good for me."

"May I come to see her?" she asked.

"Marian will be charmed."

"I hope she will try to like me," said Fanny.

"As if she could do otherwise! And I suppose I am to be presented to this Mr. Alleyne; I warn you in advance I shall hate him."

"You can defer your hatred for the present," she replied; "he is in America—been there for several months—detained by business and illness."

"And you did not fly to him?" he asked, with harsh sarcasm.

"There are things women can not do," she said, seriously. "We are fettered by a thousand rules; must sit still and bear our anxieties and make no sign, at the risk of being called bold and unfeminine."

"And will your amiable anxiety soon be ended?" he demanded.

"Mr. Alleyne writes me that he fears he can not return before September."

"Well, I'm glad of that!" cried Castlemaine. She looked at once vexed and amused.

"That is not polite," said she. "Now, listen, Sir Talbot—"

"You used to call me Talbot," he interrupted.

"I will now, if Lady Castlemaine has no objection," said she.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"To what shall I listen?" he asked.

"Just this: I am glad to see you—to have my friend back; but don't talk the platitudes of society, don't make such speeches as that was—as you talk to women with whom you are having a flirtation: I don't mean to be on those terms."

"I consent to any terms you may insist upon," he cried.

"I want your wife to like me—I want to be the friend of both. If you will let me, I shall be very glad you have come once more within reach of my life."

"Did you miss me?" he asked, eagerly.

"Oh yes," she said; "I missed you dreadfully for a long time."

"If I had known—"

"Don't be foolish, Talbot!" The color deepened in her cheeks, but she quieted her emotion, and added, calmly, "That is nonsense, and you are aware of it. The last time we met was last autumn; you went away from me with perfect indifference."

"It is not true. I had to go—I was *crible* with debt; ruin stared me in the face—"

"And you were hurrying to England to ask Miss Devereux to marry you," she added.

"Why didn't you do it?"

"Oh, Lord, it's a very crazy story!" he cried.

"I'd like to tell you—I want you to understand—"

"One moment first," interrupted Fanny; "let me make *you* understand. I am not reproaching you—we were only friends; I had no right or wish to stop your marrying Miss Devereux, or any other iceberg hung with diamonds."

"Let me tell you!"

"So I will, but don't get the idea that I want to do sentiment or mean you to flirt with me."

"We were very happy those weeks in Italy," he said, abruptly.

"Very happy—but we have nothing to do with them now. Let us be friends, Talbot. Tell me about yourself."

And he did tell her—every thing. It was like recalling a dream, to go over the events before his marriage. He termed the hopes and aims he had formed then absurd nonsense; he really believed as he talked, that the chief reason which had led to his marriage was that he found he had won Marian's heart. He described his efforts since to be patient and decorous, his weariness, his mingled pity and irritation toward his

wife. He talked well and eloquently, and Fanny St. Simon was moved as only his voice could move her.

"I am very sorry for you both," she said, when he had finished. "You have to thank Miss Devereux; if she had let you alone, all would have ended well enough. She must needs meddle—regulate—rule. She has ruined your life, and Marian's too."

Castlemaine was struck with this view of the case; it *was* the American's fault, and he cursed her in his heart.

"At least now you can see how much I need your friendship," he said, drearily.

"And it will not fail you; I promise that," Fanny answered. "I expected to find you happy, to see you adoring your little wood-blossom."

"Would you have been glad?" he asked.

She had no wish to let him see all that was in her heart; not the least intention of yielding to this wild love which sprung up more potent than ever in her soul. They would be friends—that was all life had left her; she would enjoy this boon to the utmost. But she had no mind to play the fool; no thought of endangering her future by drifting into a sentimental flirtation with this man.

"Would you have been glad?" he repeated.

She turned angrily upon him.

"You want to think I would have suffered; it would gratify your vanity, I suppose," she said, bitterly.

"Fanny, Fanny!"

The pleading tones, the thrilling eyes, shook her self-control severely, but she was strong enough in these days to act her part. She could take care of herself now; and, indeed, there would be a pleasure, moved as he was at sight of her, in letting him gain a perception of what he had lost by his indolence or lack of strength.

"Yes, that is what you want," she continued. "Bah, Talbot Castlemaine, do you expect women to suffer forever, when you men can so easily forget?"

"You did care!" he cried. "You can not deny that you cared!"

"Yes, I cared," she answered, steadily. "I am not in the least ashamed to acknowledge it; I cared. Look back over that time in Italy: did you not mean me to care? Ah, well! we were very happy for a while—very happy, were we not? It is like looking back on a dream, or reading a pretty story about somebody else. How long ago it seems! And you cared too, Talbot, *n'est ce pas?*"

"I loved you!" he exclaimed, with flashing, eager eyes; "I loved you!"

"Very well; you are not to tell me of it now," she replied, her voice, which had suddenly softened, growing calm again. "I tell you I want no nonsense. I shall be glad of a friend; if you

can not prove one, honest and true, keep away from me. Choose!"

"I will be your friend. It is the greatest happiness life could give me," he cried. "I know we must not go over the past—we'll leave it forever; but do me justice."

"I do. I know you could not marry me. I never blamed you. I don't blame myself either for what I am about to do."

"And you—you are fond of this man?"

"He is as much too good for me as Marian is for you," she replied. "I mean to be a tolerable wife."

"When did you meet him?"

"At the time you were wooing the heiress."

"And your engagement?"

"I'm not good at dates," she replied, carelessly. "I don't like questions either, as a rule. If you are quite satisfied, let us talk of other things. Don't make me think we have both grown rusty and dull."

But he stood mute under the gust of angry reflection which shook his soul. How could he have been so mad—so mad? How could he have forgotten this rare creature in a dream so weak and puerile as that wherewith he had fettered his life! He was ready to beat his own heart out and stamp on it, in the rage and bitterness which these wild reflections caused him. He had known many fancies, but he loved this woman; he loved her, and now she was out of his reach.

"If I had known—if I could have broken through the bonds which held me!" he exclaimed at last.

"Don't let us talk nonsense," returned she; and her tone sounded at once mocking and sad. "The past is dead and gone, and its possibilities are gone with it. I dare say we are quite as well off without them."

"How can you speak like that, Fanny?"

"There, there! How can I? Because I am alive and in the actual world, and don't mean to go peeping into dream-land again."

"Just let me say—"

She started to her feet and moved away, signing him to stand back as he attempted to follow. If her first intention was to leave him, she relinquished it. For several moments she walked up and down the balcony in silence. The gray of twilight gathered about; the music and laughter still floated up from the distant lawn. She returned to his side as abruptly as she had gone.

"Now, if you please, we will go back to the people," she said. "The day and hour that these subjects came up between us again will be the signal of our parting forever. Is it a bargain?"

He bowed his head.

"Then take me out among the dancers. We have not had a *valse* together for ages."

"You are enough to drive one mad!" he cried, passionately.

"Then you had better go by yourself," she answered, firmly. "Understand, I mean to have no nonsense. I will be your friend—your wife's friend, if she will let me; but we have done with the past, and I warn you that the most rigid prude would more easily pardon the insolence of an allusion to it than I."

She was in earnest; her eyes flashed; her voice rang out sharp and clear.

"Fanny—"

"Make up your mind, here and now. If you can be friends, take my hand; if not, walk through that door, and leave me my life to myself."

He took her hand, laid it softly on his arm with a deep respect in which there was no tinge of mockery. With his usual facility for self-deception, Talbot Castlemaine believed that he could keep to the letter of the bond she offered.

CHAPTER XXII.

DANGEROUS GROUND.

WHEN the month of June brought letters from Alleyne announcing an added delay instead of the expected tidings of his speedy return, Fanny St. Simon fully appreciated the increased reprove thus afforded her.

Not only was the lawsuit still trailing its slow length, but a new trouble had assailed Alleyne. The only daughter of his late sister, a girl of sixteen, had suddenly changed from delicacy and languor, which had never created much anxiety, into a rapid breaking-up of strength; and the physicians warned her uncle that if she lived until autumn, it was all he could hope. The girl was too weak to attempt a sea-voyage, and it was impossible for Alleyne to leave her, as, besides him, with the exception of her youthful brothers, she had no near relative to offer the care and attention which her state demanded.

When St. Simon heard the news, he insisted that there was but one course for Fanny to pursue. He must go with her to America, and the marriage take place. It was plain, he said, from Alleyne's letter, that the man looked for some such generous offer on her part.

"Then he will be disappointed," replied Fanny, coolly. "I have no fancy for playing nurse to a peevish girl, nor—"

"You could have people enough to take care of her," broke in St. Simon.

"Nor shall I make so undignified a proposal to Mr. Alleyne," she continued, without noticing her uncle's parenthesis. "He does not expect it. Such an offer would be as troublesome in the state of his affairs as it would be poetical. You are too romantic by half, St. Simon."

St. Simon uttered some hard words between his teeth, but he had learned that it was not safe in these days to indulge in any extreme language to the young lady.

"At least, you ought to give him the chance of deciding," he added, as soon as he was sufficiently soothed by that whispered malediction to speak quietly. "It would only show a little becoming tenderness on your part."

"More romance, St. Simon! Pray trust me to manage the matter. I think I have proved that I understand Mr. Alleyne's character well enough to know what is best."

So she wrote to her betrothed a sensible, sympathizing letter. She longed to be with him; her first impulse had been to write that she was coming—nay, she would confess that she had actually written this; but after-thoughts had shown her the wisdom of destroying the epistle, which emanated rather from her heart than her judgment. She proved conclusively that she should only be a trouble and annoyance, thereby making Alleyne, when he read the pages, perceive that it would be the height of selfishness on his part to accept the sacrifice. He was certain that she had not thought of herself; but he must think for her. He could not, much as he needed aid, allow her to commence their married life under such gloomy auspices.

He wrote her this; the matter was settled, and Fanny could keep her freedom until autumn. She was surprised at the pleasure this prospect afforded her, since she had no more use to make of the freedom which seemed so dear than she had found in the commencement.

Later she informed Alleyne that her uncle and his wife were going to Baden, and little as she felt in the mood for gaiety, she must accompany them. Now that there was no possibility changing what had been arranged, she did not hesitate to add,

"I believe I am somewhat hurt that you did not want me to come to you. I thought my telling you that I had at first thought of it would make you ask me to do so. But it is better as it is, I suppose, and I am not vexed; only I miss you."

He deemed her the most generous woman in the world, and sent her a more tender, lover-like letter than he had ever before done. So Fanny prepared her new toilets, and went off to Baden with St. Simon and the Tortoise.

To say that she was happy would be untrue; she had her seasons of horrible misery. The one potent feeling of her life had been her love for Talbot Castlemaine, and the bitterness and suffering—ay, the love too—would last as long as life did. Still the luxury of her present existence; the position which St. Simon's success gave them; the importance that attached to herself in the eyes of her countrymen from her engagement to Gregory Alleyne—all these were pleasant to her.

And, somehow, she could not feel that the drama was yet ended; she could not help dreaming even in the midst of her darkest hours. What was to come she never imagined distinctly; but she could not see herself actually married to Alleyne, or Castlemaine always bound by his present ties.

The day after her meeting with him, she furnished up the Tortoise, saw her securely pinned into a handsome gown, and took her to call on Lady Castlemaine, as had been agreed with Sir Talbot.

Talbot had told Marian of his chance encounter with Miss St. Simon, and Marian was prepared to receive her kindly.

As Fanny looked at the delicate, sensitive face, and talked in her most winning way, she was thinking,

"You're a poor, miserable child. You've too many nerves; you will soon show dreadfully jaded and old. What a pity Providence would not take you out of this weary world! You will be horribly unhappy with that man; you have begun to be so now, though you don't understand why; and there is worse beyond."

Not through her means, though. Fanny had no intention of troubling Marian's peace; not from any scruples where the young wife was concerned, but simply from prudence. She had no idea of risking her present grandeur and respectability, though it was a little heavy sometimes to carry about. She would be friends with Talbot—he might tell her his troubles, learn to lament more and more his own folly and precipitation—but within bounds. She would neither be made love to, nor in the least compromised by his dangle about her. She told him this frankly before a week had gone. He followed her, haunted the places where she visited; and though his presence rendered all haunts as bright as if they had suddenly been flooded with tropical sunshine, she was firm in her determination.

"This sort of thing won't answer, you know," she said, coolly, at the earliest convenient opportunity.

"I should think not," returned he, willfully misunderstanding her. "I did not see you once yesterday; it seemed an eternity."

"You will not see me for a much longer time, unless you conduct yourself very differently from what you have been doing," she replied.

"What have I done? You don't mean that I have offended you?"

"Not in the least; and I don't mean, either, that you shall offend the world on my account."

"Hang the world! What do you call by that doubtful name?"

"The people we live among, of course. I would see them hung with serenity; but as that can not be, one must live at peace with them. I suppose what I am going to say will sound very bold and unfeminine."

"As if any thing you could say would ever sound so!"

"So much the better, for I must say it."

"Now you are going to be cruel and harsh! Ah, Fanny, you promised to be my friend; you are forgetting it already."

"It is precisely because I want to keep my word that I must speak seriously to you," she said.

"Ah, let's dream about Italy; that is better than any serious talk," he pleaded, with one of those tender smiles which went straight to her heart.

But she showed no sign of emotion; her face was grave and her voice earnest, as she answered,

"I hope you were honest, too, when you pleaded for this friendship."

"Surely you don't doubt that!"

"You would make me, if you were to go on in the thoughtless way you have done these few days since we met. It is selfish and unkind; friendship can not be that."

"What have I done?" he asked, pulling impatiently at his mustache.

"You are a married man, and I am known to be engaged—"

"Which leaves us both perfectly free to be on frank, cordial terms," he put in with eagerness.

She smiled now; the dimples flitted about her mouth; her great eyes lighted up. She seemed positively to have an enchantress's faculty of growing beautiful at will.

"A thorough man's argument," said she, "and as sophistical as masculine arguments always are. There is nothing people are so severe upon as a flirtation between a married man and a single woman. Now, I don't mean to flirt, and I have no intention of letting you behave so that our friendship will be stigmatized by the odious name."

"You are very prudent and wise," he exclaimed, rather bitterly.

"I hope so," she answered. "I want not only the world's respect, but my own—what I prize more highly still, yours, Talbot."

"Surely you do not need assurances on that score!"

"No, I don't want assurances. I demand conduct on your part which will prove that you really feel it."

She spoke sternly, and her countenance assumed a proud, haughty look, which was a new phase of beauty.

"I'll say any thing—do any thing you bid—only don't send me away from you," he cried, his capricious nature completely under the charm of her varying moods.

"Then behave to me as you do to your wife's other friends. Don't pout when I refuse to dance with you twice in succession; don't frown

at any luckless man who speaks to me when you are near. You know what I want; there is no need of going into details."

"Then I am never to see you—never really to be with you? I might as well go off with myself at once."

"As you please. I have bidden you farewell before now."

Her voice trembled slightly, but she would not yield to any emotion, and interrupted him when he burst into a torrent of regret and self-abuse.

"We have nothing to do with the past," she said. "It is only the future that concerns us. Remember what I have asked. You may come to see me of a morning whenever you will. I shall be glad to visit your wife, for I like her. When we meet in the world, you *must* leave me to myself; is it understood?"

He was ready to accept any terms she offered, and Fanny felt gratified and touched by his submission. She was a very clear-sighted young woman, yet in this case she deceived herself as easily as the most brainless of her sex could have done. She actually believed that this friendship which she had planned could endure. For once she meant exactly what her words expressed—neither less nor more. She had no self-delusion where her love for this man was concerned; she knew that she loved him still, but he should never know it; she could perfectly trust to her marvelous control and powers of concealment.

In truth, Castlemaine was strangely perplexed, and unable to arrive at any conclusion. But it was easier not to think—to float on with the stream, and at least have as much enjoyment of her society as was possible.

Sir Talbot found other relaxations for his days; he gambled, he laid wagers on races. He as completely put by his wise resolutions of a few months previous as he had his short-lived caprice for his girlish wife. People shook their heads when his name was mentioned. But he was guilty of no flagrant act against society's ideas of decorum; and so long as a man guards against such folly, society can overlook a great deal of wickedness in her favorites; and Castlemaine was a very popular man.

Now, then, for Marian; though I do not mean to bore you with long descriptions and details of feelings and motives. It is an old, old story—that of a girl marrying in the midst of a blissful dream and watching it grow dim, conscious that she is slipping down, down to a reality so bleak and dismal that it can hold neither sun nor warmth, yet unable to arrest her course.

For a time she had hardly been conscious wherein the change consisted or what was wanting, but she had gone far beyond this. Try to close her eyes as she would, they showed her how thin the glory of her dream had become, how bleak and cold the reality looked underneath.

Was it her fault that Talbot seemed to weary of her society? Had she been childish, silly, troublesome? She could not tell if the change grew out of errors on her own part, or if it were true that marriage always brought about the same results. One thing was settled in her mind—she would die sooner than open her lips to Talbot. She had tried that once before their visit to Baden. He surprised her in tears, and, though tears bored him, he did ask what was the matter, and attempted to soothe her. She endeavored, as well as she could, to explain the dread which haunted her—careful to utter no complaint—and he was patient enough.

"My dear mouse," he said, with a magnificent patronizing kindness which would have been inexpressibly irritating to a less patient woman, "you are not strong yet; these are mere nervous fancies. Now, once for all, chick, don't torment yourself or me. I hate crying; I hate scenes! Marriage is not courtship; we must live like our neighbors; and real life is a prosaic thing."

This was the man who had talked to her of living a life apart from the ordinary world, who had described so glowingly the magic realm in which they were to wander hand in hand,

"Two souls with but a single thought,
Two hearts that beat as one."

She felt a thrill of indignation under her pain; but neither emotion found vent in her answer.

"I don't mean to be troublesome, Talbot; I only wanted you to tell me if I was in the wrong."

"My dear child, you make me uncomfortable, for I am not conscious of having found fault or complained."

"No, no! But—but—sometimes I am afraid you are not happy."

"Happiness is a relative term," he replied, lightly. "Mouse, I am capricious and fanciful; don't mind my moods. You are a good little wife—the best a man ever had—much nicer than I deserve. Now, don't pet and tease yourself and me; take life easily."

"And—and—you are sure you are not disappointed, Talbot?"

"How disappointed? My dear, I love you immensely; recollect that."

He kissed her, and Marian tried to be content. Indeed, for a few days he was quite lover-like again. Then an intense weariness of Castlemaine Park and all its stateliness came over him, and he was eager to be gone. He would have been glad to leave Marian behind. A brief return of bachelor freedom looked very tempting; but for once he controlled his wishes. He hated to see any body suffer; it was a purely selfish sentiment, though he disguised it under a variety of fine names, as the rest of us do our foibles and mean qualities.

He proposed the journey to Baden, and Marian agreed to it readily. She would much rather have remained with him quietly at home; she was tired of change and excitement, but she did not even hint this.

Grandma Payne was inclined to set the new sitting down to a whim of Marian's, and to blame her somewhat therefor.

So the whirl and gayety recommenced, and Marian endeavored to enjoy and to believe that the greater portion of her listlessness, her shyness, her troubled hours, arose from ill health. Talbot informed her that this was the case, and recommended her with gallingly careless kindness to get well as fast as possible, lest she should fall into the habit of delicacy; people often did.

There were many solitary hours for Marian, in spite of the gayeties of Baden—hours in which she could neither read, occupy herself with her needle, nor dream. Alas! that pleasant faculty seemed gone entirely.

Long hours when she could do nothing but brood over her brief season of ecstatic happiness, and wonder if the change had been unavoidable—if she had really no cause to fear that Talbot's affection had altered—if this which had come upon her was the fate of wives, and the only reason she was pained because she had been a silly, fanciful girl, with false, visionary ideas of life, the world, marriage—all those things which showed so differently from her ideal.

She held her peace; she was gentle and loving and tender. Many more fiery-spirited women would have been indignant at her patience. She was positively grateful when Talbot showed the least return of affectionate attention. But the days were long and the nights longer, and she knew that night after night her husband's step did not sound in the room next hers until almost morning. Fanny St. Simon came often to see her; it suited that young lady to be a great deal in Lady Castlemaine's society, to appear with her in public, to have people speak of their intimacy, and she carried out her wishes.

Marian was fascinated by this enchantress. In her heart I believe Lady Castlemaine never liked the girl; but that wonderful personal magnetism which Fanny possessed was too strong for Marian, and in yielding to it she convinced herself that she followed the dictates of affection. She would have been utterly astounded if some power could have revealed the truth, and shown her that affection did not in the least express her feelings for Miss St. Simon.

It was just magnetism which was at the bottom of the woman's influence over every body she came across; when it met a strong opposite current, as in the case of Miss Devereux, she was cordially disliked and dreaded. I think no human being ever had any half-feelings toward her. Many a time Fanny had been startled by

her own occult power. More than once, through the mere exercise of her will, she had brought to her side some person from a distance.

"It seemed as if you called me, and I must come," would be the remark which caused Fanny to laugh, and yet shiver with a certain enjoyable dread.

She used sometimes to tell St. Simon that she believed she was possessed by the devil, and frequently he felt inclined to agree with her, and absolutely dreaded her strange intuitions.

"I hope," her relative said to her, soon after the arrival of the Castlemaines, "I do hope, Fanny, that you don't mean to philander about with Sir Talbot."

"I am certain I do not! I don't know what the word means, but I should think something unpleasant; so be assured I have no intentions of that nature."

"It was all very well in the old days," pursued St. Simon, sententiously; "but now that we are deadly respectable and have a basis, it behooves us to be careful."

"Though respectability and having a basis do not interfere with a little philandering about the roulette tables?" asked Fanny, in the tone of one actuated by a laudable desire to acquire useful information.

"Oh, at Baden that passes unnoticed; any body not actually a bishop may indulge in that way here."

"I'm glad our basis is not too confined in its limits," said Fanny.

They both laughed. It was easy for them to laugh and be amiable in these days of success. St. Simon looked younger and handsomer than ever; Fanny felt proud to be seen with him, and he cordially returned her admiration. But to neither was the season so peaceful as to the Tortoise. She had plenty of good things to eat; a carriage to drive about in; quantities of diamonds hidden in her shoe; and St. Simon never frightened her by showing a disposition to give a slight pinch, even when he caught a glance of the obnoxious *tabatière*.

Pleasant days! The time was coming when Fanny St. Simon would look back over an awful gulf, and each separate memory of that period be a sufficient torture by itself; but no forbidding haunted her now; perhaps nothing would have been changed had any such dismal guest intruded. She was proud of her own strength—secure in her self-control; she could go just so far and no farther in the flowery path her feet were treading. Life had not held so many sunshiny hours for her that she could afford to fling away these sweetnesss offered with a liberal hand.

A whole month of such days, brightening all ways. Castlemaine was the most submissive and yielding of friends; the world of idle people about smiled benignly upon Fanny; and sever-

al times she took the trouble to inform her conscience that she meant no harm to any body.

Once before she had done this; in that case she particularized one person; she did not now. She had meant no harm to Roland Spencer, and she intended none to Marian.

Fanny, even in the midst of her enjoyment, could not lay by her habit of looking her destiny steadily in the face; her ability still to do this unshrinkingly was a proof to her mind that the strong will and indomitable energy which had hitherto been her support were not likely to fail.

She knew this charmed season could not endure long; a few weeks, and Gregory Alleyne would return; her marriage must follow, and life drift into its new channels. This unrestrained companionship with Castlemaine was only a brief interlude; existence would look dull enough when she lost it, but Fanny had no mind to forego one atom of its pleasantness on that account. The enchanted summer should be stretched to its uttermost limit, nor would she deprive herself of a single ray of the brightness through a cowardly fear of after-suffering. Suffer as she might, the memory of those days would always be something to look back upon—better than to recall the past, and find it all an unloving, unlovable blank.

Never in her most insane moments of anguish, bitterness, and wrath, which had followed in the darkness after that Italian idyl, had she regretted its existence. Mad as she was against Fate, she never reproached the stern guide for having flung that transitory happiness in her way and then wrested it from her. She had always told her soul that if to forget her pain it were necessary to blot out that love, she would not accept peace at such a price.

She had not changed. She knew that very soon she must let Talbot Castlemaine go. She did not deceive herself, as many women would have done—even women who knew the world and men as well as she. After her marriage there could never be a return, not even an approach, to a season like this; there was no danger now, but there would be then. Fanny did not propose to run risks with the station she was to assume. She would have all that it could give her—pomp, grandeur, adulation; it was a poor triumph, but the future held nothing else. She should not wish to see Talbot Castlemaine often; she would rather this present episode were the last time their paths led very near one another. Perhaps no human being ever read this man's character so clearly as she. He would always be searching after new gods and an unattainable happiness. In the course he led—so purposeless, so aimless—his weaknesses and follies would grow, and dissipation take a deeper hold. But, at least in his soul, her place would always be different from that held by any other woman; and in looking back across the world

which separated them, she should find pleasure in remembering this.

Alleyne considered it his duty to live in America; she would go—as well there as anywhere. It did not trouble her much to think of her married life, cold as it looked, because at this time all objects and events caught some rays of the golden light which flooded her way. It would be an empty life—she knew that. Why, even the old days of poverty, of make-shifts, of struggles and artifices, had their interest; there was constantly something to be done, to look forward to. Hereafter—nothing; she would be a *grande dame*—her youth would soon desert her, and existence show as dull as a beach from which the tide had gone out.

There would be a great house in town to manage, balls to give, society to direct; a great house in the country to fill with guests—interludes of Newport and Washington; occasional visits to Europe, seasons in Mayfair—presentation at courts; decorous, heavy festivities among ambassadors and dignitaries. Fanny yawned wearily at the prospect. The thought of the stage, the singing at a *café chantant*, which had one time seemed imminent, would have held more variety and sensation. Absolutely nothing to do, nothing to scheme for—be interested in; nothing to hide, no plea to work out in the dark. No witty, disreputable people either; Alleyne would always have deadly respectable associates about. Not even the wearisome platitudes of flirtation, with which many women solaced themselves; they would be more tiresome than any thing else. Fanny saw herself reduced to good works, charity schemes, and laughed at the vision.

"It will be awful," she thought. "Oh dear! if St. Simon had never come back!"

But she did not shrink from the prospect; she loved wealth and ease and grandeur as well as ever.

"One must be wretched," she continued; "it is better to be wretched in a velvet dress with diamonds."

Then she cried a little, then remembered she was a fool. The dreariness had not come yet; her charmed season was not over. Let the future take care of itself; it was useless to live more than one day at a time.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SIGNER'S DESCENDANT.

It was August—near the close—when Mrs. Pattaker felt that duty required her to honor Baden with her presence for a week. She carried Miss Langois—not to mention Miss Langois' wonderful toilets—and several of masculine servitors in her train. The planet Saturn

would as soon have thought of taking a journey round his orbit unattended by his numerous moons, as Mrs. Pattaker to set forth without a fitting group of satellites. The male Pattaker always went too; but he was not a satellite—he was a pincushion. I mean, that he served for Mrs. Pattaker to stab with sharp words when she had neuralgia. When other people would be called ill-natured, Mrs. Pattaker was neuralgic. She often suffered in this way, and then the male Pattaker was made a pincushion of. It is well to be of use in the world; and I suppose that old object would never have been of the slightest, if his gorgeous spouse had not devoted him to this convenient purpose.

Miss Langois had her use too; Mrs. Pattaker had no idea of letting her satellites remain idle. Miss Langois' business was to go about with her nostrils constantly distended on the watch for odors; the worse the scent, the more urgent was Miss Langois' necessity to put her nose into the midst of it. Miss Langois' nose was long and thin; it did its duty so well that it was apparent she had been brought on earth expressly to follow this proboscis about, and give an account of the bad smells it found.

The other constant satellites—two or three of the jumpy men—were barkers. When Miss Langois' sensitive nose "pointed" to a bad odor, they gave tongue, at Mrs. Pattaker's signal, either softly, or in loud accents, as she commanded. It was noticeable that when these were most occupied, the pincushion was last afflicted. When the nose was at fault, and the barkers lolled at their ease, then the pincushion got his fill.

This is allegorical, or symbolical, or any thing else fine you please; it is much nicer than accusing Mrs. Pattaker of being a scandal-monger, and calling these satellites her associates.

So the descendant of the illustrious Signer came to Baden; and she was very happy to see St. Simon again, and exceedingly gracious to Fanny—so gracious, in fact, that Fanny felt sure she meant mischief; but this did not matter. She had soared up out of Mrs. Pattaker's reach, would be a richer and more important person than even that stately female, and could smile at her ease on any attempts at molestation from this quarter.

Mrs. Pattaker, still possessed by the demon of cordiality, renewed her acquaintance with Castlemaine, and rushed into transports of admiration for Marian. Talbot irreverently called her an old hyena, and dubbed Miss Langois a jackdaw; and somebody told them of it.

Each passed slightly over what had been said of herself, but was indignant that her friend should be stigmatized by an odious epithet. Miss Langois knew that if she expected to retain her position near the great lady she must bring that long nose into requisition without loss of

time, and gave a sniff preparatory to setting out on her search.

There were people who had begun to look significant at the intimacy between Fanny and Castlemaine, refusing, with the obstinacy characteristic of human nature, to include Marian therein, although Miss St. Simon was so much seen in her society.

Before three days were gone Miss Langois' nose had smelled out a great deal; the barkers gave tongue, very softly, but incessantly, and Mrs. Pattaker began to deplore the fact that dear Miss St. Simon should be so careless of her new position and lofty prospects as to indulge in a flirtation with a married man.

But, beyond a few musty dowagers and unwilling servants of Vesta, nobody seemed much interested as to the terms which existed between Miss St. Simon and the Castlemaines. The world at Baden was too busy amusing itself to be ill-natured, and was much more excited about the re-appearance of the Pole who had broken the bank two seasons in succession than in regard to any young woman's flirtations, especially when conducted after an old-fashioned, orthodox manner.

Mrs. Pattaker felt that Baden was a very wicked place. If the Empress Augusta did not insist on this being the last season of the gambling-tables, she, for one, should consider the empress's lofty protestations of piety no better than hypocrisy, and she should say it at any risk; not even from martyrdom would she shrink in the performance of her duty.

Following this dubious light, which, I think, has led more people straight to purgatory than any sin they recognized as such, Mrs. Pattaker indulged in some hints to Lady Castlemaine one day when the two chanced to sit alone in the latter's *salon*.

The Signer's descendant had been talking so enthusiastically of the affection she had conceived for her new acquaintance, that Marian remained quite conscience-stricken at not experiencing a fervent outgoing of enthusiasm in return. Her cheeks really burned to remember how Fanny St. Simon had "taken off" the great lady only the night before, and how heartily she (Marian) had joined in Talbot's enjoyment of the representation.

She said something as intelligibly as possible about Mrs. Pattaker's goodness, and rated her more highly than she deserved.

"No, my dear Lady Castlemaine, no!" cried Mrs. Pattaker. She was fond of giving people their titles, and when addressing her own daughter managed to put "*duchesse*" at least twice in each sentence. "That I do not! I never flatter; indeed, I am aware that I am too blunt and plain-spoken; it is a family failing. But I am clear-sighted, that I will admit too; it is no merit of mine—a family inheritance also! Perhaps

you know, dear Lady Castlemaine, that one of the most illustrious members of my race—one of the immortal signers—by that very bluntness and clear-sightedness probably saved the then infant band of glorious freemen from disagreements which—whose possible results, I may say, make the enlightened mind shudder to contemplate.”

Marian acknowledged that she had already heard something of this from Mrs. Pattaker.

“Exactly,” said that lady. “I love my country. I glorify my country—few do that! Where were we?”

“You—you were speaking of some ancestor—a—pledger,” faltered Marian, getting the word wrong in her anxiety to escape a continuance of the memoirs of this remarkable person.

“The Signer,” amended Mrs. Pattaker. “No, no, dear Lady Castlemaine; it is your innate modesty causes you to say this; it was of you I was speaking, of my recognition of your worth, your gentleness, your true womanly qualities. I wish such shining virtues were more common among young ladies of our time. I wish that sweet girl, Miss St. Simon—poor Fanny!—had more of them.”

“Why do you say ‘poor Fanny?’ She seems to me a very happy person,” returned Marian.

“Yes—oh yes; still, I repeat, poor Fanny. I brought up, dear Lady Castlemaine. St. Simon is charming; he has now a recognized position; but I fancy much of Fanny’s life was spent in a world of which we know nothing.”

The emphasis on the pronoun was delicious; it suggested royal palaces at the very least.

“Ah,” Marian said, indifferently, all her energies concentrated in a fervent wish that the woman would go away.

“Yes, a sweet girl; I am fond of her. But—to you I speak freely, dear Lady Castlemaine—not a woman to have for an intimate friend. What I say will go no further—not a woman to admit too unrestrainedly into the inner sanctuary of home. A hopeless flirt, dangerous indeed—you understand, dear Lady Castlemaine.”

“I have never seen her flirt,” Marian replied, quietly. “You know she is engaged to be married.”

“And a wonderful match, dear Lady Castlemaine. Millions! position! I own it surprised me in Mr. Alleyne.”

“Miss St. Simon is certainly one of the most fascinating young ladies I ever met,” Marian said, coldly.

“Just that! But ah! the word—the word, dear Lady Castlemaine! Circe was fascinating, I suppose, and Medea, and—and the serpent in Eden,” added Mrs. Pattaker, taking refuge in recalling a personage of very remote antiquity indeed, as her historical lore began to fail.

“I don’t think you ought to say it, since you say you are fond of her,” Marian said, coloring furiously, shocked at her presumption in lectur-

ing a woman so much her elder, but forced to speak by her clear sense of justice and right.

Mrs. Pattaker was startled. She had not the habit of being called to order; but did not feel disposed to take offense. In certain ways she was no fool either, and got out of the difficulty well enough.

“I say it to you because I am interested in Fanny; because I hope your advice may have an influence upon her, dear Lady Castlemaine.”

“I have lived a very retired life,” Marian said, “and know little of the world. Miss St. Simon could scarcely find a more incompetent mentor—if she wanted one, and I felt inclined to undertake the task.”

“Ah—intuition!” cried Mrs. Pattaker. “Dear Lady Castlemaine, in your heart you do not approve of her.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Pattaker, I can not allow you unintentionally to misinterpret my words,” Marian said, with a firmness which astonished herself. “I told you I thought Miss St. Simon fascinating. I have not known her long enough to use any other word. I think I am slow at forming either real friendships or dislikes.”

“Most admirably put, dear Lady Castlemaine—admirably. Well, I have done my duty. I would not go away from Baden without saying what I have. Dear Lady Castlemaine, if you hate me forever, I must add that more than one young wife has paid dearly for finding Fanny St. Simon fascinating.”

The sensitive color rushed again to Marian’s cheeks. She paused an instant before speaking. Mrs. Pattaker waited rather uneasily to hear what was coming.

“So you leave Baden soon,” said Lady Castlemaine, composedly, taking up the conversation where it had dropped when Mrs. Pattaker burst into her confidence regarding Miss St. Simon.

“The day after to-morrow,” she replied, feeling hopelessly checkmated by this girlish creature, who blushed if one looked at her. “Shall we have the pleasure of seeing you in Paris this autumn?”

“It is not quite decided. I think, however, we shall go there.”

Mrs. Pattaker rose; her dignity was a good deal disturbed. A sensation which in ordinary mortals is called “spitefulness” helped to quicken the lymphatic current in her veins.

“I am so very, very glad! Sir Talbot was always a favorite of mine—even in his gay, wild days. Young men will have such a season, you know.”

“I don’t think I know much about young men,” said Marian.

“Nor young women, I fear,” returned Mrs. Pattaker. “My dear, I shall soon be an old woman” (she tried her best to look thirty-five as she spoke). “I have not in years been so much attracted by any young lady as I am by you.”

“It is very kind of you to say so,” replied Marian, again suffering from a pang of conscience, and pausing, dreadfully embarrassed.

“No, it is only justice. That sweet woman who was once empress of the French used to say that my intuitions were prophetic. You know, perhaps, that the Tuileries was almost like home to me.”

Marian had heard from Fanny St. Simon of Mrs. Pattaker’s struggles to gain a foothold at court; of the old stories about gifts of valuable laces and gems to sundry noble ladies of influence there; of snubs and slights which had been gracefully passed over; so all she could do was to look more confused than ever.

Her blushes and hesitation gave Mrs. Pattaker full possession of her courage again.

“I wish you would remember what I have said, dear Lady Castlemaine,” she continued, shaking out her plumage, and looking grand and imposing.

“Oh yes; you have promised to be glad to see me when I come to Paris,” said Marian, nervous as a school-girl, but with a firm purpose of not allowing Mrs. Pattaker to stray back to dangerous ground.

“You know I shall be that; but it is not what I meant. Dear Lady Castlemaine, I wish your friend, Miss Devereux, were here. You are very young; don’t be offended. You stand in need of a friend’s advice.”

The blushes faded again. Marian was as composed as a veteran could have been.

“If you will kindly tell me in what,” said she, in a clear, slow voice, “I will ask my husband to advise me: no one could do it so well.”

“Ah—yes—in a general way! My dear, the sentiment does you honor; but in a case like this—”

Mrs. Pattaker spoke in dashes, and left her sentence unfinished, not from embarrassment, but to give her words more effect. Perhaps this habit was also a heritage from the Signer.

“And what is this particular instance in which my husband’s counsel could not serve me?” Marian asked, her voice ringing out very distinctly, low as she spoke.

“Dear Lady Castlemaine, when I have already explained—it is difficult—ah, duty is not easy. I wish Miss Devereux were here.”

“I prefer to submit the matter to Sir Talbot’s judgment, if you will tell me in what it is I need advice,” said Marian, determined now to have the matter out, since Mrs. Pattaker had disregarded all her efforts to get away from the subject.

“My dear Lady Castlemaine,” returned the other, in her most persuasive tone, “you could not say to Sir Talbot that—that you feared Miss St. Simon might prove dangerous to—to domestic peace.”

Marian took advantage of her pause to make answer,

“No, I could not do that, because I have no such fear.”

“Well, well,” sighed Mrs. Pattaker. “Let that part go! You could not easily say to him, either, that people were talking—the world is so ill-natured—that they had not forgotten old days and past flirtations. In short, dear Lady Castlemaine, you can do nothing but be on your guard.”

Marian’s head swam, and there was a sickening sensation at her heart. She fixed her eyes full on Mrs. Pattaker.

“You mean kindly, no doubt,” she said; “but even from Miss Devereux, my dearest friend, I could not permit such suggestions. Let us consider this conversation at an end forever.”

Mrs. Pattaker was as much astounded as if she had seen a lamb turn into a lion. She repeated her assurances of affection, begged Marian not to misconstrue actions animated by a sense of duty, talked of a future meeting, and got away.

Miss Langois chanced to fall within reach on the great lady’s arrival at her lodgings. The half-hour that correct virgin passed would make stones weep, if its secrets could be set down.

I am afraid if Mrs. Pattaker had heard of Lady Castlemaine’s receiving chastisement at the hands of her husband, or undergoing the thumb-screw, or any other playful mode of torture whereby mediæval spouses could bring rebellious wives to order, or discreetly punish unloved ones, she would have considered the young woman properly rewarded. Still, pity lingered like a white dove in Mrs. Pattaker’s breast; it prompted her to talk much of this matter wherever she went. Her sympathy for Lady Castlemaine was so excessive that she wanted it shared by all her acquaintances.

After a time she encountered Miss Devereux, and told her tale; and on this occasion she found an attentive auditor, although Helen affected to treat the story lightly.

Left to herself, Marian’s last effort at self-control gave way; neither pride nor anger could support her any longer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR TALBOT.

ALL his life Talbot Castlemaine had been wanting something out of his reach. Whether the thing were of importance or almost valueless, did not matter; the fact that it looked unattainable seemed enough to rouse in him a desire of possession as frenzied as a temporary madness.

When he first met Marian Payne, had he been entirely free to flirt with or make love to her, he would probably have amused himself for a week,

and then forgotten her. But at that time it appeared absolutely necessary he should marry Miss Devereux's fortune, and the sight of Marian standing aloof, with her beseeching eyes and pure face, made her show like some angel of light, under whose tenderness and influence, if he could but have them, his own thwarted, warped existence might struggle into other paths.

Marriage had proved a very tiresome business, and the wild passion which preceded it now looked as unreal as a dream. He pitied himself for this. He said to Fanny St. Simon,

"Why couldn't she have forced me to love her? It was a pretty fancy—if she had only known how to make it something more."

Fanny sympathized with or laughed at him, according to her mood. A kaleidoscope could not have been more changeable than she was at this time, or a child more fascinated with its changing hues and shapes than Castlemaine by her caprices. Sometimes she drove him nearly insane with jealousy, till he risked becoming ridiculous, and almost risked compromising her. Sometimes she let him drift into tender, sentimental talk, and when his lips were ready to burst into the passionate declarations which his eyes and voice had already been telling, she would force herself back to common sense, and torment him with jests and badinage. He suffered, that was plain enough. She was glad to see him suffer, though all the while it wrung her heart with fierce pangs to cause the pain.

It was playing with fire, this game, and Fanny knew it; but she was bold enough and dexterous enough to escape scorching. She would enjoy these feverish delights to the utmost; they must end soon—end forever. She had no mind to see Talbot Castlemaine again for years. In the gilded dullness of her wedded life she would at least have these memories wherewith to keep her heart from starvation. The mingled sweetness and agony of recalling this past would be more endurable than to have been forced to look back over a blank record of disappointment. She was glad to have met him—glad to feel that he loved her; she would spare neither him nor herself.

His mornings were spent in her *salon*; his engagements were all formed with reference to meeting her; even the powerful attraction of play sunk into insignificance by the side of this enthralment.

He had been reading poetry to her one day, the lays of some of those modern marvels who are promised immortality by their admirers. As he looked up from the book, he caught her eyes fixed upon his face with a sad, wistful expression.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"About what you were reading, I suppose," she answered.

"Not a bit of it! Now, confess! It is a shame to let me waste my abilities in this way."

"I was thinking what pleasant weeks these have been," she answered, slowly, her eyes still on his face—those marvelous eyes which were a beauty worth all the regular features and pretty coloring of other women.

"Pleasant!" he echoed; "they have been a taste of heaven!"

She smiled—one of her slow, dreamy smiles.

"But they are almost ended," she sighed.

He gave the table beside him a push which nearly tilted it over.

"Why do you speak of that? why do you make me think of it?" he said.

"Because you insisted on hearing my thoughts," she answered. "I'm a truthful soul, when it costs nothing."

"So it costs you nothing to look forward to the end of these weeks?" he demanded, scowling in a way that would have rendered another man hideous, but which deepened the expression of his Greek face into a force and intensity that left him handsomer than ever.

She did not reply.

"It costs you nothing?" he repeated.

"Very well; say it does not—what then?" she asked, brusquely. "Sir Talbot, I am not in the habit of having my friends scowl at me, or my enemies either, for that matter."

"I don't know in which catalogue to rank myself, when you show so horribly heartless," returned he, smiling now, but looking vexed enough still.

"That sounds like a phrase out of a sensation novel," returned she, teasingly. "Nobody is horribly heartless—and if I were, remember, you would not be the person with a right to complain."

She looked so tantalizingly beautiful, and she said the words with such smiling calmness, that Castlemaine was furious.

"What are you muttering?" she asked. "Bad words, I think. Now, in the novels I was speaking of the English girls appear to like being sworn at; the men all swear, from princes of the blood down to the baronets; but please to recollect I am an American, and not accustomed to such sweet frankness of speech."

"You would drive a saint out of his senses when you are in one of these moods," cried he.

"I am in a very good mood," she replied. "It is you who are ill-natured and fractious."

"I don't think those words quite express my feelings," he said, his voice sounding injured and plaintive. "You tell me suddenly that these pleasant days must end; you say it as smilingly as if it were the most cheering news possible: do you expect me to look enthusiastically delighted?"

"They have been nice days, have they not?" she returned. Her head drooped; her eyes met his, misty and soft. "Ah, well, nothing lasts forever in this world."

"But you are sorry?—own that you are sorry."

"I don't think I need say it," she answered.

"You know I am sorry, dear friend; but that changes nothing."

"At least it is a little comfort to hear you admit it. Oh, Fanny, what an odious muddle life is!"

"Life is pretty much what we make it, I suppose. At least let us have fortitude enough not to moan over what we have deliberately chosen."

"I deny that we do choose! All sorts of things and events unite, and are too strong for us. Some apparently unimportant move; something we have done without the slightest reflection forges the chains which hold us fast," he exclaimed.

"I don't perceive how that removes the responsibility from our own shoulders. But there is no good talking in this metaphysical way; it is morbid and unhealthy."

"There is no good in any thing, I think," he said, drearily. "What made you so suddenly bring me down to reality, by speaking as if we were to have no more of these delightful mornings?"

"Because the end has nearly come," she answered.

"The end?"

"Word it as you will; at least I am going away from Baden."

"Going away. Where?"

"You will be cross if I tell you. Still—well, as you have no right to be cross, I don't see why I should hesitate."

"Perhaps at giving me pain; would that make you hesitate?"

"But some one of those wise metaphysicians we were emulating pronounces pain a figment of the imagination."

"Will you tell me when you are going?"

"Oh yes," she answered, provokingly. "In a few days Mr. Alleyne will land at Havre."

Castlemaine started to his feet with an angry gesture. He began to mutter something—her eyes stopped him.

"It is too early for Paris," she went on, as easily as if he had shown no emotion; "so I am going to stay at Creuxville for a while; Mr. Alleyne will come there too."

He sat down again, pulling at his mustache in an impatient way. Fanny played with the fringe on her dress, looking straight before her. There was a brief silence, during which Castlemaine's eager eyes studied her countenance; but she willed to keep it passive, so he could form no conclusion as to her thoughts.

"I am not cross," he exclaimed, abruptly; "as you said, I have no right!"

"None," she replied, giving him a rather defiant glance.

"No right," he repeated; "but oh, Fanny, I am the most miserable man alive!"

How the deep, quivering voice struck home to her heart! How the pale, passionate beauty of his face made a glory before her eyes which fairly dizzied her soul! But she was strong, able to speak jestingly, to remember that not one step beyond the law she had laid down must he go, even now. Let him complain if he would—it did not seem a weakness to her, as it must have done in another man; she pitied him, yet his pain was a triumph, even while it hurt her.

"Luckily Baden possesses hosts of attractions in itself," she said; "you will scarcely have time to miss me."

"What do you want?" he cried. "Do you wish to drive me mad—hear me rave like a lunatic?"

"Indeed I do not; I have no taste for private theatricals."

"Going away! Why, I feel as a wretch might who was listening to his death-warrant. I had forgotten these days must end!"

He spoke truthfully; he felt every word.

"I warned you not to forget," she replied.

"And you can talk calmly about it; you—"

"My friend, Swinburne's poems have turned your brain! Heigh-ho! I shall have no more of his delicious improprieties; my future lord and master disapproves of him."

"Why on earth do you marry that man?" he cried. "You are well off now—you will be rich; St. Simon's mine is a wonderful success. What object can you have in selling yourself?"

She was angry now.

"Sir Talbot Castlemaine," said she, "I told you when we first met that there were subjects the mention of which, on your part, I should consider intolerable insolence! How can you venture to speak like that?"

"Because I am half mad, I think," he groaned.

"Then you'd better go away and recover your senses. Why do I marry Mr. Alleyne? Why should I not, and like him too?"

He winced under her words. She put by her vexation, and continued playfully, "I have no fancy for being an old maid. I am doing very well with my life; you know that, though you will talk nonsense. I am going to be dull and respectable, and married too: your good example is contagious."

"I wish I had blown my brains out the day of my wedding!" he cried; "and you will wish the same for yourself before six months are gone."

"One is always wishing that about something," returned she, coolly.

"Can you feel?" he exclaimed, passionately.

"Have you any heart?"

She held up her hand warningly.

"That is not a question for Lady Castlemaine's husband to ask," said she. "Now, Talbot, don't

be foolish! Don't cloud these last days by any nonsense which will make me regret our friendship."

"You are very wise and prudent," he said, bitterly.

"Very! Better not sneer at me, though, for the possession of those virtues!"

The thought of soon seeing her another man's wife roused a fierce tempest in his soul, deepened the glowing infatuation of the past weeks into frenzy. He stood before her, his eyes wild and dilated, a spot of vivid color on either cheek.

"Do you know what I have three minds to do?" he gasped. "I'd like to strangle you in my arms, and blow my own brains out just as I felt your last dying breath on my lips."

She could have cried to him to do it—thrown herself on his breast, and gone utterly mad. The very whirl in her brain brought her senses back.

"I hate melodrama, even on the stage," said she. "Had you not better say good-morning, Sir Talbot?"

"What an accursed fool I am! what a triple idiot!" he exclaimed. "I don't wonder you laugh at me."

"I don't laugh," she said, softly. "But stop now, Talbot. We live in the real world; we must be sensible."

He strode up and down the room a few times, then flung himself in a chair near her, saying,

"But why shouldn't I go to Creuxville, too?"

"Because I don't want you there; I shall be occupied."

"Not at first! I may go and stay till he comes."

"I do like my friends near," Fanny said, pensively. "If only you would be nice. St. Simon can't go yet; he is trying to bury some rich Russians in his mine. It would be very pleasant to have you and Lady Castlemaine. I think I will ask her, as a favor to me."

"Ah, now you are good and kind. God bless you! At least I don't have to be cast into utter darkness without warning."

"No; you shall have a little preparatory twilight. It is very silly of us both; better to say good-bye here."

"I will not do it—I will not!"

"Don't be so emphatic," returned she, rising.

"Are you sending me away?"

"Yes; I am going out."

"Where? Let me go with you?"

"If you like; but I'd rather go alone."

"Oh, if I should be in the way!" he retorted, sneeringly.

"You don't deserve my good-nature," said she. "I am going to beg Lady Castlemaine to coax you to take her to Creuxville, that my aunt and I need not be alone there. Now are you satisfied, you most ungrateful of men?"

He burst into a torrent of ejaculations.

"Really," said she, scornfully, "if you behave like that, I don't want you. Please to go away. I am busy."

He got a scant farewell, and hurried off, not wondering much at his madness. He was so accustomed to his own insanities that they had lost the power to astonish him.

CHAPTER XXV.

FENCING WITH THE BUTTON OFF.

I THINK it was at Spa that Mrs. Pattaker encountered Helen Devereux. Still smarting from a sense of defeat, she poured out in magnificent language her fears in regard to Lady Castlemaine's happiness. Of course she made Miss Langois do the scandal bits; that is, repeat the Baden gossip; then Mrs. Pattaker added her forebodings.

Marian's letters had grown irregular and unfrequent; somewhat unsatisfactory, also, when they did come. Miss Devereux was not a woman to debate or argue questions with herself. She decided upon a thing and did it, else she put it aside completely. She was greatly troubled, slight attention as she seemed to pay to Miss Langois' chatter or Mrs. Pattaker's stately regrets. She would go to Creuxville; Marian's last letter had informed her of the proposed journey; she would go also.

Those amiable old birds, her step-mother and Miss Cordy, were so weary from much wandering up and down the earth—though they had no other resemblance to poor Job's persecutor—that Miss Devereux had not the heart to disturb them at present. They should stay where they were, and meet her later in Paris. She encountered Roland Spencer while meditating her journey. He had arrived at Spa a few days previous.

"Do you like staying here?" she asked.

"Not particularly," he answered, with a rather wearied air. Life was not so bright and full of interest as it used to be.

"Would you mind going away?"

"Not in the least. Where shall I go?"

"I wish you would take charge of me and my maid—a much more important person—to Creuxville. I want to see Lady Castlemaine, but it seems a shame to drag my elders any farther just now, and my poor Jules is ailing, and needs the waters as much as if he were a fine lady."

"I shall be delighted to be of use, you know that," said Roland; and so they set off the next morning, at an unearthly hour.

Miss Devereux sent no warning of her arrival to Marian, though of course she took the precaution to assure herself by telegraph that she could find rooms in the hotel with her friends.

It was twilight. Lady Castlemaine sat by a

window of her chamber, looking down into the busy street, and out upon the *place* beyond. Odious little Creuxville was crowded this season. Patriotic French people made it a point to avoid German spas, and the President's visit brought hosts of Republicans and Liberals.

It was ten days since the Castlemaines arrived thither, with Fanny St. Simon and her aunt. These last were in lodgings, and somehow, though Fanny had begged Lady Castlemaine to come, as a favor to her, the two were not very much together. For a while each morning Fanny came and sat with her. They walked on the beach, occasionally drove out; then Marian went back to her lonely rooms. She was so weak and nervous that any attempt at gaiety was impossible. The doctors had said sea-air might be of benefit to her, so she yielded to Fanny's request, aware that it would please Talbot.

She was not jealous, in the ordinary sense of the word. She knew Miss St. Simon would soon be married and gone; but that would not bring Talbot any nearer her. Perhaps she had not lost his love—she would have lain down and died, she told herself, if once convinced of this—but she had lost the power to amuse and interest him. So far as she could see, her fate was not different from that of most wives in this gay world to which her wedded life had introduced her. Other women saw their husbands at dinner, went with them into ball-rooms; that began and ended their companionship. It was her case, too; but other women did not appear to suffer; they found interests and amusements for themselves. She had nothing, no resource wherewith to fill up her solitary hours.

It disturbed her no more to know that Talbot spent a great portion of his mornings with Fanny St. Simon, that he went to parties and concerts to meet her, than it did to have him pass his evenings at card-tables or among racing men. The fact remained that her society did not suffice for him—had lost its charm; that he was moody, weary, or impatient when they were alone; or, worse yet, showed the effort it cost him to be attentive and kind.

The bloom had worn rapidly off Marian's romance; yet she could have offered no other complaint, had she wished to complain, than that Talbot behaved like the generality of husbands whom she saw. But it was so different from her dream—from his dream, too. Ah, if she could have died during that illness before her marriage—died in his arms, with her glorious vision undimmed! She had come to wish that; not consciously to wish it, but to think what a blessed death it would have been, and what a beautiful memory her earthly life must ever have appeared, even amidst the splendors of eternity.

She was thin and pale; the change had come so gradually that Castlemaine scarcely noticed it. Strangers no longer said, "How pretty Lady

Castlemaine is!" They shook their heads when she passed, and whispered, "How very delicate she looks!—chest, I should think—so many English girls go in that way."

Marian herself half believed it the beginning of the end. She suffered no pain, she did not cough; but sleep had deserted her, appetite was a stranger, and her nerves were in so disturbed a state that a door suddenly opened made her tremble, and a raised voice went through her like a knife.

The beginning of the end! Would Talbot grieve? He might be shocked when the fact became patent to him; but once gone, he could not greatly miss her, since she had come to occupy so slight a part in his life. He would be sorry—oh yes, he would be sorry! During the last weeks, when he learned the truth, he would grow gentle and tender—would stay beside her, hold her hand, attend to her few wants; she should have him to herself during those closing weeks. They looked pleasant to her; she almost wished that they were near—the quiet sweetness they promised appeared so tempting compared to her present loneliness.

She was thinking these things as she sat at her window in the twilight. The tread of feet, the sound of laughter, the talk in varied tongues, surged up from the street below; the tones of music sounded at a little distance; the beat and hoarse call of the waves lent a deep under-tone to the whole. She could look out across the broad sweep of gray sea, out to the long line of pearly white which still lingered across the horizon. The waters looked sullen and cold; two or three birds winged their way toward the line of light; the waves near the shore had more motion, tumbling in, foam-crested and noisy. A few stars shot up in the sky; the moon was not visible yet. It all showed so chill, so hopeless! To gaze down into the busy square, hear the voices and music, was worse still, gave her a deeper sense of solitude.

Thinking of death—thinking that this world had come to an end! She was only nineteen—not a year married; and though to wives grown middle-aged and stout and comfortable life may seem quite endurable without the romance girlish fancy casts over wedlock, Marian's burden was a hard one.

Couched in a low chair, leaning her two arms on the window-sill, her face seeming still more changed and pale in the uncertain light—so it was that Helen Devereux found her, coming abruptly into the room to give a pleasant surprise.

And Marian did not even appear surprised; she trembled a little from nervous agitation; said how glad she was: but Miss Devereux was the one most deeply moved. She took Marian in her arms, and positively wept, though she tried to laugh at her own absurdity.

"Are you ill, Marian?" she asked.

"No; I have never been strong since we were at Nice," Marian answered; "but I am not ill."
"Where is Talbot?"

"Oh, I don't know; he went out after dinner—I dare say to the *cercle*, or with some friends."

"And you—what do you do here?"

"Nothing, I think: I am very lazy nowadays. How good of you to come, Helen! how well you look!"

Miss Devereux told her of Spencer's proximity, so Marian said he should be sent for. She would give them some tea. They passed the evening with her, talking cheerfully, but both were so shocked by her appearance that it was difficult to hide their trouble.

"What a world!" said Miss Devereux to herself when she was alone in her room. "If any thing had hindered her marriage, she would have gone into a decline and died. As it is, she has nothing but misery; that fiend of a man is breaking her heart."

The week which followed showed Miss Devereux plainly where the trouble lay. There was no one to whom she could hint it except Roland Spencer, and he rejected angrily the idea that Fanny St. Simon's conduct could be in any way blamable.

"There's another," thought Helen. "That creature needs only to look at a man to leave him idiotic. I wonder if she knows what she is doing! I wonder if she would care in the least if she knew that she is helping to make Marian wretched."

Miss Devereux, indignant as she was, had no idea that she should positively attack Fanny St. Simon; yet at the end of the week she did. She had come to see the Tortoise, and the Tortoise had gone out to drive with Lady Dudgeon. She got into the house before she knew this; so there was no escape either for her or Fanny from a short *tête-à-tête*.

That naughty enchantress was looking especially charming this morning—perfectly dressed—her eyes more wicked than ever, and a triumphant smile on her lips. She was almost affectionate to her visitor, because she knew that would annoy her beyond any thing. She talked of the brief season when Miss Devereux had lived in her house—of how much they all missed her.

"But you didn't miss us," she said. "You never liked either St. Simon or me. I wonder why! I am sure we are rather agreeable people than otherwise."

"Very charming people," Helen said, a little taken aback; a little vexed, too, but mastering her confusion bravely.

"At least I am glad to have your favorable verdict on that score," replied Fanny, laughing. "And yet you did not like us, I suppose," she added more slowly, as if thinking the matter out. "I suppose you do not exactly believe in either of us. Was that it?"

Miss Devereux had no intention of being put at a disadvantage. She took firm hold of her wits, and returned composedly,

"I certainly never did believe in your uncle—nor did you."

"Poor St. Simon!" smiled Fanny. "How sore he would be if he heard you! St. Simon has a mania for people's trusting him. And now St. Simon's niece—you don't put faith in her either!"

"Ah," said Miss Devereux, quietly, "as for Miss St. Simon, she made no effort to deceive; she did not like me, and took no trouble to hide the fact."

"Oh, you can not mean to accuse me of having been rude!" cried Fanny, in a tone of distress. "I could bear any thing better than that!"

"Never—of course."

Fanny's look of relief was an additional aggravation.

"And I liked you," she said; "it was only that you would not respond. My efforts to produce a favorable impression were entirely thrown away. You showed that plainly."

Miss Devereux did a little facial eloquence in her turn; she expressed a polite indifference in regard to the truth of both assertions. She had no wish to continue the conversation, however, and made some inquiry after the Tortoise, allowing it plainly to appear that her visit had been intended for that lady.

"And I was hoping you came to see me! Well, I'm glad my aunt is out; it punishes you, and gives me the pleasure of your society. One can never talk in the crowds where we usually meet," Fanny said, by no means ready to relinquish her efforts at annoying the guest.

"So few people have any thing really to say to one another when they do meet," observed Miss Devereux, fully appreciating Fanny's drift.

"Women, you mean. And I remember you don't like women," quoth Miss St. Simon.

Helen would not even refute the charge.

"What lovely flowers!" she observed, turning to a great basket of fragrant blossoms on the table near.

"Are they not? Sir Talbot Castlemaine sends them to me," replied Fanny; and Miss Devereux fancied that she caught a malicious sparkle in the dark eyes. "What a sweet little thing Lady Castlemaine is, and how utterly unsuited to him!"

"I do not perceive it, or any reason for your thinking so," returned Miss Devereux, curtly.

Fanny shrugged her shoulders.

"She is a dear friend of yours, I know; I am very fond of her too." Helen looked so deaf to the latter clause of her remark that Miss St. Simon hastened to add, "And I believe she likes me; she actually came here because I was coming. Are you jealous?"

"No," said Miss Devereux.

"Still, though one may like her, one can not shut one's eyes to facts."

"Indeed, one can not!" exclaimed Miss Devereux, emphatically.

"Now, I don't think Sir Talbot a happy man," continued Fanny, leaning back in her chair, and speaking in a lazy way. "Have you never thought that?"

"Never! He married from love. I never saw a man more insanely in earnest," replied Helen.

"The trouble is, such insanities are easily cured," replied Fanny, quick to turn Miss Devereux's unfortunate adverb to account.

"I used a very silly expression," Helen said. "Sir Talbot loved Marian so devoutly that he was ready to do for her what he would never have dreamed of doing for another woman. He was eager to marry her while he thought himself still poor; ready to work—go out to a new country, and begin a fresh life for her sake."

"Dear me! dear me!" sighed Fanny. "How admirably the term you applied suits his case!—insane certainly. Why, it must have been as severe as an attack of brain fever—and as short-lived."

"I have no reason to suppose he has changed," replied Miss Devereux, goaded into a fib, and irresistibly impelled to make it linger, "not the slightest reason."

"You have not seen much of them," Fanny said. "But, anyway, you are right to speak as you do. Clear-sighted as you are, you must have discovered the truth, little as you have been with them."

"You are speaking in riddles, Miss St. Simon."

Again Fanny shrugged her shoulders.

"There's no doubt he made a great mistake," she said, in the same indolent tone. "Just another proof of the truth of the old adage, about marrying in haste to repent at leisure. A great mistake; and he looks as if he had found it out. Do you think she has, too? Sometimes I fear it."

Nothing could have been more perfect in its way than her commiserating contempt as she put this question.

It was impossible to rise and leave her, though that was Miss Devereux's first impulse. Every drop of blood in her veins tingled and boiled to see the creature dare exhibit pity and scorn for a state of things which she was daily helping to render more hopeless.

"How has he made a mistake?" she asked, trying to speak with something of the other's indifference.

"You must see—every body does. She is sweet, lovely, a darling; but not able to manage him. That man was born fickle and capricious; he ought to have married a tempest—a whirlwind—something that would have kept his mind constantly occupied."

"Probably you are better able to judge of his character than I," said Miss Devereux, coldly.

"Yet they say you were engaged to him once," returned Fanny, sweetly, but flinging off the gloves now. She had seen for days what was in Miss Devereux's mind; she herself had been rather wanting a battle. "I am sure one ought to know a man after that! Perhaps I ought not to have said it—I am so careless! But, after all, there can be no offense in repeating what you must know was said."

"People say so many impertinent things," observed Miss Devereux, calm enough outwardly, though her hasty temper was in arms. "They said at Baden that you flirted outrageously with Sir Talbot, and were making his wife wretched. Perhaps that is not polite either; but, after all, there can be no offense in repeating what you must know was said."

"Not in the least," replied Fanny, unmoved; "but I never knew it. How delicious—I mean—I mean to tell Marian!"

"I would not," said Miss Devereux, stiffly.

"Why would you not?" asked Fanny, her eyes handsomer than ever with a wide look of surprise.

Since the opportunity offered, Miss Devereux had no mind to spare Fanny a lesson; the girl had been daring her to give it, and she would.

"Why would you not?" Fanny repeated, with laughing impatience.

"Because there may have been truth enough for your words to give her pain," returned Miss Devereux.

"Truth enough in what?" she asked, with a soft laugh, which rippled out like running water.

"That I flirted with him?"

"Of that I never had the least doubt," answered Miss Devereux.

"That's delicious!" cried Fanny, laughing still. "Then you must mean you believe she was troubled."

"So I do! I don't think Marian Castlemaine has been jealous of you, but I do think that any attraction which takes her husband away from her gives her pain," said Miss Devereux, rather too hotly.

Fanny rested her head on the back of her chair in an easy, graceful attitude, and looked at her visitor with a placid smile.

"Did you come here this morning to read me a lecture?" she asked, carelessly, good-naturedly, as if they had been the dearest friends in the world, and such a procedure common on Miss Devereux's part.

"No, I came to see your aunt," she replied; "but you brought this talk up, and rather dared me to say what I have, so I spoke."

"Oh, out of mere bravado? Then your counsel loses all point," said Fanny, laughing again.

"There was no bravado about it," said Miss Devereux. "I am very glad to have had an opportunity of saying what was in my mind."

"But what purpose can it serve?—show me," said Fanny, as if studying the matter from a totally disinterested point of view.

"Because if you have done these things thoughtlessly, I hope now you will try, like me—like Mr. Spence—try as any real friend of Sir Talbot's ought—to draw him back to his home, instead of encouraging him to leave it."

She spoke rapidly; she was conscious that Fanny could not be much blamed if she actually turned her out-of-doors; but she said her say, nevertheless. Fanny listened with entire composure, watching the unusual flush which rose to her companion's cheeks—watching it curiously, and with a certain amusement.

"So you really think I have influence over Sir Talbot?" she asked, gayly. "How glad I am! I like to believe I can influence people."

"Then I hope you will use it for his good," cried Miss Devereux, speaking too hotly again under the irritation caused by the other's manner.

"What shall I say?" asked Fanny. "Dear Sir Talbot, go home to your little wife, and help wind worsted. Don't look to the right or the left on the road, that's a good boy." Would this do?"

"Something to that effect would do very well," said Miss Devereux. "Of course, what I have said is perfectly unwarrantable and unjustifiable—"

"Perfectly," cooed Fanny, with delightful amiability, as she might have addressed her most intimate friend.

"Still, you brought it on yourself," added Miss Devereux.

"But suppose I refuse to do this, or any thing like it?" cried Fanny, with more animation, though betraying no sign of anger. "Suppose I say I am doing nothing wrong—that I choose to amuse myself with Sir Talbot—what do you think of doing in that case?"

"I can't say I have thought."

"Odd," said Fanny, laughing again. "I have seen for days you wanted to lecture me; but what is the use of distressing yourself if you can hold out neither bribe nor threat?"

"If you are a good, true-hearted woman, neither will be needed!" exclaimed Miss Devereux, tormented past her last frail hold of patience by this insolent calmness.

"I never saw the sort of seraphic creature you mention," said Fanny. "Lady Castlemaine comes nearer the description than any body; if her fate is as sad as you describe, I congratulate you and myself on being neither good nor true-hearted."

"I decline a share in such congratulations," said Miss Devereux. "I shall say *au revoir* now. I had no idea our talk would stray in the direction it has."

"I like it," said Fanny; "it is a pleasant variety in the usual stale topics women discuss."

But"—anxious to vex and worry her opponent farther—"you have made a muddle of it, after all! You began in a very severe style indeed, and you don't carry it out."

"Upon my word!" cried Miss Devereux. "Long ago, Fanny St. Simon, I told you that I had never met a human being with your genius for being provoking, and I can only repeat it."

"Then, why do you meddle with me?" she asked, a sudden flash of anger darkening her eyes. "Having meddled with what you justly observe is none of your business, why do you leave the matter unfinished?"

Then she laughed at her own energy, and her visitor's troubled, indignant face.

"I can not see that it is a subject for laughter," exclaimed Miss Devereux, stung afresh by this merriment. "You are engaged to be married."

"And what then?"

"Suppose these Baden gossipings should come to the ears of—"

"Chut!" interrupted Fanny, holding up her hand. Her quick ear had caught the sound of a step in the anteroom. "Yes, I thought so! Dear Miss Devereux, here comes the unfortunate individual now! You might tell him yourself—the information would come with such a good grace from you, of all persons in the world!"

As she spoke the door opened, and Gregory Alleyne appeared. He had arrived on the previous day, unknown to Miss Devereux.

"Come and shake hands with an old friend, Gregory," cried Fanny, gayly. "She came on purpose to welcome you. I told you I was as naughty as possible at Baden; just ask Helen Devereux if it is not true."

Miss Devereux rose; Mr. Alleyne advanced. Both changed color, though they managed a few commonplaces with sufficient composure.

Fanny's eyes danced with malicious glee; and wherever a tiny dagger, in the guise of an apparently innocent word, could pierce the armor of one or the other, Fanny thrust the weapon resolutely and dexterously home, and they only blamed their own weak, cowardly hearts, not her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE BEACH.

ST. SIMON appeared at Creuxville only three days after Alleyne's arrival.

It was a glorious morning; Alleyne had come rather early to the house, and, finding it difficult to sit still and talk and be talked to, Fanny proposed their going down to the beach.

"Would you mind taking poor T.?" she asked, as soon as he had consented to her first proposition. "It does her so much good to go out, and she hates walking unless she has company."

"Ask her, of course; I will give her my arm with pleasure," Alleyne answered.

"You are always so kind," said Fanny, and she smiled, then sighed, and her eyes rested somewhat wistfully on his face.

"Are you not well this morning?" he asked.

"Oh yes; there is never any thing the matter with me—as far as health goes, at least. I am fanciful, and given to tormenting myself sometimes, perhaps."

"Are you doing that now?"

"I suppose you would think me very silly if I said yes?"

"I should try and persuade you to tell me the cause," he replied, taking her hand kindly. "Is there any thing that really troubles you, Fanny?"

"I dare say there is no reality about it, but something troubles me all the same," she said, giving him a shy glance.

"Can I help set it right?"

"Perhaps; it concerns you, anyway."

"Then let me hear it, by all means."

"I'm a goose! I know it is just one of my teasing fancies. Tell me that it is, will you not?"

"But I must hear the fancy first!"

"Ah, well! only—now you will not laugh? It seems to me that you are different since you came back; *triste—ennuyé*. Oh, I forgot! you don't like French words. It is just my absurdity, is it not? You are glad to come back!"

"I am very glad to come back," he replied.

"Perhaps I am a little silent and grave. Remember, I have gone through a good many painful scenes during my absence."

He stopped; his explanation was not entirely truthful, and he suddenly became conscious of it.

"How selfish of me not to have thought of that! Forgive me, do forgive me!" cried Fanny, and looked such a beautiful model of contrition that he could not help admiring her, gloomy and dissatisfied as he felt.

Dissatisfied with himself, though, not her! It was finding Helen Devereux at Creuxville which had put him in this frame of mind, and he recognized this, angry and ashamed, too, that he should be forced to admit it. Fanny understood the whole matter as clearly as he did, feeling neither pity nor indignation at what she perceived. She wanted him to see that she noticed his abstraction and gravity, because hereafter the time might come when she would wish to use this season as a weapon against him; when she might desire to overwhelm him by her acquaintance with his past. Then she should want to remind him that she had observed his manner, had spoken of it, and that he had put her off with paltry excuses—he who prided himself on his candor and honesty. She did not disguise from her mind the fact that before their married life had continued long she should need

to make use of such charges against him as a reason for her own conduct. Ever since his return she had felt that it would be impossible, once his wife, to keep up the farce of tenderness and attention. This state of feeling was due to the effect those weeks of Castlemaine's society had upon her; she knew that, too, but she did not regret them. So when the wedded yoke should gall too heavily, and her hot spirit break into active rebellion; when he learned that he had no more hold on her heart than the merest stranger, she would need all these proofs of what she called his treachery, that she might put herself in the right, might be able to declare that the change in her rose from her knowledge of his deceit.

Yet she wronged him. He was conscious of no revival of tenderness toward Helen Devereux. He still believed that it was rather anger than any other emotion which the sight of her roused. But the memory of the old days would come back. He could not help regretting those wasted years spent in adoring an ideal; they still looked so beautiful that the new ties he had assumed showed poor and common, and it was for this he reproached himself with such bitter humiliation.

So now, when Fanny began to exclaim against her own wickedness in not remembering how he had suffered and undergone every species of annoyance during his absence, once more the desire to give her a frank, full explanation occurred to him with renewed urgency. But an explanation was exactly what Miss St. Simon did not desire or mean to have. She got away from the subject immediately; would hear nothing, only that he forgave her selfish fancies, and promised never to indulge in such folly again. Then she summoned the Tortoise, and they went down to the beach, and strolled about among the idle people who were then enjoying the sunshine and the fresh sea-air.

Presently they came upon Roland Spencer, and though he made his greetings cordially enough, and seemed quite at his ease, he had no wish to tarry. But Fanny knew that presently the Tortoise would cry out she was fatigued and beg to sit down, and then Alleyne would be at liberty to bestow his attention upon herself, and it was to avoid such attention that she had proposed coming out. So now, when Spencer showed signs of meaning to escape, she said, laughingly,

"Well, I did think you would have politeness enough to offer me your arm instead of running away. Mr. Alleyne has to take care of aunt, and I am so tired walking in this slippery sand."

Roland could not have resisted had resistance been possible. He gave Fanny his aid, and they walked on, soon distancing the poor Tortoise and her cavalier. Indeed the Tortoise, as Fanny had foreseen, soon complained of fatigue, and begged to rest; but by this time her niece and Spencer

were so far in advance that they could not be supposed to know the others had paused.

"What a comfort to have met you!" Fanny said; "I have scarcely seen you a minute alone since you came. And now you don't seem to care; you look cross. Aren't you glad any more to see me, Roland?"

But he could not be played with and teased; his heart was too sore still, though he never dreamed that she tortured him wittingly, just to get out of herself for a little.

"Is it true that you don't care to see me any more, Roland?" she added, when he did not speak.

"You must not ask such questions," he said, almost sternly. "Fanny, I am doing my best; don't make me feel how poor and weak it is."

"Why, you are braver and stronger than any body in the world, Roland—and truer too!" she cried.

"Never mind," returned he, impatiently. "I try, God knows I have tried—and I will, and I shall conquer!"

She did not need to ask what he meant. She was sorry for his pain, too—sorry that she had asked her question. Why should she torture him as she did every body else—him of whom she was so fond in a sisterly, patronizing way?

"You will always conquer, Roland, whatever you undertake," she said, softly.

"You mean when the battle is against myself, I suppose."

"And those are the hardest battles to fight. See how the rest of us fail always."

"Oh, it seems to me other people don't have to engage in such contests: what they want comes to them, and there's an end."

"Roland!" she said, reproachfully.

"Yes, it was a silly speech; it is always silly to complain."

"I did not mean that. But how can you look about and say that other people get what they want? How can you say it to me, of all persons?"

"I beg pardon; but—it will sound brutal, I fear."

"Say it all the same. At least, if it is something harsh it will sound truthful. What did you mean?"

"Only that in any case one need not take what one does not want: as I think you are doing."

"As you know I am; I have never concealed that from you. But you don't understand any thing about it, Roland. What I have begun, I must finish, and there's an end."

"No; the worst of it is, there will never be an end."

"Oh, don't remind me of that, don't! I can not draw back now, Roland; there are things I can not make clear even to you. Perhaps if I had known how hard it would be, I might have

hesitated in the beginning; but it is too late! Only don't think of me any more harshly than you can help. Try to believe there may have been some excuse for my conduct which you do not know."

"I shall never think harshly of you, Fanny; you are sure of that."

"My good, good Roland—my brave, kind brother!"

She clasped her hands over his arm, and looked up into his face. The touch of those delicate fingers, the light in those appealing eyes, made his head swim and his step actually falter; but he walked on in silence, not trusting himself to glance at her again. He had his battle to fight, and he would fight it manfully. She belonged to another now; soon any weakness where she was concerned would be an absolute sin on his part, and Roland vowed that his soul should not be sullied by such unworthy error.

Presently Fanny's voice called him out of his reverie.

"What are you thinking, Roland?"

"A great many things; but they would not be worth repeating."

"I am not sure of that. Oh, I had quite forgotten those people—we have walked ever so far. Well, your reflections must go, and we must get back. T. will be seized with the idea that we have been washed away by the waves, and Mr. Alleyne is not enough accustomed to her vagaries to know how to manage her."

Roland was quite ready to return; he had no wish to find himself alone with Fanny in these days. He wanted a cure for his heart-ache, not a weak indulgence in momentary pleasure which only left the wound sorer, and rendered it more difficult for him to struggle on in the right way.

They came in sight, at last, of the Tortoise and Mr. Alleyne; but the former seemed quite peaceful and calm, and was listening to her companion's conversation with as much of an expression of interest as her face could assume in these days.

"Mrs. St. Simon looks very comfortable," Spencer said.

"Yes; we need not have hurried back; but I suppose it was better. I was in a mood to complain and gird against destiny, and that does no good, does it?"

"None, Fanny."

"Please do me one more favor this morning," she said.

"Of course I will."

"Come home with us. T. will want to go in, and I am sure I shall do or say something dreadful if we don't have company."

She could hardly have asked any slight thing so hard for Roland; to play third in a conversation between Fanny and her betrothed was what he always got away from. But he bowed his head in assent, and only smiled sadly when she thanked him in her pretty, enthusiastic fashion.

"Did you begin to think we were lost, T.?" asked Fanny, laying her hand on her aunt's shoulder.

"Lor!" squeaked the Tortoise. "You frightened me, Fanny. I didn't see you come up."

"You seemed very earnest in your talk," laughed Fanny. "I shall tell St. Simon what a flirtation you are having with Mr. Alleyne."

"She's only joking," the Tortoise explained to the two gentlemen in a wheezy whisper. "Mr. Alleyne was telling me about—about the coral reefs, Fanny—away off there, you know; and she pointed vaguely out to sea as if they lay somewhere toward the English coast. "Do you know about the coral reefs, Mr. Spencer?" she continued.

"Not so much as I ought, I dare say," he replied.

"Oh, they are very wonderful—in the Italian—I mean Indian Ocean; but I don't recollect if it is from there the birds bring the guano—Mr. Alleyne knows."

"Your explanation must have been singularly clear," Fanny observed to that gentleman, but he never had the heart to smile at the Tortoise's woolly bewilderment; he could not help feeling that some great shock or prolonged trouble had left her what she was. Indeed, Fanny once, when in the mood for recitation, composed a moving tale out of the slight facts she was acquainted with in regard to the loss of the Tortoise's baby, and the brain-fever which followed, and Alleyne concluded that since then she had never been quite like other people.

"Fanny!" she called, suddenly, "bend down your head."

"Yes, T."

"I—want—to—sneeze!" in an awful whisper, and with such hissing distinctness that it sounded like a strangled whistle.

"We will go home, T.," Fanny answered aloud. "If you ask him, I dare say Mr. Spencer will come and have breakfast or lunch, or whatever you please to call it, with us."

"Will he?" returned the Tortoise. "Yes, there's sure to be enough—I mean eatables. Do come, Mr. Spencer. And I need my lunch—I couldn't remember what it was I hadn't had."

Fanny kept her hand on the Tortoise's arm, so the two gentlemen were obliged to walk by themselves; indeed, they understood the reason for this, and did not turn their heads.

"Now, sneeze and be done, T.," Fanny said.

Out came the snuff-box, and the Tortoise inhaled a tremendous pinch with sensuous enjoyment.

"It makes me feel stronger," she sighed; "but don't tell, Fanny."

They were seated at the luncheon-table, when St. Simon entered so unexpectedly that the Tortoise at sight of him dropped her knife and fork,

and uttered one of her dolorous squeaks. She was always frightened when he first appeared after an absence, and shrunk into a heap, mindful, probably, of past pinches.

"My dear Anastasia!" said St. Simon, pretending to kiss her forehead, though Fanny noticed that he was careful not to touch it. "Fanny, my love, embrace your affectionate relative. Ah, Alleyne! welcome back heartily; the same to you, Roland, my boy."

Long before the Tortoise had recovered a semblance of self-possession St. Simon was established at table, eating a comfortable breakfast, and talking in his usual gay fashion.

"I am en route for England," he said; "but I could not resist the pleasure of looking in on you for a day. What do you say to that for a proof of devotion, T.?"

The Tortoise rolled her eyes wildly, but managed to reply,

"Yes, St. Simon;" and her husband laughed.

"Telegrams and unexpected arrivals are always too much for my wife's nerves," he said.

"Are you actually going to-morrow?" Fanny asked.

"Yes, I must. What is the old adage?—Business before, et cetera. But I shall not be gone long."

He talked on gayly, but Fanny saw he looked troubled and anxious, though one would have needed to know him as thoroughly as she did to perceive it. After a while both the guests rose, even Alleyne feeling that he ought to leave the uncle and niece together.

"Will you be able to go out on horseback, as we proposed?" he inquired.

"Of course she will," said St. Simon, overhearing. "I did not come to make myself a bore by upsetting your arrangements. And you will both dine with us. Fan, can't we have the Castlemaines and Miss Devereux too? I know they are here."

"I dare say they would come if they have no other engagement," she replied.

"Then write a note, please. I can stay so short a time, and I want it as pleasant as possible."

As soon as they were alone Fanny asked eagerly if any thing had gone wrong about the business. He assured her that all was going as well as possible, so she could only conclude he had been losing money at the roulette table. Troubled he was, she felt confident of that; beset, too, by a certain diabolical irritation of which she had the full benefit during his brief visit, for the Tortoise wisely immured herself in her room and slept till near dinner-time.

He was furious to find that Fanny was still losing time—precious time, he called it. He wanted the marriage to take place at once, and spared neither argument nor reproach, but Fanny remained unmoved.

"You are mad!" he said; "hopelessly mad! The idea of wasting a moment—of playing with a chance like yours!"

"My dear St. Simon," returned she, "it is your head, not mine, that is a little wrong. You have talked like this ever since the day Mr. Alleyne was condescending enough to ask me to marry him. Do be tranquil; he is perfectly satisfied."

"Is there any day fixed?" he inquired.

"There will be to-morrow; I promised my future lord and master yesterday to think about it. Let me see! On the 20th of October your troubles shall end. I don't know why I set that date, but it has just offered itself to me—the 20th of October shall be my wedding-day."

"Almost six weeks off!" groaned St. Simon.

"I could not be ready before," she replied. "Poor Madame La Touche is doing her best, but you must remember that times are changed! Once I might have been married anyhow, anyway; but the niece of so important a personage as you have become must take a husband with due ceremony, and have lots of clothes."

"Oh! sheer and dawdle, and be a dunce, if you like!" cried he. "I have done!"

"I am glad of that," said Fanny, with a placidity which increased his ill-temper.

"I warn you, though—it is sheer idiocy! Knowing the world as well as you do—knowing that Alleyne might hear a hundred things about us both which would make him fight off if possible—I *can not* understand your trifling; it is too insane for endurance!"

"You said you had finished," observed Fanny, unruffled.

He gave her an awful look, and, unable to trust himself to pursue the conversation, flounced out of the room. I am aware that the expression is reserved usually to characterize the movements of the softer sex; but there are men who flounce when in a passion, and St. Simon was one of them.

Fanny's invitation to dinner would have been promptly refused by Miss Devereux; but Talbot chanced to be present when it arrived, and announced his intention of accepting. He should not go alone—Helen made up her mind to that; so she averred she wished to go, and said Marian would enjoy it too.

"You are sure it will not tire you, Mouse?" he asked; and then Miss Devereux knew he desired them both to remain at home.

"It will do her good; she stays shut up too much," replied the American before Lady Castlemaine could speak. "We will both go; it would be rude to refuse, and St. Simon is very amusing."

The dinner proved a merry one, though I think among the whole group no one was perfectly comfortable, with the exception of the Tortoise. The fact that she was surrounded by numbers

always made her happy when in her husband's society. St. Simon was in his wildest spirits; but, watching him always, Fanny grew more and more convinced that her suspicion of the morning was correct—something troubled him.

The next day St. Simon continued his journey.

Fanny announced to her betrothed the decision which had so irritated her uncle, and persisted in it, though Alleyne pleaded to have the wedding take place with as little delay as possible. She assured him that the 20th of October was the earliest she could fix.

She had promised Castlemaine to name the latest date practicable for her marriage, and she meant to keep her word.

"It is the last favor I shall ever ask of you," he had said. "Once you are married, I will take care that fate does not lead me in your way: I could not bear it—I could not!"

Fanny knew that it was very doubtful whether he meant this; but she intended it, at all events. The wedding over, Alleyne should take her to Italy; the following spring they would go to America. She had come to see that there were limits even to her force and will. It would be wise that a long season should elapse before she again met Talbot Castlemaine. Still she did not regret the past weeks; restless, miserable as Alleyne's return rendered her, absolutely odious as his presence was growing, loathsome as the thought of her marriage had become, she did not regret this renewal of her intercourse with Castlemaine, though she knew that all these feelings arose therefrom.

"If I had not seen him I could have gone on without suffering much," she said, over and over to herself. "I did not dislike Alleyne—I dare say I should have been quite comfortable. But I don't care! When I first met Talbot, I said I would be happy, and I was. I shall always have these dear weeks to look back on. Their memory may leave the present more unendurable, but my very misery will make that season look brighter. I don't care."

So now she told Alleyne it would be impossible for her to get ready before the last weeks in October, and he was obliged to submit.

"We will stay for a fortnight yet," she said. "The air does 't' so much good that I can't have the heart to take her away. I could not hasten matters by going to Paris; besides, I am sure it is very pleasant here; don't you find it so?"

"Oh yes; the weather is lovely."

"And we have people about us whom we honestly like," amended Fanny, "and one does not find such at every turning. Miss Devereux is an old friend of yours; I am exceedingly fond of her and the Castlemaines—of my boy, Roland Spencer, too! Let us stay and enjoy their society; who knows when we shall meet any of them again?"

They did remain at Creuxville for two whole weeks after St. Simon's departure—long after that gentleman's return to Paris, from whence he wrote numerous letters of mingled warning and appeal to his niece, letters to which the willful young lady paid not the slightest attention.

Fanny's appreciation of every thing dramatic gave a keen enjoyment to the odd position in which they were all placed. They were together a great deal; naturally Marian fell to Roland Spencer, Miss Devereux to Alleyne, and Fanny took Castlemaine. She managed this as adroitly as she did other matters; whosoever work it appeared, certainly it did not seem hers, and nine times out of ten one would have thought it Alleyne's doing—another little weapon ready to Fanny's hand, should she ever need it.

Miss Devereux would not go, and leave Marian, though it was painful to her to remain. At first she and Alleyne would gladly have avoided one another, but their tormentor found means always to prevent that. Fanny hugely enjoyed their annoyance. She knew very well that in spite of the anger in their hearts—in spite of each believing the other had been unjust, cruel, absolutely false—the old dream possessed still a portion of its power on both.

"Let them suffer," she thought; "I want them to. Why should the pain be all mine? Bah! in spite of their rigid ideas and their moral sense, and all the rest of it, to support them, they have not half my courage; your good people are always weak. Let them suffer; wasn't that part of my bargain with myself—at least for the Devereux? And oh, my lady, I've not done with you yet—not nearly done! There's no chance of an explanation between them—they are both too obstinate for that; they'd call the feeling by some fine name, but it's just mulish, diabolical obstinacy. So I run no risk in any way, not the slightest. It's not a bad move either, this throwing them together; how they do writhle under it! and never wit enough to circumvent my little schemes—two idiots! Yes, indeed; hereafter I shall have an added hold on my lord and master—my master—Fanny St. Simon's! I shall tell him he married me while Helen Devereux had his heart—and the Fates give her joy of that dull, frigid organ! I'll remind him that he discovered this before it was too late; that he was mean and base not to own the truth, and let me set him free—always an excuse for me if I can not keep up appearances in our private *têtes-à-têtes*!"

And Alleyne did suffer, suffer keenly. Before Fanny saw fit to break up the intercourse of this period, he was forced to admit to his conscience that there had always been a reason latent in his heart why the delays which one after another

prevented their marriage were so patiently borne by him.

The sentiment he had deemed love for his betrothed wife refused to grow and become the absorbing affection he had hoped and believed it might. It was a kind of temporary fascination which had beset him; he began to dread even this. He perceived, too, that the idea of seeing Helen Devereux had helped to draw him toward Fanny. He had desired, before meeting the girl who had crushed his heart, to be bound by new ties, placed in a position which would leave him not the slightest right to indulge in so much as a memory of the past. He saw that too.

Alleyne was a man of strict integrity and honor, and he felt terribly humiliated and abased as these things gradually forced themselves upon his mind; became so patent that no sophistry, could he stoop to employ such, would have hidden their truth. Had this occurred during the earlier days of his engagement, he would have told Fanny the whole truth, entreated her to be patient with his weakness, to marry him at once. But now it was impossible to speak, nor would she listen. He must fight his battle as best he could, and suffer from that sense of treachery and guilt which haunted him.

It was a long while before he reached so clear a stand-point as this. Fanny had studied the whole matter before he recognized its potency. It takes any of us much time to get at the exact facts concerning ourselves. Try as we may to act honestly toward others, the bravest of us are nearly always engaged in deceiving our own souls.

The days floated by—the soft, golden days, which ought to have brought peace to the most anxious heart.

To watch the little knot of persons with whom we have to deal, one might have deemed the lot of either an enviable one; but they bore heavy burdens about in the pleasant sunshine, all the same.

Fanny had great trouble to keep Castlemaine in reasonable order, though Alleyne was too much occupied by severe mental struggles to notice, and in any case too high-minded and noble to have indulged in a suspicion toward his affianced. But matters which escaped his observation were apparent enough to Miss Devereux and Roland Spencer, though they soon ceased to discuss them, for their opinions as to where the blame ought to rest differed widely.

Spencer could not reproach Fanny; he was too loyal to the idol he had set up. But nothing interfered with his condemnation of Castlemaine, and as he had grown to have a great esteem and tenderness for Marian, his verdict in regard to the careless husband was not a gentle one.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW THEY PARTED.

THE fortnight passed, and those days came to an end.

Lady Castlemaine received a letter from the housekeeper at the park announcing old Mrs. Payne's illness—a very serious illness. It was impossible to avoid going home at once; even Talbot recognized this, enraged as he was when Marian came to him, tearful and alarmed, to announce the evil tidings. But he did not give way to his temper, or reproach his wife, as many men would have done in his state of mind. All these annoyances came through her: he thought this, but he could feel, too, that she was not in fault—a degree of decency certain better husbands would do well to emulate.

As Marian stood before him, pale and grief-stricken—for the letter did not attempt to disguise the fact that Mrs. Payne's state was considered dangerous by the physicians—the great change in his wife's looks for the first time became really apparent to Castlemaine, palpable as it had been for weeks to every body else. As he noticed this alteration, one of his spasms of remorse seized him, always as ill-directed and brief as his efforts at doing right.

He felt remorse, and sincere sympathy for Marian, even while his passionate heart was raging under the knowledge that he must go away—must quit the enchantress who had succeeded in casting a glamour so fresh and powerful over his fancy and his soul. Yet while he inwardly rebelled at this necessity, he was still gazing at his wife, still feeling pity for her and detestation of himself. He remembered again his eagerness in that season before his marriage. Those grand resolutions he had formed to forsake his evil courses came back and tortured him. Yet all the while the time looked so far off, so unreal, that it seemed scarcely possible it could have been he who had fancied himself in love with this girl, he who had dreamed of wonderful deeds which should work a redemption for the miserable past.

These bitter thoughts in the brief whirl of seconds, his wrath at having to depart surging madly under the whole, his eyes always fixed with a vague pity on Marian's altered face. He saw how the color had faded, how pale it was, how thin and drawn; what an expression of patient sadness the soft eyes had assumed. Ah, she was very unlike the childish beauty who had once stirred his impressionable nature. And now he began to transfer his pity to himself, as an antidote to those sharp pangs of conscience.

"We can go at once, can we not? We need not wait?" Marian asked, eagerly, bringing him out of his strange, distracting reflections.

There was only one answer possible, without

nearing the verge of brutality, and Castlemaine was incapable of that.

"Of course not, Mouse; we will go at once. But don't be too much alarmed; old Mrs. Carey is always in extremes. I dare say we shall find the grandmamma less ill than you expect."

"She has had one or two similar attacks," Marian said, swallowing down her tears. Even then she could recollect how crying distressed and annoyed her husband. It was very good of him to be so ready to go; she had half feared being sent alone. "But she must be extremely ill! And we can start to-day? You are very kind, Talbot."

What a hopeless, patient ring her voice had caught! He had not noticed it before. He hated to hear it.

"Of course, child. Let me see; we are so near Havre, the best way is to cross from there to Southampton. We can catch to-night's boat. Don't cry, Marian. Don't look so distressed. I am convinced we shall find her better."

"I'm not crying," she answered, with a watery smile. "You are very good to me, Talbot. I am sorry to be such a bother. I know you hate sudden journeys."

"Now, don't make me feel that you think me a selfish brute," cried he, irritably, though laughing as he spoke. "Be off, and tell your maid to get every thing ready. Just give the orders to Antoine also. I am going out for a while."

He was going to bid Fanny St. Simon farewell; Marian knew that. Always she must submit to such things: she knew that too. There would always be some woman he was going to welcome or to bid farewell; flirtation was a necessary part of his existence.

Perhaps he loved her (Marian), but it was not like the love she had pictured—not the love he had promised. Life had grown dull and blank and empty; it was difficult to have patience. He must love her; why should he have married her else? She had neither rank, nor fortune, nor great beauty—nothing but her affection to make her worth the taking. Ah, had that been it? Had she shown her heart in her eyes so plainly, that pity roused a kind of tenderness in his breast? There were seasons when she was obliged to fear this, and then she felt that her burden was harder than she could bear. If she could only die, and leave him free!

Oh, if he had not needed her! if she could not enter into and form half his life, why had he not left her alone? This was not living—this was not marriage! She might better have died in that dreadful fever, and been done.

She thought over these things when he left her, as she had thought of them day and night for weeks and weeks.

She went to recommend Christine and Antoine to make all possible haste; then she passed on to Miss Devereux's room, to tell her of their

hurried departure. Miss Devereux was sympathetic enough—much more demonstrative than usual.

"If you like, I will go with you," she said, after doing her best to comfort Marian by letting her shed freely the tears which had been kept back through fear of distressing Castlemaine.

"It does one good to cry," Marian said, when she recovered her composure. "I couldn't cry before Talbot; it worries him so."

Miss Devereux understood; not one of Marian's struggles escaped her. But there was nothing to answer; Marian never spoke of her griefs or disappointments. Miss Devereux had, days before, given Talbot one energetic lecture, but it only caused him to avoid her in sullen ill-temper. So now, when Marian's words showed her another proof of the weary self-contained life the girl was forced to lead, Miss Devereux did not appear to notice it; she only repeated,

"If I can help you, Marian, I shall go willingly."

"I think—I—"

Marian hesitated. She would have given much for Miss Devereux's companionship, but she knew that Talbot did not like her as formerly; he would be displeased at having her thrust upon him.

"You are so good," she began again, after a brief, confused silence. "No; I shall have to be with grandma all the while; it would be dull for you."

"I hope you would not hesitate on that account," Miss Devereux said, rather dryly.

"Oh, Helen!—dear Helen!" cried Marian, reproachfully, but she offered no explanation.

Miss Devereux's heart softened; the real reason occurred to her: Marian feared that her presence would annoy Castlemaine.

"If you find I can be of use, you will send?" she asked. "I dare say you are right: I could not do any good now; but when the dear grandmother begins to get better, then I will come."

"You are not vexed? You know I love you!" pleaded Marian, with an impulsiveness which she seldom showed nowadays. "Say that you are sure of that, Helen!"

"Of course I am sure, Mouse—quite sure," Miss Devereux answered, trying to speak playfully in order to hide her emotion. "As for being vexed, what a cross-grained thing you must think me grown to suppose it possible!"

"No, dear—no! you are what you always were, the kindest, best girl in the world," returned Marian. "But I know I have been dull and stupid since you came; when one is not well, one gets tiresome ways; and I could not have you think I loved you less—"

Her voice was so choked with tears that she had to pause; yet she did not weep.

"I have never thought that, Marian; I could never think it," Miss Devereux said. "Were

you really to change in your manner toward me, I should know the old tenderness was in your heart still."

"Yes, dear, always—always."

They were both contemplating the same possibility, that their future intercourse might never be so free and untrammelled as the past had been. A dislike once implanted in Talbot's mind grew rapidly, and he had begun to feel ashamed in Miss Devereux's presence. Helen knew, too, that Fanny St. Simon had fostered this inimical feeling by every means in her power. It might easily come about that she and Marian could never go back to the intimacy of the old days.

"But, Marian," she said, suddenly, "remember your promise to send for me if I can be of the least use. You will not forget?"

"Forget?—oh, Helen! And I love you—I do love you! Say that you forgive any thing that has seemed cold or stupid. I did not mean it—I could not mean it."

Miss Devereux just took her in her arms and cried. She could not shed tears for her own troubles, but it almost broke her heart to see the alteration in this child—to think what had caused it, and to remember that in a way she must blame herself for Marian's misery. If she had only been less credulous, had insisted upon a longer trial! Yet she could have done nothing in reality; Talbot's sophistries would have outweighed her arguments; nay, Marian would have obeyed his slightest wish, and deemed it disloyalty to hesitate.

The two spent the morning together, getting back to safer topics of conversation. When Helen left her, Marian fell to thinking again. She remembered that at least she would have Talbot to herself for a time; no one could stand between. Oh! perhaps in the quiet of the next few weeks a change might come. Perhaps they might return to something like the happiness of those opening days of marriage, when they seemed lifted above the common earth, when heaven looked so near that each passing breeze floated straight out of paradise, and all sights and sounds of beauty appeared a part of her Eden.

If she might only have one brief vision like that before death took her, she could be quite content to go.

Some such possibility as this upon which Marian dwelt with a feeling of rest suggested itself to Miss Devereux's mind also, and that evening, when she and Roland Spencer were discussing the departure, they agreed it might be the best thing which could happen.

"If he will only stay at the Park," Roland added, doubtfully.

"But he can not leave her; indeed, if he can only be made to see how Marian is changed, I am sure he will not," Miss Devereux said. "Before they left I spoke out. If I could alarm him about the poor child's state, I meant to do it."

It was almost a settled thing in both their minds that Marian was not to live long; and neither, contemplating the probable earthly future which would lie before her, could grieve at the idea of her release.

"Nothing will make him open his eyes," Roland replied; "he will stay willfully blind up to the last, and then moan tremendously. His is a hopeless case, Miss Devereux; you may as well believe it."

The young man was a very harsh judge, in these days, of Talbot Castlemaine's conduct; more to screen Fanny in his own opinion than from any other reason.

The baronet had gone straight to Miss St. Simon on leaving his wife. He knew that he should find her alone. She had arranged to have a visit from him this morning, and had sent Alleyne off on an expedition in Roland Spencer's company, managing it days in advance with her usual art. She enjoyed compassing such things, trifles as they were.

So Castlemaine entered the room where she sat in a pleasant gloom—a room odorous with beautiful flowers; she sitting there in her pale-amber robes, whose delicate texture showed the contours of her exquisite neck and arms. Her face wore a soft flush of expectation; her eyes turned toward the door as he appeared, with a look which might have unsteadied stouter nerves than his.

"You begged so hard for this morning, and now you are a half hour late," cried she, as he came in.

He hurried up and took her hands; his agitation was real enough; the sight of her perilous beauty drove him mad.

"I am going away," he said, hoarsely.

"Ah, indeed! Well, I advised you to do that some time ago," returned she, laughing, though his words struck her like an icy wind. "But you needn't take both my hands on that account—civilized people only take one."

"Don't laugh!—don't tease me!" he exclaimed. "Did you hear? I am going away."

"I wish you a pleasant journey," said she, bending over a vase of flowers on the table by her.

"Great God, what an idiot I am!" he exclaimed, furiously.

"You know I detest swearing," returned she.

"And you don't care?" he cried.

"I have just told you I hated swearing," she replied.

He dashed his hat on the table; it was a relief to bang something.

"Upon my soul, you are enough to make one believe in the old legends," he said; "Circe—Medea—any of that set—must have looked and acted like you."

She raised her head; the provoking smile played about her lips still, but her eyes were full

of reproach. She had been afraid at first to question him; the news of his departure had so shaken her that she was fearful of betraying her misery and pain, unless she snatched a little space to get composure back by tantalizing words.

"Why are you cross with me?" she asked, plaintively. "You come and blurt out that you are going away—then rush into a fury, as if it were my fault."

"Neither my fault nor yours," he answered; "just my odious, accursed fate, that holds me fast as usual."

"Going away," she continued, musingly.

"Ah, well, we have had a few very pleasant weeks; I shall remember them. Do you think of them sometimes too, Talbot?"

"When shall I ever think of any thing else? Don't you see I am out of my senses—mad at the idea of going?"

She held up the white hand which had so often of late been forced to give warning that he was straying upon forbidden ground.

"One is sorry at leaving one's friends, but one doesn't go mad," she replied. "Where are you going? and what is the reason of this sudden departure?"

"Marian's old grandmother is ill—dying; she must go to her at once; and I can't, in decency, let her travel alone."

"Of course not; and a married man's duty must be his pleasure too," returned she, in a cold, disdainful voice. "Dear me! there'll be dying speeches and fainting fits, and promises on your part to the departing spirit—how very exciting! Not quite in your line, though."

"I was a fool to come here and tell you!" he exclaimed. "I might have known you would only jibe and torment me! You don't care in the least; you are glad to be rid of me."

She could tease and worry him, yet his reproaches stung her heart into fresh anger and suffering.

"Why should I care?" she cried. "What is your staying or your going to me? We are very good friends—every body is that. You'll forget easily enough; yours is not a troublesome memory, Talbot Castlemaine."

"Fanny, I am almost desperate now; don't drive me out of what gleam of reason I have left!" he said, brokenly. "See here; I have been patient, I have held my tongue, I have acted up to the letter of the conditions you insisted upon—you can't deny it."

"You have been very good—very," she answered, stretching out her hand.

He took it and pressed his hot lips on the palm—twice—thrice. The touch of that fevered kiss rendered her absolutely faint. She drew her hand away, and moved her chair abruptly back.

"Then be kind to me now," he pleaded.

"Let me have a little reward; just a few gentle

words! Heaven only knows when we shall meet again."

"Not for a long, long time, Talbot," she replied; "not until I am old and wrinkled and ugly; I have made up my mind to that."

"I will see you!" he cried, passionately. "I'll not give up the one poor bit of happiness this world has left for me. Not see me! Then you shall hear the truth now at least—I love you! I love you!"

He started to his feet, and tried to catch her in his arms. She rose, and walked toward the door without a word.

"Where are you going? what do you mean?" he called.

"If this is what you have to say, our farewell is said already," she answered, looking at him over her shoulder.

"Come back; I forgot myself. Oh, Fanny, one is not angry at a madman! Forgive me, do forgive me!"

"Then go and sit down," she said, sternly.

He obeyed.

"How could you say that?" he continued, after a moment's silence, as she resumed her seat.

"How can you talk of never seeing me again?"

"Because it must be so," she replied. "I did think we might be friends, but these last days have shown me that our lives must separate here and forever."

"And it does not hurt you to say that?"

"Oh, my hurts—I'm not accustomed to paying much attention to them," she said, with restrained bitterness. "Life has been hard on me, but I am used to pain."

"And part came through me," he cried. "You did care, Fanny; you may deny it, but you did care! See—we are parting now; you are right when you say it is best we should not meet again, but own that you did care."

Oh, that face bent toward her—that perfect, glorious face, like the countenance the old faith gave to some god gifted with eternal youth! Oh, those eager eyes, burning into her very heart! Oh, that proud mouth, with its mournful smiles, its sensitive trembling, whose every change had power to fire her soul! Oh, that one love of her thwarted, miserable life! Oh, her precious dream—her sole, golden hope shattered in its prime! She was losing him—losing the last ray of sunshine her days could ever hold.

These thoughts in her mind while he poured out passionate laments which she scarcely heard, her eyes on his face, her soul in them, trying to stamp that beauty still more indelibly upon her heart; in all time to come she should have nothing but that memory left.

"You will not speak, you will not give me even that poor comfort to take with me into the darkness. Oh, my God! Fanny, if I were dying, you would not refuse to own the truth! It is just the same; death could not part us more

effectually than we are parted now! I shall never see you any more—never any more! I couldn't—you are right; to see you married, to know—oh, I should murder that man before your eyes!"

He flung his head upon the table and groaned aloud. She was white as a ghost; nothing looked alive about her except the great brown eyes dilated with agony.

"You suffer," she said, in a strange voice, "you suffer! Well, I have suffered first and last also."

"Yes, I do suffer; and you have no pity."

"I never had any for myself," she answered. "You have said hard things to me this morning, Talbot; you have said many such during the past weeks. It is a man's way; you men always hurt the thing you fancy you love."

"If there was any thing for which you wanted revenge, you have it," he said, raising his troubled countenance. "I am wretched enough to satisfy even you, Fanny."

"I don't want you to be wretched," she cried out, her fingers twisting themselves together, her head moving wearily from side to side like a person struggling against the delirium of fever. "I did want you to be when we met at Baden, I'll own that. I had no more pity for you than for myself; but it hurts me so—I can't bear it. I'd rather tell you any thing than see you suffer like this! I think I have not much pride; oh, Talbot, Talbot!"

He was on his feet again; her look and gesture stopped him.

"Don't make it all worse than it is," she said. "Suppose we were dead, and met, we should tell the truth quietly. We are the same as dead; let us do it now."

"Fanny, Fanny!"

"You want to know if I cared; you fancy I did, but you don't know how much. I don't mind telling you; why should I? Care! Oh, my God, Talbot! Do you remember when we parted in Italy? It was you who went away."

"Fanny, have a little mercy!"

"Do you remember when we met afterward? It was you who went away."

"You hate me; you must hate me, or you could not torture me like this!" he moaned.

"Do you remember last autumn, when we met in the street?" she continued, in the same hollow tone, her hands always twisting themselves slowly together, her head moving from side to side. "I was quiet enough; you wanted to go. I couldn't keep you."

"How could I stay! You know how I was hemmed in; fettered by debts—"

"I am not blaming you, but you wanted the truth. The truth, oh, great Heaven! Talbot Castlemaine, I found I was going to be rich; I had just one thought—of you! I said you cared—you would come back to me if only we

had means to live; I said your feeling for me had been different from that you had given to any other woman—"

"And it was true," he broke in.

"I said," she went on, not heeding, "that it would be sweet to make the world bright and easy for you! I dreamed—dreamed for weeks—oh, this life of ours! I wrote to you; how could I be sure you were true? I could only write of the change in my fortune, but I think all my heart must have been in my letter. I told you, Talbot, that you had humbled my pride."

"You wrote to me?" he repeated. "When? I never knew."

"No, of course not; wait! I wrote my letter; I spent that last night awake—the last night of my dream, my beautiful dream! And then the end came; you were married. Talbot, I tore up my letter; I tore up my heart with it! You wanted to hear the truth; you have it now."

"If I had known—"

"There is no good of any more words," she interrupted. "You and I have come to the end. Go away now. There is nothing more to tell; we have come to the end!"

He rose again; his features were livid and seamed with anguish, his beautiful blue eyes looked actually dead and cold. Keen and easily roused were this man's faculties of suffering—as sensitive as his capabilities of enjoyment—and they were awakened to their utmost in this parting. He believed now that if he could have claimed and kept this woman for his own, the spell of her fascinations would be as lasting as it was strong; and it is certain no other human creature ever possessed a tithe of the power over him which she had gained.

He stood before her a few instants in silence. She did not attempt to speak; she had reached the limits of her self-control, and she beheld her misery reflected in his face. Presently he said, in an odd, repressed voice,

"Will you give me your hand, Fanny? It is the last time, you know."

She held up her perfect hand, then drew it back, saying, pitiously,

"You kissed it once there—and there! I never wear rings on those fingers, Talbot, because I can feel those kisses yet! It is another man's hand now; I can not give it you again."

"And it is all over, all over!" he moaned.

"All over," she repeated; "the end has come."

He turned away and sat down again in the nearest chair, hiding his face on his arm.

She went swiftly up to him; before he could stir she pressed her icy lips upon his forehead—once—twice. Her hand fluttered like a bird's wing across his golden curls; then she was gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MORNING CALL.

THE Castlemaines departed; Fanny began to cast about for excuses to leave Creuxville. Miss Devereux unintentionally aided her. Only the day after Sir Talbot and his wife sailed for England, Roland Spencer met Fanny and Alleyne on the beach, and told them Helen was going away, adding that he should very soon say adieu himself.

"So we are deserted," Fanny said, as Roland walked on. "This place would be detestable with our friends all absent; you would look so bored that I should quarrel with you! Well, I ought to be gone to Paris. Poor Madame La Touche keeps writing piteous appeals; she can get no farther without my interesting presence. Besides, St. Simon is doleful at my deserting him now, when we have so little time to spend together."

"Then Paris it shall be," Alleyne answered, trying to appear cheerful and interested.

"You don't want to go a bit," cried Fanny; "and no wonder—it will be as dull as a tomb."

"I do not think I shall mind that," he said.

"Ah! but I shall," returned she. "For ten days or more I shall be busy every moment—you will certainly get cross and reproach me; besides, I have heard you say twenty times that you detested cities in the early autumn."

"All of which, I trust, is not to condemn me to Creuxville?"

"No; I am not quite hard-hearted enough for that," she replied, laughing. "But I will tell you what occurs to me as a good idea."

"Well?"

"You have seen nothing of Normandy," pursued Fanny. "If I were you, I should seize this opportunity to make a little tour; it is beautiful weather. I wish I could go; but there is no help for it: I must away to dress-makers and other tiresome wretches. Lucky St. Simon does not hear; he would want to know if I included him among the abominations!"

"You banish me very coolly," Alleyne said, half amused, half annoyed.

"It does look like that, does it not?" returned she. "But try not to be unjust, though you are a man. As I told you, I shall be busy every moment: I venture to think you would be bored; but perhaps I flatter myself too much."

"No," he replied, simply; and Fanny mentally called him a stone.

"You admit that the time might hang heavy on your hands?" she asked.

"Yes;" only a monosyllable again.

"If you go through Normandy, you will be interested and amused," she continued, "and that you have not been lately."

He had never heard her voice take its sharp,

disagreeable tone before, and he regarded her in surprise.

"Have I done any thing to vex you?" he asked.

"Oh dear, no; but you have been bored. Well, you shall have your fortnight of solitary meditation! If at the end of it you come and say you find you have made a bad bargain, I promise not to be either lachrymose or vindictive."

"Fanny, do not jest on a matter like that!"

"Are you angry?"

"No; but so serious a thing—"

"Yes; please don't scold me!"

"Am I in the habit of doing that?"

"Oh! no, no! How you do take me *au pied de la lettre* this morning! more of those French phrases you hate. There, I'll not be naughty, and do not you be grim and awful. About the Normandy excursion?"

"It will be rather dull to set off alone."

"I dare say Roland Spencer would go," she said. "Dear me! for that matter, I heard Miss Devereux say the other day that she felt like sending for her step-mother, and drifting away on some tour."

He looked keenly at her; there was no sign that she had meant other than an idle commonplace or careless bit of nonsense. She often talked to him of Miss Devereux, nowadays, and sometimes he winced; but she never appeared to notice it. He was ashamed to admit that this proposal, which would offer a brief season of solitude and liberty, did not strike his fancy unpleasantly.

"I do dislike a city so early as this," he said, ignoring her observation in regard to their young countrywoman.

"I should think every body must, unless it be some genuine town lover, like St. Simon," she answered.

"Will you have leisure to miss me?" he asked, feeling that such remark was called for; indignant with himself that it was difficult to find a suitable one.

"At least I promise when you reach Paris not to be in a constant state of trying things on, and wondering what I am to buy next." She laughed, and made him laugh too. "But you must persuade Roland to go," she added; "it will be a kindness—keep him out of mischief, which he will get into if he goes to Paris."

Then Alleyne could only say that he would beg the young man's company.

But Roland Spencer had no mind to undertake an excursion with Mr. Alleyne. He fully recognized that gentleman's good qualities; he was glad for Fanny's sake; but the hurt and the pain of the past winter had left too deep a wound for him to accept such close companionship with the man who had won the prize he coveted. He did not covet it now, though; his heart was very

tender toward Fanny, but he blamed her too much for the eager love not to have suffered diminution. It was a shock to him that she could marry a man for whom she entertained such feelings (Fanny attempted no secret with him of the loathing and disgust which filled her soul as the time for her marriage approached). It was a relief in the new bitterness she felt to talk freely to some one, and she did not scruple to unburden her trouble and weariness to Roland.

"You will despise me," she said, "but I don't care. From the first I adopted you for my brother. One tells a brother every thing."

But he did not despise her; it would have been difficult for any masculine to despise Fanny St. Simon, whatever she said or did.

Roland was grieved and disappointed; but he pitied her so sincerely that even his condemnation was softened.

"So he wants you to go on a tour with him," she observed to Spencer the next morning. "You must not go. Come to Paris. I shall not see much more of you for a long time; do come."

Fanny St. Simon could no more have helped keeping some men in subjugation, to fetch and carry at her bidding, than she could have changed the color of her eyes. Just now, too, she was afraid of solitude; it held such dreadful ghosts, such dark forebodings!

As Spencer had announced, Helen Devereux was preparing to quit Creuxville. She had only remained on Marian's account; and that motive removed, she felt more eagerness to get away than she could find sober, sensible reasons to account for.

"I am an idiot!" she said to herself. "When shall I grow wiser? Well, I wanted to see Gregory Alleyne, and be satisfied the past was as dead as I tried to believe it. I have seen him"—she paused here in her thoughts. "Poor Gregory!" she continued, rushing off from her personal reflections with undignified precipitation. "I don't know why I say poor Gregory—yes, I do! I pity the man who must be Fanny St. Simon's husband. But he chose for himself; he does not seem happy, though. Ah me! there are mysteries that will never be cleared up in this world; in the next I suppose it will not matter. No doubt I'm a goose; still, there have been times when—when little things he said sounded as if he considered himself an ill-used person—that is the man of it. Bah! Helen Devereux, don't go digging about old graves; there's nothing there but unsavory corpses, and nettles growing over them that will sting your hands. It is an unprofitable occupation: let it alone, my dear."

The day but one after the Castlemaines' departure she went to bid adieu to Miss St. Simon and the Tortoise. Ever since their sharp encounter she and Fanny had been so elaborately

civil to each other that it was a sight to behold. Two men after so keen a fencing-match would have been rude, or not spoken, or found some pretext for punching heads. But women are not such blundering idiots. Either of these girls would have died by inches rather than show that her antagonist possessed the slightest power to wound.

Miss Devereux knew that at the hour she chose for her visit Gregory Alleyne was seldom at the house; but when she discovered she had selected this precise time for no other reason, she was so indignant that she deliberately sat down and waited, after dressing to go.

She had not the habit of returning to city haunts so early in the autumn, but there was no country place she cared to seek, and the two old ladies wrote her, pleading against further journeys. Still a third and more important argument urged her to settle in Paris. If she went off somewhere else she would always be forced to believe that she had feared to stay for Gregory Alleyne's wedding. She would prefer to suffer the doom of Nessus, or have a cancer, or endure any other calamity utterly fiendish and insupportable, rather than spend the rest of her life humiliated by this thought.

Gregory Alleyne was there when she entered the *salon*. Fanny stood beside him, her hand on his shoulder. It looked as if she had just risen from an ottoman by his chair, but she had, in truth, been seated some distance off. When the servant came in with Miss Devereux's card, Fanny crossed the room and assumed her present position, a question she asked giving a motive in Alleyne's eyes.

The Tortoise, dozing in a window, woke and was delighted to see the visitor, though she was more vague and odd than ordinary, from the effect of morphine Fanny had administered for a neuralgic attack. That young lady was cordial and charming, and there being nothing in particular for Alleyne to do, he did nothing but rise, bow, and smile, according to the stereotyped rules laid down for good behavior. Fanny managed, however, to make him share in the talk. Every possible subject which could rouse unpleasant thoughts in the mind of her betrothed or her guest, she brought up in carefully arranged sequence.

She could not live a chapter out of a sensation novel; she could not ruin Miss Devereux's beauty by slow poison, or shut her in a cell and torment her; but there were numberless little tortures respectability permitted, and none of these should be spared the woman or the man. For she had come to include Gregory Alleyne in the active animosity she had so long entertained toward Helen. Yes, she hated him too! She did not disguise the fact in her reflections; she uttered the ugly word boldly, and enjoyed the sound.

A very tidy thrust occurred to her while the conversation went on—a sweet little penance for both—and she prepared to inflict it with neatness and dispatch.

The Tortoise, always unusually animated in the society of these two guests, who were her special admiration, began to ask questions (her idea of conversation), and presently inquired of Miss Devereux how much longer she proposed remaining at Creuxville.

"I am going away to-morrow," the lady replied; "I came to make you my adieu, Mrs. St. Simon."

"Lor!" said the Tortoise, "I wouldn't."

What she meant was not exactly clear, but people who knew her were accustomed to such modes of speech.

"Going away!" cried Fanny, in a dismayed tone. "It is too bad—positively cruel! The Castlemaines are gone; Gregory—Mr. Alleyne—sets off on a walking tour, and now you take flight."

Under the circumstances this regret struck Miss Devereux as absurd; she knew the damsel and her aunt were likewise to depart.

"You leave for Paris also almost immediately, I believe," she said, half questioningly, and very dryly. She meant to show that the sort of St. Simonian plaint was a failure, but in truth Fanny had indulged it to provoke this very remark.

"Oh yes," she replied quickly, with a little, conscious laugh, "but I shall be busy. These lazy days have been so pleasant, I hate to see them end; your staying would have given me an excuse. Once in Paris, I shall not find a minute to myself."

"She says she's going to be married in October," added the Tortoise, in a wheezy half-whisper, uttering the precise remark Fanny could have desired. "What day was it, Mr. Alleyne?"

"The 20th," returned that gentleman, laconically.

There are few men who do not feel a certain embarrassment in hearing their wedding-day discussed. Alleyne waxed rather stiff and awkward—vexed with himself, therefore; but it did seem very odd to be discussing the subject before Miss Devereux.

"You will not have any too much time," said Helen, steadily, looking at Fanny as she addressed her.

"No," replied Fanny. She did a slight confusion very prettily. She was seated on the sofa beside Alleyne; she moved quickly to the other end, then as quickly assumed her former position, apparently ashamed of such girlish behavior. "Now that T. has made us both look foolish," she continued, glancing at Alleyne, but speaking to Helen, "I must tell you what has been in my mind. You will not refuse, dear

Miss Devereux? Gregory, help me persuade her—an old friend of yours. I know you wanted me to ask her. Oh, what a muddle I am making of the matter!" with another troubled laugh. "I want you to help me, Helen—to be one of my brides-maids; now, don't refuse. Gregory, don't let her."

"I fear that if your persuasions do not avail, mine would have little effect," said Alleyne, with an effort.

"But you must coax her, too; you have known her the longest."

Then Miss Devereux spoke. There was a buzzing in her ears, anger and mortification in her heart. She knew the request was a fresh bit of spite on Fanny's part, but she could not refuse. If she herself, or this heartless girl, were to believe she was afraid!

"To be brides-maid?" she said, with perfect ease, as if the demand were too indifferent and natural to need a thought. "Certainly, Miss St. Simon, I shall be charmed—only do have the livery white and blue. My complexion won't stand pink, and one could not consent to wear an unbecoming color even in such a cause."

"White and blue, of course!" cried Fanny. "How nice of you to say yes! I am so grateful! Thank her; do thank her, Gregory."

He was annoyed with her, with Helen, with every body and every thing, but he could not appear like a fool without some attempt to prevent it.

"I think your face is doing it better than any words of mine possibly could," he answered, and felt that he had not done badly.

"Thank me for having procured you a pretty compliment, Miss St. Simon," said Helen Devereux.

"Yes; he says he never pays compliments, but he manages to say very nice things; you have known him long enough to discover that," Fanny replied.

The Tortoise had gone into a momentary doze, and came forth from it with a jump, her senses more obscured than ever.

"I can't make out what you all mean," she whined, trying to quicken her wits by inhaling a pinch of snuff behind her handkerchief. "Fanny, what is Mr. Alleyne saying to Helen Devereux?" (He had said nothing.) "He can't marry you both, you know."

That gentleman's cheeks rivaled Miss Devereux's in color, and hers had grown too deep a damask to be becoming. But it was impossible to avoid joining in Fanny's burst of childish laughter; they were forced to do it, and, besides, the predicament was so absurd that tragedy heroes must have laughed.

"I can't see what you are all laughing at," pursued the Tortoise, in a voice of mild complaint. "I've been asleep, and I haven't had my afternoon cup of tea, and I can't understand things."

"Miss Devereux was consenting to be my chief brides-maid," Fanny explained. "Is it not nice of her?"

"To be what?" demanded the Tortoise, not wide enough awake to comprehend even so clear a statement.

"My brides-maid, T."

"Oh, I thought it would come from the confecturers. Or you didn't say cake? Oh no! I begin to understand," and the Tortoise looked slightly relieved. "If I only had my tea."

"I must run away now," said Miss Devereux, rising, "and Mrs. St. Simon can have both tea and explanation."

"You'd better stop and have a cup; it's very good," observed the Tortoise, in a burst of generosity.

Miss Devereux would have no tea, but now the Tortoise had so many fresh questions to ask that getting away was a difficult matter, and as they were troublesome queries Fanny did not aid the visitor.

"Didn't I get it mixed up?" cried the Tortoise. "You see, I had been dozing—was it rude? St. Simon says it is. And I thought you wanted to marry Mr. Alleyne and Fanny, didn't I? No—how was it? Did I dream he didn't wish to marry either of you?"

"Either way will answer, T., since it was only a dream," said Fanny, laughing as if it were the best joke in the world.

"But it couldn't be, could it? And he promised—didn't you promise, Mr. Alleyne?"

For the first time Alleyne wondered that St. Simon had never smothered the poor soul. Miss Devereux tried to act as if she thought it all as amusing as Fanny appeared to, and endeavored to get away, but the Tortoise held her dress.

"Did you say you were going to be married too, Helen?"

"Not that I am aware of, dear madam."

"Oh, but you must have said something—mustn't she, Mr. Alleyne? I couldn't have got everything all wrong, without somebody's saying something to set me off; now, could I?"

"I will try to talk more clearly when I come to see you in Paris," Miss Devereux said, feeling it necessary to speak.

"Are you coming? Didn't you and St. Simon quarrel? I know I thought you didn't like some one; was it Mr. Alleyne?"

"My dear T.!" cried Fanny, "Miss Devereux and Mr. Alleyne are very old friends: don't suggest such dreadful things."

"How could I have thought she quarreled if she didn't?" crooned the Tortoise, with a slow, irritating obstinacy she sometimes displayed when roused suddenly from a nap. "Why won't any of you explain any thing to me?"

"But there's nothing to explain, T."

"Now, Fanny; didn't you begin? Didn't

you say Helen was going to furnish your cake or something?"

She appeared on the point of falling asleep again, but she still held Miss Devereux fast.

"I really must say good-morning, Mrs. St. Simon," said Helen.

"Why must you?" demanded the Tortoise, waxing more and more argumentative.

"Because I have a great deal to do to-day. I shall come to see you when you get to Paris."

"Every body is always doing something," sighed the Tortoise. "You're as bad as St. Simon—and what's he so busy about? I wonder if I dreamed that he—"

"T., T., you are detaining Miss Devereux," broke in Fanny, deeming it time to check the Tortoise, since her maunderings approached a dangerous topic.

So Helen was permitted to say farewell; but when released from the Tortoise—who sunk back in her chair, and went to sleep like a baby—Fanny had to indulge in a few more ecstasies, and added expressions of gratitude.

"It was so good of you to promise; I was so afraid you might not like the idea!"

"Oh, all young women like playing the brides-maid's part," said Miss Devereux.

"And we will consult about the most becoming costume. I shall depend greatly on you, Helen; your taste is perfect!"

"Such as it is, it will be quite at your service," replied Miss Devereux, carefully hiding her annoyance. She knew that whenever the creature employed her Christian name she meant to be especially venomous.

"Gregory, you bad boy, you don't say a word!" cried Fanny, desiring to give him his full share of the penance.

"When it comes to a matter of feminine attire, I am forced to take refuge in silence," he said.

"Oh, you are as near asleep as T.!" laughed Fanny. "I meant you to thank her again."

"And that you have done better than I could," he answered, more nearly vexed with her than he had ever felt.

"Besides, it must all be left till we meet in Paris," added Miss Devereux. "I really must go now."

"How I hate saying good-bye—it is such a doleful word!" sighed Fanny.

"We need not say it for so short a time," rejoined Miss Devereux.

"I shall expect you to give yourself up to me and my affairs entirely," said Fanny. "Oh, I shall be so selfish you will hate me. And you really will go! Then, not good-bye, but *au revoir*."

She had three minds to kiss the departing guest, for the pleasure of seeing her wince, but could not bring herself quite to that. Fair as the face was, Fanny felt that it would not be

safe to attempt this last proof of affection. She should inevitably bite her enemy, or claw her like a tiger-cat, in the midst of the embrace.

Gregory Alleyne had to see the visitor downstairs; there was no help for that, though just at this moment both could have objurgated etiquette with great heartiness.

"I shall come to you the moment I get to Paris," Fanny said, following to the door of the anteroom. "I shall want advice about all sorts of things: you will find your office no sine-cure."

Miss Devereux replied, she hardly knew what, and passed on.

"Gregory, you careless fellow! you are not giving Miss Devereux your arm," called Fanny.

"Good-bye, dear Helen; *bon voyage*!"

The flight of stairs was a long one—the longest in all Europe it seemed to those two as they descended. Alleyne considered it necessary to talk, and, man-like, stumbled on the precise subject which of all others he would have wished to avoid.

"I hope Miss St. Simon's request does not bore you too much," said he.

"To be brides-maid? Oh no; I rather like it. I have served in that capacity several times," returned Miss Devereux, lightly.

"I believe young ladies do enjoy such things," said he, perfectly conscious he was talking and looking like an idiot, but unable to do better or to keep silence, and it was such a journey yet to the foot of the staircase; certainly they would never reach it!

"I enjoy pleasure and amusement of all kinds—so I fancy do most people," replied Miss Devereux; and her gaze, too, wandered down the descent, and it looked interminable in her sight also. "So you are going for a tour through *la Normandie*?"

"Yes—just to pass a week or ten days."

"Ah, of course; I suppose at such a time the days do go slowly."

She was sorry the moment the words were uttered; they had a sneering sound, as if his happiness had power to move her to anger or scorn. She would rather have died than let him believe she had feeling of any sort in regard to him or his future, beyond the cool interest one gives a person one has known for a long time.

"I don't know that I have ever congratulated you," she hastened to add; "you must let me do so now."

He looked about ten feet high, and as stately as a mountain at once.

"I thank you," he said, and knew the words sounded as if they were pumped out of his boots.

"You were good enough to do so when we met in Paris last winter."

"Then you shall have these in addition," returned she, pleasantly. "I hope you may be very happy indeed."

They were at the foot of the stairs at last—reached it just as she finished her sentence.

"I thank you again, and I return your wish," he said; and now he was painfully aware that his voice sounded as if the pump had grown unequal and jerky in its movements.

No more need of speech; they were at the outer door: he helped her into her carriage, where her maid sat to play propriety.

"Good-morning," said Miss Devereux; "it is good-bye, too, for a time."

"Good-bye," he repeated.

She did not offer her hand. As he lifted his hat, their eyes met; then the carriage whirled away.

"How pale he looked! how odd he looked!" was Miss Devereux's thought. "But his looks are nothing to me—nothing whatever. He chose voluntarily, and no doubt is suited; and I know him simply because he is Fanny St. Simon's future husband, and fate for some reason is always bringing me near her. No, it is nothing to me."

Gregory Alleyne did not cast so much as one glance after the departing vehicle. Mechanically he walked a few steps down the street in the opposite direction, then remembered that he must go into the house again, so turned back at once.

"Why, her eyes looked as they used to do," was the thought in his mind. "If she cared—but how could that be? I thought she would have been a duchess before now. She must have meant to sell herself from ambition; there was no other reason for— But what have I to do with her reasons or her plans? Come, I may be a fool, but I will not be mean and cowardly! I am going back to Fanny, and Fanny is my betrothed wife."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RISING TIDE.

AFTER all, Miss Devereux's departure did not take place the next morning, anxious as she was to be gone. Her maid seized the opportunity to be ill in the night, and Helen was not the sort of woman who could go serenely on her way, and leave the poor creature to fight out her troubles in solitude, with permission to follow in case her illness did not continue long enough to inconvenience her mistress.

The girl suffered great pain the whole night, and Miss Devereux spent the greater part of it at her bedside, to be certain that the remedies ordered by the physician whom she had summoned were properly employed. When morning came Clémence was better, but the doctor said she must remain quiet for another twenty-four hours; exertion might bring on a renewal of the attack.

Clémence was so faithful and devoted that she was like a relic of that exploded race of domesticities of whom our elders talk so much, but specimens of which so few of us ever saw. Miss Devereux caught herself wondering why it is that the people so deeply attached to one are always doing something inconsiderate or ill-timed. Then she felt ashamed of her cynicism, and wondered if she were really growing captious and bad-tempered. Of late she had found so many occasions to be shocked at her own harsh thoughts and unregenerate impulses, that she began to fear she was by nature a far more wicked woman than she had known.

She had no desire to let any of her friends or acquaintance learn that she had delayed her departure, and so spent most of the day in the house. Late in the afternoon she recollected that Fanny and Alleyne were to have gone off early on some excursion with Roland Spencer, from which they would not return till evening. As soon as she remembered this, it occurred to her that she needed a walk; though, with that habit so common to humanity of keeping up decorous appearances with one's soul as one would with a stranger (to a good many of us, indeed, I think that unquiet possession remains a mysterious unknown from first to last), she did not admit that it had been the dislike of again meeting Fanny and her lover which kept her indoors.

Fanny's lover! The words always sounded odd and unnatural in Helen Devereux's ears, as she remembered who the man was. Then she never failed to ask herself sternly why they should, and to assure her soul that she considered the pair very well suited to each other; that, in fact, neither of them was any thing to her, and she could not see why fate was so fond, wherever she turned, of bringing her face to face with them. She went through the little round of questions and answers now, vexed for so doing; then began to prepare for her walk in as great haste as if she must keep some important engagement. She would have liked to shake herself had that gymnastic feat been possible. It was a little relief to shake her hat till the feather threatened to fly off, and then to laugh at her own folly. The wisest and most self-restrained of us have done just such silly things, each in our turn, when physical weariness added to mental disquietude has made us feel more childish than usual.

It was a beautiful afternoon, soft and golden; so warm, too, that it seemed as if summer had forgotten something on earth and come back to look for it. Helen had no mind to go down to the *place*, where she would encounter crowds of her own species. She walked through the village, and came out upon the shore just beyond a jutting point which formed the limit of the ordinary promenade. The waters lapped the sands in play; off in the distance a few sails floated

like silver banners; sea and sky so clear that it was difficult to tell where one began and the other ended.

A perfect day; so serene and bright that Helen felt more than ever ashamed of her own unrest and fretfulness. It seemed a positive sin to bring such petty, miserable thoughts out into the glory of the sunshine. She was certain that this unusual state of mind arose from bodily fatigue consequent upon her sleepless night. A good stiff march would restore her to a less heathenish mood; so away she rushed along the beach, trying to occupy her mind with the beautiful scene spread before her, and so obtain that comfort and support which Nature is ever ready to give us, if only we can check the hurry and confusion of our souls sufficiently to watch her loveliness and listen to her voice.

She reached a deep bay, whose curving sands shone like a silver cup set to hold the rainbow-tinted waters. Farther back the shore became rugged and precipitous, in one spot broken to give room for a little patch of garden, on whose edge stood a fisherman's hut. Miss Devereux knew the place; she had made acquaintance with old Babette, the fisherman's mother, the quaintest, most original ancient body imaginable, who delighted in the beautiful lady's visits. She knew little Jean, too, the widowed fisherman's son, a bright, handsome lad of thirteen, who had taught her to row, and was so fervent an admirer of hers that he had several times confided to his grandmother a private belief that the lady was no less a personage than the Virgin disguised in a modern walking-dress. Babette was afraid that this extreme idea might be sinful; so, after hearing Miss Devereux sing one day, they united upon a theory that she must at least be St. Cecilia, and were so happy in their credence that I, for one, would not have disturbed it for the world.

When Miss Devereux first visited the cabin old Babette was getting up from a serious illness; Antoine's boat had been stolen, and ruin menaced the two. So, having taken pains to learn that they were honest, hard-working, and thoroughly deserving, Miss Devereux pleased herself by helping them in a more material fashion than either of the saintly persons to whom they compared her might have been able to do.

But to-day the cabin was deserted; it chanced to be the festival of some one of St. Cecilia's brethren or sisters, and Babette and her son had given themselves a holiday, and taken Jean with them.

However, the light boat, arranged to use a sprit-sail if required—by the presentation of which Miss Devereux had crowned Jean's thirteenth birthday with glory and happiness—lay partially pulled up on the sands, securely fastened to a stake by a chain and padlock, to prevent its capture by marauding boys or unscrupulous passers-by of a larger growth. Helen made her

way into the house, and found the key in a drawer where it was always kept, and the oars in a corner.

It was easy enough to push the little craft into the water; and Miss Devereux had learned to manage the oars very neatly. The tide was out, the bay smooth as glass; and Helen so thoroughly enjoyed the exercise that she was even able to forget she had her troublesome soul for a passenger.

She rowed quite out to sea, and came back. A short distance within the entrance to the bay rose a shelf of rock, which at high tide was sometimes quite covered. In the centre there had probably some time been a sharp peak, but the waves had broken and crumbled this away, till now it looked more like a rough stone chair than any thing else, raised like a throne, with the flat ledge for a footstool.

Miss Devereux landed there, secured the boat's chain about a heavy stone, and walked up and down the shelf. Strange sea-weeds grew in the crevices of the rocks, green and gray lichens spotted them, odd shells had lodged themselves in friendly niches, and mysterious, tiny creatures—to see which one almost needed the aid of a microscope—darted in and out among the weeds, as busy and self-important as if convinced this platform were the world entire, and they the despotic rulers thereof. Here and there were little hollows filled with water, in which miniature fish with heads much larger than their bodies skimmed about; and they, too, were as active as if their pools had been an ocean, and they whales, if not leviathans. Troops of gay-winged insects circled to and fro, like flecks of emerald and gold; a gorgeous purple butterfly, that had come in the boat with Helen, and landed at the same time, floated up to the throne and settled thereon, as if she had been a fairy queen assuming her rightful seat. A sea-eagle was poised away off in mid-air, motionless as a shadow; a flock of wild ducks shot past, chattering as they flew. Every living object in sight appeared full of excitement, pleasant excitement at that. The sea laughed and sung, the sky spread out radiant and bright, and Nature seemed to cry, with all her thousand voices at once, that existence and happiness were meant to be synonymous terms, and would have remained so had not man been utterly deaf and blind.

Except in those little basins, the sun had left the rock dry and shining. Miss Devereux walked about, noticed every thing down to the tiniest insect or lichen, and tried diligently to forget that eternal consciousness of self which haunts us from the cradle to the grave.

At length, feeling a wholesome sense of fatigue, entirely unlike the restless weariness which had beset her when she left the house, she mounted to the throne; the fairy queen, in the guise of a butterfly, fluttered up to give her welcome, and

graciously relinquished the chair in her favor; and, after Helen had sat down, swam in airy circles about her head, now and then pausing quite close, as if she would like to converse, had the honored human only been fortunate enough to speak her language.

But, alas! mortal nature is so poor a thing (the trite old words strike me with a melancholy significance as I repeat them) that, before she knew it, Miss Devereux was worlds away from any consciousness of the charming scene wherewith she had just thought herself delighted, lost in the troubled realm of her own reflections.

How long she sat there, whither her thoughts had wandered during the interval, I think she never could have told. But when she did rouse herself, the splendor of the sunset was brightening sea and sky. The butterfly had drifted back to land, the eagle and the wild sea-birds had disappeared. The wind had risen suddenly, and was surging in from the ocean with an angry moan; the tide had come up; the great foam-crested waves were dashing to shore; the water had swept over the outer edges of the shelf of rock, and each succeeding surge leaped higher across its level.

She must get back to the beach; fortunately the wind and tide were in her favor, so that the task would not be difficult. She descended from the chair, crossed the first broken ledge, and discovered that she must step in the water in order to reach the boat. She looked down at the spot where she had secured the bark; it was no longer there; the force of the tide had loosened the chain. She glanced toward the shore, and saw the boat dancing gayly over the heaving surge.

A fresh dash of foam leaped higher across the rocks, drenching her garments. A new blast of wind rushed past with a dreary sob; the voice of the ocean replied with something menacing in its tone.

She turned and ran back to the seat; the waves had almost reached the cliff where her feet had been resting a little time before. Helen sat down again, and looked about; the glowing colors of the sunset deepened each instant; great masses of yellow and red clouds jutted out from the horizon, casting their brilliant reflections even over the pale blue of the zenith; but below, away down close to the sea-line, stretched a band of black mist, which told of stormy weather off in mid-ocean. For a few moments Helen did not realize that she was in danger; it was not till she chanced to catch sight of the fisherman's cot, looking so peaceful and still, that she remembered it was empty, and she far beyond the reach of any human aid.

On tore the wind again; up boomed the yeasty waves, tinted with the coloring of the clouds, and dashed close to the foot of the throne. She was fully alive to her peril now; she might be drowned; or if she escaped that by standing

on the seat, always supposing the tide did not wash her off, she ran the risk of a worse, because lingering, death, from the effects of chill and exposure.

For a brief space she was horribly frightened, conscious of nothing only a physical shrinking from pain and death. That feeling passed; she could think, she could pray; could remember that if her faith were not sufficient to cover the dread of this crisis, it was worth nothing. If she could not trust God now, then the confidence of her whole life had been a delusion and an unwitting pretense.

A strange calm succeeded the horror and bewilderment: she gazed down at the sea and up at the sky; and afterward could recollect that she was thinking how strange it seemed that perhaps in a few moments she would be beyond the stars. Every memory of her past life seemed to rush back, as is said to be the case with persons actually drowning. She could recollect no willful injury done to any human being; her conscience did not cry out over any palpable means of doing good left unimproved. Hardness, lack of faith in her kind, a weariness and impatience of existence often—these memories rose to haunt her; but she remembered that in her blackest hours she had never ceased to trust God here—she could trust him hereafter.

The memory of her wasted love came back too; her whole soul went up in a quick prayer for a blessing on the man she had loved—a petition that in whatsoever he had erred he might be pardoned, even as she hoped that her sins might be absolved.

The sunset hues flashed out with stormy magnificence, and suddenly began to fade. Helen could notice this, even amidst the preoccupation of her thoughts. A few hours before, when there had been no special reason for self-absorption, she had found it difficult to get her mind away from personal matters; now, whether she prayed or gazed back over the narrowing vista of her life, not a sight or sound escaped her—nothing so trivial that she could not give the minutest detail when she recalled this time.

She saw the little boat dancing gayly over the waves; one instant flung in toward shore, the next carried out by the under-tow; then her eyes wandered on to the beach. And she could perceive a figure standing on the sands—a woman; another glance, and she recognized Fanny St. Simon.

It chanced that Fanny had been in one of her bad moods this day. At the last moment she had refused to accompany Alleyne and Spencer on the proposed expedition, and, as a crowning wickedness, had forced them to take the Tortoise and two tiresome young ladies, who did not possess half an idea between them.

Late in the afternoon she grew sick of herself, tired of shaking her clenched hands (metaphor-

ically) in the face of destiny, and so went out to walk. She stopped for an instant at the hotel where Miss Devereux lodged to inquire after an invalid acquaintance, and learned that Helen had not gone as she intended. But Fanny had no desire to see her; she felt that in her present frame of mind it would be utterly impossible to keep the peace; so she hurried away from the house for fear of meeting her enemy—it was a relief just now to call her so—her enemy! The woman who had come between her and the one love of her life—who had taken Talbot, and then given him to her friend, that baby-faced Marian!

It was not Marian she blamed or hated; she wondered sometimes thereat; she called her a pretty child, and had no sentiment beyond a half-scornful pity where she was concerned. Helen Devereux had done the whole; she had been the cause of all the suffering from first to last.

Bitter, black thoughts were those which filled Fanny's mind as she walked along. She was not greatly given to long rambles for the mere sake of exercise, but just now she was in no mood to go back to the house and sit idle; the experiment would be positively dangerous. If she remained shut in her room till the unwilling pleasure-seekers returned (even in the midst of her wrath and pain Fanny could not help laughing as she recalled the rueful expression on the two men's faces when she announced her intention of not going, and coolly laid the Tortoise and the idiot sisters on their shoulders), she would be incapable of controlling herself, and infallibly treat Alleyne to a scene which might end in her breaking the engagement. She must not go mad enough for such folly; St. Simon would certainly find means to confine her in a lunatic asylum if she did, and Fanny acknowledged that he would be quite right in so doing.

On she went by the very path Miss Devereux had taken a couple of hours before. Sometimes she fairly ran—there was a relief in the rapid movement; she must in some way work off the absurd excitement which had burned all day like a fever in her veins. At length she had to stop to rest; she had raced along till she was breathless. After a short repose she resumed her march, forgetful that it was growing late, and that if she went much farther the darkness would overtake her before she reached home.

So she came out upon the bay as the sun was setting. She went close to the water's edge, and stood looking, not at the gorgeous colors in the sky, but at the swift rushing tide, as it foamed up on the beach with outcries like those of some sentient creature. The hurry and noise of the waves was pleasant to her, they seemed so thoroughly alive, animated by so savage a desire to work havoc and ruin to something, to find a satisfaction in dashing themselves madly on the beach, since there was no other object to hurt. She would have liked to spring into the foaming

surge—to dare some great danger—do any thing preposterous or insane.

Then she saw the little boat whirling and dancing into shore, each sweep of the tide bringing it nearer to where she stood. Her eyes wandered farther on. She saw Helen Devereux on the summit of the rock.

The girl had mounted into the rocky chair; the waves were dashing up, up; Fanny could see that they had already reached her feet, that a terrible death menaced her.

She started instinctively forward, remembering only that she was watching a human being in danger, beset only by a wild desire to aid. Suddenly she checked herself; stood still.

"Let her die!" she cried. "Let her die!"

The boat swept nearer. Even as Fanny uttered the mad words she started forward again into the water; a wave almost threw her off her feet, but even if she could have reflected she would have experienced no fear, for scarcely a fisherman on the coast was a better swimmer than she. But she did not think at all; she knew that she was trying to seize the boat, nothing more.

Another rush of the waves—a dash of spray which wet her to the skin, and half blinded her for the second; but she had caught the boat by the bow, she had sprung into it, and seized the oars.

"Let her die!" she shrieked again. "Let her die!"

But with all her might and main, with a strength which seemed lent by some invisible power, she tugged at the oars; and, once under headway, the boat made fair progress, in spite of the force of the waves against which she had to contend.

In the days when the frantic pleasure-seekers of the Second Empire were always pushing about in search of some *outré* excitement, Fanny had won many a rowing-match, and her skill stood her in good stead now. Even while she kept the boat-headed so as to avoid the full force of the tide, and sent it leaping so rapidly along that sometimes the gunwale was almost under water, she was watching that figure standing motionless on the rock.

Higher and higher rose the waves; once a cloud of spray shut the form from her sight. Fanny closed her eyes for a second, almost expecting, when she opened them, to find the rock bare—to know that the woman had been swept from her place. But she saw her still; and again Fanny cried,

"Let her die!" and in the same breath added, "Let her live; she will suffer more. Let her live!"

She laughed outright at her own insanity. With one side of her mind she seemed oppressed by an awful hurry and excitement; with the other she could reflect, analyze, anatomize her

feelings in the cool way she was fond of doing. Was she trying to save Helen Devereux because her wickedness went no deeper, after all, than words, and she was incapable of allowing her enemy to perish, even though she risked her own life in the effort? Was it because, as she had just cried out, Helen Devereux would have to walk hand in hand with pain so long as this mortal existence should endure?

"That is it!" exclaimed Fanny. "I know that is it. I am not trying to save her because I am good or humane; I know I am not!"

Miss Devereux saw the boat approaching; it was near enough now, so that she could distinctly catch every expression of its occupant's features. Fanny's hat had fallen off; some curls of her hair had loosened and were floating about her face; her great eyes were dilated and black with exertion and excitement.

She was saved! Even as Helen Devereux murmured the words, there came another thought. Saved by Fanny St. Simon! She felt for an instant as though she would rather die than owe her life to this girl, in whom she instinctively recognized an implacable foe. The impulse was strong upon her to turn her back, to refuse to see or hear, to let the next rush of water suck her down—down. Life seemed too dearly bought at such a price—saved by Fanny St. Simon!

Then she realized her own wickedness; she was contemplating suicide—that was what it would be—suicide! And she had believed herself a religious woman—had all her days thought that her belief in the Bible was entire, her faith in God boundless! Never had this woman coming to rescue her been guilty of a sin so black, and yet she had dared to condemn Fanny! To condemn her—to believe her hard, false, unscrupulous; yet she knew nothing in reality against her. She had only her intuitions and her harsh judgments to build upon; perhaps in thinking evil of the girl she had committed a greater crime than in feeling that she would rather die than let Fanny save her.

"My God, forgive me!" she cried, horrified at herself.

The boat was so close now that Fanny caught the sound, though she could not distinguish the words.

"You were frightened!" she shrieked. "You were afraid to die!"

She uttered the words before she was aware. The roar of the waters drowned her voice, and Fanny got her reason back. Very dexterously she manœuvred her bark to the edge of the rock. By this time Miss Devereux had descended.

"Jump!" cried Fanny.

Helen sprung into the boat; it lurched dreadfully under her unguarded leap, but Fanny pushed off.

"Give me the oars," said Helen.

"I will not!" exclaimed Fanny. "I'll do it all myself."

Helen sunk down, weak and faint after her excitement. The task of getting back to shore was easy enough; the tide aided Fanny's efforts.

The two girls sat staring full in each other's face. Each read strange thoughts in the eyes of the other; but no word was spoken.

They reached the shore. With a last vigorous effort Fanny sent the light boat up on the sands. Miss Devereux sprung out; her companion followed. The two sunk down on the sands; neither had any strength left. It was moments before they could move. Fanny was the first to rise, to speak.

"We must get home," she said. "We shall catch our deaths of cold, and that would be such a prosaic ending to our adventure."

She laughed as gayly as a child; her face was perfectly calm now, her voice had recovered its usual *insouciant* ring.

Miss Devereux moved toward her, and extended her hand.

"I wish I could thank you," she said; "I wish I could. How brave it was of you! how good!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Fanny. "I've always doted on a rowing-match. This time I beat Neptune himself for an opponent. I am much obliged to you for giving me the chance."

"You might so easily have left me; scarcely a woman in the world would have thought of trying," said Helen.

Fanny pointed to the rock; the summit was scarcely covered.

"You would have got off with a ducking," returned she. "I might have had the feminine pleasure of seeing your dress ruined, but not of being Nemesis in a tragedy."

"We are both drenched," Miss Devereux said, shrinking from her tone. "We must get home as fast as we can."

"Come," said Fanny, and ran up the sands.

Miss Devereux stood still for an instant, and looked back across the bay. The sun had set; the bright hues had faded; the sky grown cold and dark. The tide was just reaching its height; it leaped and dashed with such force over the rock, as if mad against this obstacle, that she knew she must have been washed from her stand had not Fanny appeared.

"Come, come!" she heard her companion call.

Miss Devereux ran after her, and the two raced along at the top of their speed.

"I am warm enough, in all conscience," Fanny said at last, as she paused to rest. She was horribly tired; her arms ached as if they had been wrenched out of the sockets; the veins in her hands were swollen and distended; but she would not admit that she was fatigued.

Miss Devereux wanted to thank her; but she knew Fanny well enough to be certain that she was in one of her reckless states, and would either be vexed, else utter mocking words, which would jar on her mind in the softened mood of penitence and gratitude which had come over her.

"I know what you were thinking," said Fanny, suddenly, "when you hesitated there on the rock."

Miss Devereux looked a startled, rather confused inquiry; Fanny's tone was so odd, her eyes so keen, that Helen felt as if the girl were reading her very soul.

"You were thinking," pursued Fanny, "that you would almost rather be drowned than have me the person to save you."

Even several seasons of worldly society, though they had taught her self-control, had not taught Miss Devereux to lie. She was positively frightened by Fanny's intuitions. She attempted no denial.

"If I was," she said, slowly, "I am ashamed of it."

"Don't be," returned Fanny, gayly; "it is so refreshing to indulge now and then in a natural reflection." She paused to laugh, and added, "Do you know what I was thinking as I came up?"

Helen remembered the strange look that had been in the beautiful eyes as she stepped into the boat; something of the same wild passion swept through their depths now, carelessly as she spoke.

Miss Devereux offered no reply.

"I see no reason why I should try to put myself on a pedestal, when I have just pulled you off," continued Fanny. "I was wondering if I should enjoy most seeing you drown or live—"

She had to check herself; she had been about to add, "To live, that I might watch you suffer." She paused; laughed again, and went on, "Sensations are so rare; and I never saw any body drown."

"Will you let me thank you for saving my life?" Helen asked.

"Good heavens! is it a subject for gratitude?" cried Fanny, in a voice of surprise, which would have been insolent only that it was so deliciously childish and graceful.

"It ought to be, since God gave the life," Helen answered. She did not want to appear making an attempt at piety, or to be overstrained; but the remembrance of those dark moments filled her with penitent shame.

"God gives us a great many good things, according to the orthodox people," returned Fanny; "but I think, as a rule, it is asking too much to ask one to be grateful—going to purgatory, for example, either here or hereafter. The discipline may be of service to the soul; but the soul ought to be allowed to wait till it gets out before it is asked to be very thankful for the wholesome pain."

Miss Devereux felt that she had no right to attempt a reproof, nor was this the moment for it, anyway. She only observed, "We must make our way home; it is getting dark."

"And you are shocked at my wickedness," returned Fanny. "You see I have not just had a fright."

No matter what she said, or in how pleasant a voice, there was always an under-tone of sneers and mockery. Miss Devereux could not help noticing it; and again she wondered, as she had so often done, why Fanny St. Simon regarded her with such bitter hatred, for it was that; the word dislike or aversion was not strong enough.

Scarcely another syllable passed between them till they reached the village. They had run till they were thoroughly warmed, and fortunately the darkness prevented their being seen and mistaken for mermaids who had strayed away from their native element. The two girls exchanged hasty adieus. Once more Helen tried to express her thanks; but Fanny stopped her.

"It is not worth making a fuss over," said she, brusquely.

Somehow Miss Devereux could not keep herself from thinking that Fanny meant her speech to refer to the value of the life she had perhaps saved, not her own action in the matter, though she was ashamed to think it.

"Shall we see you to-morrow?" continued Fanny.

"No; I am really off in the morning."

"Then, good-bye. Once more, *bon voyage*." They shook hands. Fanny added, gayly, "Don't go in search of any more adventures; remember that your life belongs to Gregory and me till after the fatal ceremony where you have promised to give us your support."

They parted. Helen hurried into the house. A sudden chill, which did not come from cold, shook her. She registered a vow that night, which she tried her best to keep, not to regard Fanny St. Simon so harshly. Who was she, that she should sit in judgment on any human creature? She wrote a note to the Tortoise recounting Fanny's bravery; and the Tortoise and Spencer were frightened half to death at the idea of what the girl had done, and Gregory Alleyne praised and admired her, till Fanny went into an inward rage, and said a dozen honeyed things about Helen Devereux which cut him to the quick.

The next morning Helen departed for Paris, and the day following Gregory Alleyne set off on his tour. He wanted to wait and escort Fanny and the Tortoise on their journey; but the young lady would not hear of his taking such perfectly unnecessary trouble.

"Roland Spencer will convoy us under his wing," she said. "I am selfish enough, but not quite a monster. There is no use of your having a five hours' solitary journey back."

"I shall follow you soon," he observed. "I would rather go now, but you don't want me."

"That is not a nice way to put it," said she. "I shall have time to get over my hurry, and to be good-natured."

"You are not sorry as the day approaches?" he asked, suddenly.

"There's a question!"

"Don't laugh, Fanny. Tell me that you do care; that you are certain that we shall be happy."

"It seems to me that is an assurance I might more naturally demand from you," returned she, lightly.

"We will be! we must be!" he exclaimed, with an eagerness unusual. "We are both tired, and need rest; we will try to find it, try to do our duty, and peace and happiness will come!"

She did not answer. It was less easy now to hold out those false hopes than during the first weeks of their engagement. So when he repeated his question again and again, putting it in different forms, trying to hear from her lips assurances which should silence the doubts that troubled his mind, she got away from any serious discussion. She teased, and jested, and looked very bewitching; but he was not satisfied.

Ever since his return from America he had felt that there was an indefinable change in her; he did not acknowledge this, but he felt it all the same. He would not, either, have admitted to himself that he had begun occasionally to question the future rather drearily, and yet he did so.

Could he a second time be fated to meet with disappointment? Were worldly considerations at work in this woman's mind? had they influenced her from the beginning? It seemed base and vile to harbor such fancies even long enough to give an indignant refusal. He was shocked when he found them in his mind, and drove them out as he might positive suggestions from the Evil One. Still, the peace and repose which he had thought would come with the near approach of his marriage day looked as far off as they had done during the night and tempest through which he had struggled in the past. He set out upon his solitary expedition, wandering about the recesses of beautiful Normandy, sick and sore at heart, weary of his own changes of feeling, calling himself vacillating and weak, growing eager to see Fanny again, in the hope that her presence might once more exorcise the dark thoughts which haunted him.

And Fanny accomplished her little journey in the highest spirits. The Tortoise always slept in a railway train; so her niece and Spencer could converse without restraint.

"You wonder at me, I know," Fanny said more than once. "You will think me utterly heartless. Ah, if I were! Let me alone, Roland, let me forget! I am like a prisoner who

has had a respite. The day of execution must come; but at least it is put off! I have ten whole days to myself. Oh, it seems a great deal now! Don't make me think."

MERCANTILE
CLIPPING
AN AWKWARD MEETING.
OCTOBER had come, and Fanny St. Simon began to count in days the time before her wedding.

"You have put it off, and put it off. Should any thing happen now, you may blame yourself."

If St. Simon said this once to her during the first week of her return, he said it twenty times, each morning, noon, and night. He could be wearying enough on occasion, Fanny knew; but any thing like this "damnable iteration," and the unaccountable irritability which he displayed with or without reason, she had never encountered in all her experience of his habits.

"Is there any thing the matter? Are you in any trouble?" This question was often on her lips, in spite of knowing its uselessness.

Sometimes the inquiry put him into a furious passion, which Fanny did not in the least mind; but more frequently he declared that his anxiety was wholly on her account.

"What trouble should I be in? I am only thinking of you."

"But there is no necessity for such excessive fears, St. Simon. Certainly, every thing is going well enough with me."

"I know you so perfectly. You are capable of upsetting your own plans at the last moment. Why, it would not surprise me to see you have a spasm of rage, or remorse, or something else ridiculous with a fine name, in the very church, and to hear you say you wouldn't marry him."

"Oh, please don't nag, St. Simon!"

She never gave any harsh replies, nor did his jeremiads and reproaches affect her in the least. She watched him narrowly, and was as much troubled on his account as he professed to be on hers.

He looked jaded and worn; though that might proceed from dissipation rather than care. He had gone back almost openly to his evil courses; she knew this. He was overwhelmed with business; always seeing people, or receiving letters or telegrams; though he found plenty of leisure for his reckless pleasures. Sometimes, too, there was a lack of ready money; fortunately their credit in all quarters was so good that this rarely caused any embarrassment. A little later Fanny discovered that St. Simon had borrowed from Roland Spencer. She noticed he grew very confidential with the young man: it occurred to her at once what that meant, and she did not scruple to put Roland on his guard; of

course too delicately to injure St. Simon. But it was too late; she perceived this by Spencer's face, though he said nothing. But he had already lent the money, and Fanny feared it was a much larger sum than he could easily spare. St. Simon would not stop at a small amount.

She questioned Besson as closely as she dared; but Besson was in ignorance of any thing being wrong, and she would waken his suspicions by a betrayal of anxiety. Besides, she found the poor old man in wretched health; he had begun to fail early the previous spring, but it was evident now that he had nearly reached the end of his pilgrimage. When Fanny returned to Paris he was not well enough to go and see her, and as soon as she heard that, she made a journey down into the Quartier Montmartre. No change of fortune could induce Besson to remove from the place where he had lived so long; the dingy apartment in the dark, narrow street was dearer than ever to him since it had been Fanny's home for a time. Every article of furniture was left just as she had arranged it during her sojourn. A work-basket and some books which had been forgotten on the table of the *salon*, in the hurry of their departure, were there still when Fanny went to visit him.

The old man was up and dressed, in expectation of her arrival, and his wasted face and dim eyes lighted with joy on her entrance; but she was so shocked by his appearance that she could not hide her emotion.

"Oh, Besson!" she cried, hurrying toward him, and taking his withered, trembling hands between hers. "My poor, dear Besson! Why did you not send me word you were ill? I would have come back and nursed you."

"I know you would," he answered, gratefully; "but I could not have you wearied by my troubles. Indeed, I have not really been ill; I seem gradually going to bits, that is all."

"Don't say that, dear Besson! You will get better; you must have good doctors. I am sure you have neglected yourself."

"No, my little one, no! All the doctors in Paris could not help me: I have had Du Varrien."

"And what does he say?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"He says nothing; but that is what he does, Fanny."

"I can't have you stay here alone, you must be moved to our hotel; I shall nurse you myself," returned she.

"The good child—the dear one! But I am better here; I like the quiet and the solitude. You shall come to see me now and then; that is all I need to make me quite content. I have missed my beautiful sunbeam; oh yes, I have missed her."

"Why did you not let me know?" she repeated. "If you had only sent for me!"

"The dear kind heart!" smiled Besson.

"I would much rather have been with you," she continued, and meant no falsehood as she spoke.

"I counted the weeks: at the end of each I said, seven days less to wait; that helped the time to pass," he replied, with a smile.

"Oh, Besson!" she cried, "nobody will ever care for me so much as you; I wish I were more worthy; I wish I were a better woman."

"Do not say that—not that! I shall wait for you up there, Fanny, as I have waited for your coming all this long summer. I do not know where it will be; but the little book yonder says His mercy is without bounds, and I believe it now. There will be a nook up in the sunshine that they will give the old man, and I shall wait for you."

"Oh, Besson, Besson!"

"The good heart—the kind heart! She will miss the poor crooked old fellow; she does not like to think of his going. But I have nothing more to do here, Fanny; I had better be gone."

"No, no; I want you, I need you."

"The dear Fanny!" he said, softly.

She was kneeling beside him, her head resting on the arm of his chair. His wrinkled hand played gently over her hair, and he went on dreamily,

"In the sunlight that never shall fade, the rest that is eternal. It is all written—there, in the little book—full of His promises."

Wait for her! He would wait for her up in the eternal sunlight and the eternal repose to which his guileless soul was going forward. And she? Fanny St. Simon was not given to thoughts or fears where the life beyond this was concerned. She regarded it almost as recklessly as she did the earthly existence. But the old man's words roused a vague yearning in her mind. She was not frightened; she did not tremble at the idea of future punishment; she told herself it could be no worse than the tortures she had already endured. What she did feel was a strange longing for the repose and brightness of which he spoke; felt it perhaps for the first time; feeling, too, no hope that it would ever be hers. Not because infinite mercy—and she supposed it existed up there—would withhold such peace on account of her sins, but because she could not fancy her fiery, impatient soul at rest, content to bask in the sunshine and be still.

She wanted to get away from such reflections—to change the conversation.

"What was St. Simon about, not to let me know you had been ill!" she exclaimed, angrily, as she rose from her knees, and began walking up and down.

"He is very busy; besides, he has not been back long," Besson answered. "Do not blame

St. Simon; he is kind; he has been several times already to see me."

"My poor Besson—my good, unselfish Besson!" murmured Fanny, her eyes filling with tears as she looked at him.

"But you must not cry for me, Fanny! See, I am only broken down and feeble; I may last a good while yet. Tell me about yourself—about the marriage—if you are happy."

She gave the best account she could for fear of paining him, and he listened attentively with that sad, patient smile she knew so well upon his face.

She remembered he had begun gradually to fail from the time that her marriage had been decided. She was an evil fate to every human being who crossed her path; even to this old man, who had no thought or care but for her. She said this bitterly enough to her soul, though not in terror or remorse. It was true, too, that the change in Besson dated back to this season. He had grieved sorely from a dread that she suffered after the news in regard to Castlemaine destroyed her dream, and when the reaction followed—her engagement; his belief that she was content—he began to feel his part ended. She did not need him any longer, and there was nothing else for him to do in this world; he had better be gone. Then came the solitary summer, and his mental loneliness increased his physical ills. Besson had no idea of complaining—no thought that he was badly treated. Had he possessed the wealth of the Indies, he would never have dreamed of any thing so incongruous as Fanny becoming his wife. But he loved her; he had always loved her. A care for her future had been his one task during years. There was no necessity longer for such solicitude; so his work here was finished, and, being finished, it was better he should go.

Unconsciously as he had listened to her plans, he murmured the words distinctly enough, so that she caught a portion of them.

"Go where? What are you talking of, dear Besson?" she asked.

"Only thinking aloud," he answered, still smiling. "I do think often now about the journey before me—the long, long journey."

"Ah, don't talk so, Besson!"

"Not if it pains the little one. But I am cheerful—see, quite cheerful."

He began, however, to speak of other things. She sat a long time with him, and he brightened wonderfully in the pleasure of her society.

"We will have some tea," he said; "you shall make it, if you will. There are the cups on that table; Babette will bring hot water."

"But you have one white cup among these pink ones," Fanny said; "how is that?"

"That is mine; you must give me that. Babette told me you always drank tea out of that, so I took it."

"How did Babette know?" Fanny asked, trying to laugh, but hearing a little sob in her own voice.

"Oh, Antoinette told her, I suppose; they were great friends. Antoinette comes to see us sometimes; but she is a very grand person in these days," Besson answered, with a smile.

They drank their tea, a beverage Besson was too thoroughly French really to like, though he made a point to drink it daily because Fanny was fond of it, and chatted very pleasantly.

Then Fanny walked slowly about the different rooms, recalling the months she had spent there, reflecting upon all which had happened since, and wishing anew that St. Simon had never returned.

She discovered that Besson believed the affairs of the mine going splendidly. According to him, not a soul with an interest in the matter but would become as rich as Cræsus. If there was aught amiss, St. Simon evidently took pains to deceive him, and Fanny had not the heart to disturb his content by so much as a hint. The fortune he now considered actually his own, Besson valued solely on her account; it was to be hers—add to her comfort and splendor.

"I used to think it would be more necessary to you than it is," he said; "but all the same I am glad you will have it. You will be quite independent of your rich husband: that is always well."

"I shall expect you to get strong, and help enjoy it," Fanny answered, scarcely knowing what to say, yet realizing, as she looked at the pale old man, that such words were almost a mockery.

"I have every thing I want," he said. "You will come to see me when you can; there is nothing could do me so much good."

"Of course I shall come. I wish you would let me take you home to stay."

But Besson gently shook his head.

"It is best as it is, little one. I am quite happy—quite. There must be gay doings *chez vous*—it is right; and I never was well suited to such things, less than ever now."

Besson did not even feel inclined to blame St. Simon for the extravagant mode of life he had adopted. The wily gentleman told him in the beginning these lavish expenditures were solely on Fanny's account, absolutely essential where her interests were concerned. After this Besson could not dream of disapproving.

Fanny discovered, too, that St. Simon had managed to secure nearly all the money the old man had put aside from the sale of a small portion of his shares. She was confident this also had been done under the pretense that it was required for the expenses of her marriage, but she could not venture to question Besson, nor was it worth while to have a quarrel with St. Simon. Indeed, she felt sorry for him at this time; habit, associations, and many similar tastes and inter-

ests formed a strong bond between uncle and niece; and Fanny sympathized with the anxiety which, from some cause, beset him. They had struggled through too much together for her ever to become indifferent to St. Simon. She looked for neither honor nor honesty where he was concerned, so nothing he might do would alter her interest.

In spite of the bothers and occupation which she had declared to Alleyne were to be her portion during the first fortnight she spent in Paris, Fanny found time to visit Besson nearly every day. She took Roland Spencer to see him also, and the invalid always brightened wonderfully under the charm of her presence. But he failed rapidly from the time she arrived: ignorant as Fanny was of illness, she perceived this, and hardly knew whether to grieve or be glad. She consulted Du Varieu herself, and learned that her suspicions were correct: it was almost the end.

At the expiration of a fortnight Alleyne returned. He had written frequently during the journey; pleasant, chatty letters detailing his wanderings among the quaint Norman villages; letters not over lover-like, perhaps, though he spoke much of their future, dwelling upon that peace and rest which they were to find.

"One would suppose he actually believed such trifles were to be had in this world for the asking," said Fanny, scornfully, as she threw aside his latest epistle, the last she would receive. "So he will be here to-morrow. Well, once married, I have no doubt I shall find means to keep him away a great deal."

She saw plainly that the man was not satisfied with the state of his own mind, and waxed as bitterly indignant as if she had loved him, and he were willfully deceiving her.

The next day she told St. Simon that Alleyne would arrive in time to come and dine, but he only said, snappishly,

"I don't venture to interfere in the affairs of a young woman so very capable as you."

"You are quite right," she answered, calmly; "but I wouldn't be cross, St. Simon; above all, not before Alleyne. He may get the suspicion that I am a bad bargain, if you seem so anxious to be rid of me."

Fanny had a variety of things to do, and the Tortoise was tired of going about; so she took Antoinette in the carriage, and left her relative to that sleepy idleness which was her idea of bliss.

"If Miss Devereux comes as she promised, be sure you keep her, T.," Fanny said. "Tell her I have a particular reason for wanting to see her. I may be a little late; I shall go sit a while with Besson after I am through at La Touche's."

Fanny did not inform the Tortoise of Alleyne's expected arrival; it was never good for her

nerves to tell her things in advance. She knew Helen Devereux would come; Fanny had told her that she wanted to go to poor Besson, and that her aunt always moped in her absence. Miss Devereux offered to sit with her; so Fanny hoped that by returning late she could keep the lady to dinner, and thus annoy her and Alleyne. It really seemed to the wayward creature that to worry and tease either of the pair was about the only comfort possible to her at this period. She quite looked forward to seeing them together again, in order that she might have the satisfaction of tormenting both at once.

Even on her first meeting with Helen after she came up to Paris, she had been so provoking that the latter was obliged to keep a firm hold of her resolution to judge the girl less harshly. That the remembrance of the danger from which Fanny had saved her might bring about any better state of feeling between them, Miss Devereux found could not be hoped. Fanny showed plainly that the idea of having Helen feel under obligations to her irked the incomprehensible girl as deeply as if it had been she who ought to indulge in gratitude.

"I am sick of hearing about it," she cried, irritably. "I never helped any body before, and I vow I never will again. As for your being in danger, that is just trash and nonsense. I made old Antoine measure the depth of the water at high tide; it was only a few inches over the rock."

"One would think it was you who had been there, and I the one to aid you, you are so cross with me," Helen said, trying not to be glad that there was no occasion for intense thankfulness.

"In such case I should have hated you forever," laughed Fanny. "But it is almost as bad to be talked to as if I were a heroine. Come, now, let us get back to the old terms. Of course I like you—I always did; but I like to horrify you, and I must. You think I am jolly and pleasant, but you don't trust me, and you are right not to. There is only one consolation: I could be so much worse than I am."

Fanny was so correct in her statements, so unscrupulous in her anatomization, that Miss Devereux felt as she had often done before—as if the creature were a clairvoyant who could read at will the thoughts of any person who approached her.

Then for a little Fanny petted her, then stung her to the very core of her heart; and even from that first interview Helen was forced to go away thinking that if she had the strongest possible reasons for gratitude, Miss St. Simon would torment and outrage her till she obliterated every trace thereof. And after her visitor had gone Fanny sat meditating.

"I am sure I shall murder her some day before I know what I am doing. I never think so much about Talbot as when I see her. But I

will be intimate—I'll spare her nothing. Only she sha'n't be grateful. I'll not have it! I can't tell why it vexes me so, but it does. Oh, if it had not been for her! Oh, Talbot, Talbot!"

There was another stormy hour to pass; never had Fanny's warped nature so struggled and rebelled against destiny as at present; never had she felt so utterly desperate, so full of scorn for the luxury and station she had striven so hard to attain, which looked so poor and worthless, now they were within her reach, that she would have given the whole for one smile from Talbot's lips, one loving glance from his passionate eyes.

The two girls met almost daily. On this afternoon Miss Devereux appeared at the house in accordance with her promise. The Tortoise was delighted to see her, and she endured the poor old soul's society patiently enough, though the unfortunate animal got on the subject of Fanny's marriage, and was more talkative than usual, actually accomplishing a good many sentences without dropping into dozes in the middle. And while she maundered on, expatiating upon Fanny's goodness, Fanny's future glories, the merits of Fanny's betrothed, and similar topics, an imperial photograph of the young woman which stood on a hand easel seemed to Miss Devereux to watch her every movement, and look with a smile of triumphant malice at the sort of pin-and-needle martyrdom she was undergoing.

Toward dusk the carriage was announced for the visitor, but the Tortoise, strengthened into a sudden spasm of memory by her five-o'clock cup of tea, which Miss Devereux had prepared, recollected Fanny's request, and fairly held on to the guest's skirts.

"Fanny wanted so much to see you. I promised you would stay," she said, growing nervous and anxious when Miss Devereux proposed returning in the morning instead. "She has something to consult about. Oh, don't go. St. Simon will think I did not try to keep you; and he's queer these days—he is, indeed—even to Fanny, though she doesn't mind; and I can't tell whether they are in fun or earnest, they make my head whirl so. Only please don't go, Miss Devereux—please don't!"

So Helen sat down again, and presently the Tortoise fell fast asleep in her chair, and the slow cadence of her customary "peck, peck!" was the only sound which disturbed the stillness. Miss Devereux sunk into a reverie almost as deep as her companion's slumber. The gray shadows of twilight crept into the room, and filled it so completely that only the embers on the hearth made a faint point of light.

It was late. St. Simon had come in, gone to his room, and dressed; but, learning who was with his wife, and that his niece had not entered, sat brooding over the masses of papers which littered his table; and in these days, when alone

and thus occupied, very worn and haggard St. Simon looked.

Presently the door of the Tortoise's *salon* opened softly. Some person was close to her chair before Miss Devereux knew it. A hand touched her arm, a voice said quickly,

"Fanny, Fanny! I just caught the gleam of something white in the dark. Oh, it is your aunt wrapped in her shawl! Are you glad to see me, Fanny?"

Gregory Alleyne's voice. He was bending forward; his lips were almost touching her forehead. Miss Devereux pushed her chair hastily back, saying,

"It is not Miss St. Simon, Mr. Alleyne. Allow me to welcome you back, though."

He muttered some confused words, and stood still. He had only understood from the servant that the ladies were in Mrs. St. Simon's *salon*, and hurried up.

"If one could find the bell one might at least ring for lights," observed Miss Devereux, as calmly as though not nearly overcome by a trouble which was half anger, half compassion.

"Peck, peck!" sounded the Tortoise's low refrain.

Miss Devereux tried to rise. Alleyne muttered something about making a search for the bell, upset a little stand with the first movement he made, and as he did so the door opened again, and Fanny St. Simon entered, followed by a servant bearing a large lamp, while in the background loomed St. Simon himself.

Dazzled by the sudden glare, Miss Devereux could scarcely raise her eyes. Alleyne looked as foolishly as only a man can; the stand, in falling, had twisted its cover about his legs, and he was striving vainly to disentangle himself from this impromptu winding-sheet. The Tortoise, roused out of her slumber by the noise, was in a fright, as usual if abruptly awakened, and began a series of strangled squeaks and incoherent questions.

The tableau was as absurd as could easily have been devised, and Fanny enjoyed it hugely during the second she remained in the door-way, with St. Simon silently chuckling behind her.

"All in the dark!" exclaimed she. "Why, Gregory, they did not tell me you had come."

"I am glad you have thrown a little light on the scene," observed Miss Devereux.

"Oh, oh! where are we?" moaned the Tortoise. "Helen and I were all alone, and so comfortable. Oh, who is that? Oh, oh!"

"I am so glad to see you, Miss Devereux," Fanny said, moving forward. "Well, Mr. Alleyne, why are you trying to muffle your legs in my aunt's pet table-cover?"

Then they all laughed: the catastrophe was explained, only Helen Devereux did not add how close the new-comer's lips had been to her face, and how strange a shock it gave her to feel

Gregory Alleyne's breath once again fanning her forehead.

Mr. Alleyne got his wits back, saluted his betrothed decorously, greeted the Tortoise, received St. Simon's cordial welcome, and even managed to say with tolerable ease,

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Miss Devereux, for my awkward entrance. I am very glad to see you, now that I can. Dear Mrs. St. Simon, why do you have tables set as traps about your room, to catch awkward men's legs?"

"Oh, I didn't; I never did!" sighed the Tortoise. "Helen and I had our tea, and then we both dozed and were comfortable, and you all came in shouting and falling over us—"

"Now I think Anastasia's explanation the most lucid of any," interrupted St. Simon, laughing.

The Tortoise subsided into silence, and kept staring from one to the other with eyes as round as an owl's.

A few more pleasant words, then Miss Devereux rose and gathered up her wraps, which she had thrown on a chair. St. Simon and Fanny began to exclaim, but she would not hear of remaining.

"I only staid," she said, "because your aunt thought you were anxious to see me about something. We can arrange it, however, whatever it was, in the morning."

"I wanted you to stay dinner, that was all," Fanny answered.

"Thanks; but I told mamma I should come home: she will wait for me," was the reply.

"We can send word," observed St. Simon.

"Ah, now you are thinking about your dress," cried Fanny. "I'll not dress either. These men will never know; and that gray silk is so becoming to you; isn't it, Gregory?"

"It is not on account of my dress," returned Miss Devereux, quite appreciating Fanny's neat attempt to make her appear misshapen and absurd. "I must go home; we have friends coming to-night."

There was no more to be said. Indeed, now Fanny did not care whether she staid or went. The lady and Alleyne together had presented a ridiculous picture, and they knew it; so Fanny decided that the Tortoise had not detained her guest in vain.

Miss Devereux made her adieus with a composure which did not deceive her enemy, and St. Simon offered his arm. She always hated to take St. Simon's arm; Fanny knew that, too.

The visitor having departed, Miss St. Simon did not wait for any more affectionate interview with her betrothed.

"It is horribly late," she said. "Come, T., we must dress. Mr. Alleyne, if you go down to the library, we will not keep you waiting ten minutes; I am sure you are hungry."

Guests were almost certain to drop in before the

evening was over, and Fanny had no intention of appearing in an unbecoming out-of-door costume just to allow Mr. Alleyne the half hour before dinner. A woman's ten minutes always means that length of time, when changing her dress is concerned.

While occupied with her toilet, Fanny laughed again at the tableau which had greeted her entrance. But Alleyne in the library, trying to listen to St. Simon's conversation, did not laugh as he recalled the hurried scene. He felt hot and angry; he was recollecting that his lips had nearly touched Helen Devereux's forehead; and memory, with odious pertinacity, kept bringing back the last time he had really pressed a kiss upon that white brow.

Very similar reflections were in Miss Devereux's mind as she sat among her guests that night, and, try as she might, she could not get away from them. They had been happy once; the world looked wondrous bright then, and faith and truth seemed to guard the way on either hand. It lay a long distance off now, that beautiful season; awful storms and earthquakes and utter desolation swept between; but it looked beautiful still, as the memory of the beloved dead looks to us, and we forget errors and wrongs, and only recollect that they were dearer than aught earthly can ever be again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEARER.

THE days got by.

St. Simon tried hard to behave like his customary self, but the effort was apparent to Fanny. He had great difficulty, also, to subdue the odd irritability which formerly he never betrayed; still he tried, Fanny admitted. Indeed, he did not often even persecute the Tortoise, and for this his niece gave him great credit. She knew that, when anxious or suffering, it was almost impossible for him to avoid making a *souffredouleur* of the defenseless animal.

He talked so freely and hopefully about the mine, that Fanny began to think business might have nothing to do with this change in him. He was certainly in difficulties, but perhaps only because he had wasted too much money. His losses at the gambling-tables during the summer had been heavy; she learned that from Castle-maine.

He was altered, however, in many ways. One day he would perpetrate some reckless extravagance, the next grumble over the expense of the Tortoise's cup of afternoon tea. But he gave Fanny *carte-blanc* for her wardrobe, and did not go back from his first offer. Certainly no creature, save a Russian princess or an American woman, ever owned such quantities of clothes as

were preparing for her trousseau. In this matter there was no talk of money to irritate St. Simon's worn nerves; not only Madame La Touche, but the greatest houses on the Boulevards, and even the immortal Worth, were glad to put themselves at the orders of St. Simon's niece.

After all, Fanny told herself, the worst that could happen, so far as she was concerned, would be Gregory Alleyne's having to pay the bills after their marriage. She should not care; it would only be a variation on the French custom, which renders it fitting for the bridegroom elect to present a *corbeille*. Indeed, she had in the beginning proposed this course to St. Simon, but he rejected it with fine scorn. They were Americans; he would not adopt an odious foreign custom which made a woman and her family appear like beggars. So Fanny said nothing more; if he had money, and chose to spend it, she was satisfied. Now, however, it occurred to her that her future husband might have to pay for the *corbeille du mariage*, although he had not ordered it. But by the time the disagreeable possibility could become a fact, Mr. Alleyne's opinion on the subject would be a matter of utter indifference to her.

Until those weeks spent in Talbot Castle-maine's society, it seemed easy enough to go through life keeping up appearances with herself and her husband, and Fanny would like to do this. But the task did not look easy now. The one absorbing passion of her youth had grown more potent than ever during that rash indulgence of a last summer-day of happiness.

Splendor, position, every thing that her marriage had to give, appeared so utterly empty! What a price she was paying for a grandeur the mere contemplation of which had grown odious! She was furious with her own folly, but that did not change her feelings. There was only one thought which had any satisfaction in it—she was making Helen Devereux suffer. She could do this. Hide it as skillfully as she might, the proud girl suffered: Fanny was certain of that.

But neither pleasure, weariness, nor vengeance, no occupation or pursuit, caused Fanny to neglect poor Besson. She visited him regularly. Roland Spencer went often, and Alleyne several times accompanied his betrothed, so that the old man was very comfortable and content. It was not selfishness which prevented Alleyne's offering more frequent visits. Fanny perceived that Besson was never quite at ease in his presence; never able to forget that he was young and straight, and strong, and soon to become her husband. So, though Besson always asked about him, and tried hard to like his society, Fanny did not often permit him to go.

A few times, on exceptionally fine days, Besson was able to drive up to St. Simon's hotel. No matter who might be present to claim her at-

tention, Fanny received him with enthusiasm, and petted him to his heart's content.

Her conduct was charming in the eyes of both Alleyne and Roland Spencer. Even St. Simon said, laughingly,

"It's a good dodge, Fan—looks very pretty. But there, you'd do it in any case; I will say that for you."

But care and kindness were not much longer needed. Besson grew rapidly weaker, and soon after Alleyne's return was unable to leave his bed.

One day Fanny took Antoinette, and went down to his apartment as usual. But she did not return at her customary hour. Alleyne, going to the house, found her still absent, and so remained talking with the Tortoise. Toward evening, however, the incoherent creature decided to have a spasm of anxiety, and to conceive the idea that Fanny and Antoinette had either met with some accident in the carriage, or, more probably, been murdered on the dark staircase of the old house in the Quartier Montmartre. She showed more imagination in enlarging on this latter supposition than Alleyne would have given her credit for possessing, and really portrayed quite a dramatic scene, even to the arrangement of the bloody corpses as they lay in a particular niche in the corridor of the fourth floor, though what should have taken the pair thither, since Besson lived *au second*, did not appear.

However, Alleyne set out in search of them, partly to oblige the Tortoise, partly to get away from her. The motives of the best men are dreadfully mixed in this world.

As he reached the story where Besson's rooms were situated, old Babette was showing out an elderly man in the dress of a *curé*, weeping so heartily that she could only nod her head in answer to Alleyne's inquiries and motion him to go in.

He entered the bedroom. Besson was lying back among his pillows; Fanny sat beside him. Roland Spencer and Antoinette were both in the chamber, but they had retreated toward one of the windows.

The last rays of the setting sun stole in, touched the bands of Fanny's hair with a gleam of gold, and glorified the face of the old man, who lay with his hand clasped in hers, his eyes never wandering from her countenance.

"I have nothing more to do now," he was saying softly, as Alleyne appeared. "They were good words the *curé* spoke, Fanny dear. Good words to believe when this time comes! Never forget."

They could hear her voice in reply, but not the words she spoke.

"Don't cry, Fanny; there is nothing to cry for. I am quite happy, quite content. The great God is very kind. I am going where I

shall be young again; no care, no weariness, no crooked old body to ache; and I shall wait for you, Fanny, up in the sunshine, you know."

Alleyne had gone softly to the place where Spencer was standing. Old Babette crept in and knelt by the foot of the bed, weeping silently. There was quiet for a little, then Besson spoke again.

"I leave you happy, Fanny—that was my only dread—quite happy. There is the will. I have left it all to you. Be sure he makes good use of the money. I should like to have seen him once more; I might have told—"

"Seen whom, dear Besson?"

"Your lover. I should have liked; but never mind."

Fanny had not looked up when Alleyne entered, but she knew he was there: she beckoned him to approach. He moved forward, and stood by her chair.

"Besson," Fanny said, "here is Mr. Alleyne."

The old man opened his eyes, looked unrecognizingly at him, and answered,

"No, no; not him! It was only that I wanted to say he must take good care of you and the money. He was a reckless fellow; but he will mend. I think he will mend."

His words conveyed no meaning to Alleyne. He only perceived that the speaker's mind was wandering. But Fanny understood that Besson fancied her engaged to Castlemaine; and even then, absorbed as she was, a fear crossed her lest he might mention Talbot's name—join it with hers in a way which would afford Alleyne some glimpse of the secret he had never suspected.

But the old man forgot the fancy. He began to talk more disconnectedly, and in a fainter voice; always of the rest to which he was going forward—the cloudless sunshine in which he would sit and wait for her.

The latest ray of sunlight faded. As it quivered across the window-panes, Besson raised himself, stretched out his hands, and his voice sounded distinct and clear:

"Good-bye, Fanny! They have come! You will find me up yonder, you know—up yonder."

His head sunk on the pillow; his eyes closed, opened again, still turned on Fanny's face; and now the pleasant smile which had ever crossed his lips when he looked upon her remained fixed and changeless. Besson had gone away to the sunshine for which he had yearned so long.

The old man had left a will, as he said. The mining stocks and shares which he believed were to prove, so vast a fortune were bequeathed to Fanny. Besides this problematic wealth, there was a small property in France, upon the income of which he had lived—somewhere about twenty-five hundred dollars a year. This was Fanny's too. There was a little gift to the faithful

Babette—that was all. In the first softening influence of her regret for the good old man, it struck Fanny as an evil omen, this bequeathing her the annuity in addition to those thousands; as if the time were to come when she might be forced to depend upon it. But she soon forgot the fancy. Indeed, Besson once buried, she seemed to grow harder and more reckless than ever. One thing she did, unknown to any body but Alleyne; she made over the annuity for the use of the Tortoise, in a way which would keep it always safe from St. Simon's clutches. She could still show kind and thoughtful where that helpless creature was concerned.

The ordinary tide of life swept quickly back. It would not have been reasonable that the merciful release should cause any special change in the plans for the wedding; besides which, Besson had specially enjoined it upon Fanny.

"I shall be happy," he had said over and over; "do you be happy too. The dull clay lying in the grave will not be me: cover it up, and let it lie."

Very few people among the St. Simon circle knew any thing whatever about Besson; only out of the fact of his death rose a report that some distant relative in America or Zanzibar—no matter where—had left Fanny a grand fortune, and she was envied more than ever.

Harder and more bitter Fanny seemed daily to grow, and the brunt of her evil feelings fell upon her betrothed and Helen Devereux. The blows were carefully disguised, of course; but they told invariably. She spared Helen nothing, and the latter's promise to act as one of her brides-maids afforded ample scope for Fanny's powers of tormenting. She insisted on seeing her daily; there was always something about which she needed advice. She could scarcely choose a pocket-handkerchief unaided by her dear Miss Devereux. She threw Helen and Alleyne constantly together; she placed them in every predicament which could possibly be annoying to both. As much as she consulted Miss Devereux in regard to her purchases—not that she heeded or required counsel, for her taste was perfect—did she talk of her marriage, her hopes, her vague fears.

"Do other women feel so?" she asked one morning, when she had worn her victim's patience nearly threadbare.

"I dare say," Helen replied, calmly. "You know we are not a very sensible race at the best."

"And you are ready to set me down as the silliest specimen of our sex that you have ever encountered, *n'est ce pas?*"

"I certainly never accused you of being silly," exclaimed Helen, goaded into energy, and putting more emphasis on the last word than she was aware.

Fanny smiled behind a hand-screen she had

taken up. She was calling on Miss Devereux, so that young lady was quite at her mercy.

"That is rather admitting that you have accused me of other things," said Fanny, gayly.

"Oh yes, you know I have, and you know what they were, so we need not go over them," said Miss Devereux, determined not to be tormented further without putting out her claws.

"Ah, well," said Fanny, "you scold me—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Helen; "I never took that liberty."

She could endure a great deal, but not being put on such terms of intimacy as that freedom would imply.

"—And you disapprove of me," pursued Fanny, as if the other had not spoken; "but I think you like me a little. Don't tell me if I deceive myself; I want to believe you do."

So Miss Devereux said nothing, though at the moment she was conscious that never in her life had she so nearly detested any human being as this tantalizing creature.

Then, without warning, Fanny began to be agreeable. She could have charmed her guardian angel into momentary forgetfulness of her sins, had he stood face to face with her. She put herself aside; she talked on subjects which she knew interested her companion; she showed such noble capabilities, such appreciation of every thing good and true, such admiration for aims which she confessed she was too weak to make more than theories, that Miss Devereux almost forgot it was Fanny St. Simon who spoke, and listened entranced. She did this often when the mood was on her, trying as hard to fascinate Helen as if there had been something to gain by the achievement, never failing to turn and sting her desperately at the last. Each time Helen said to herself that she was a fool to be duped. The girl only did it for the express pleasure of showing her power; yet she could seldom resist any more than people in general could resist her charms, though to like the creature was beyond her.

For a full hour she rendered herself perfectly delightful; Miss Devereux could have listened forever. Suddenly she dropped down from her height, sneered at her own conversation, and got back to the subject they had left: her future, her doubts, her certainty that Alleyne loved her, and a score of similar topics, which caused Miss Devereux to wish herself deaf, and her visitor dumb.

"The question is, do I love him?" she said. "Do you know I sometimes ask myself that: shocking, is it not?"

"It would seem a little late," returned Helen, carelessly. "Still so many women marry, when there are sufficient reasons, without any doubt as to their own feelings, that perhaps your case is an ordinary one."

"By sufficient reasons, you mean money and position," said Fanny, eying her calmly.

"The world calls them such, at all events."

"And I have had a terrible longing for money all my life," continued Fanny, thoughtfully. "I used almost to hate you sometimes because you had so much. But now I am rich; I shall be as rich as you soon; you can not think I am marrying Gregory Alleyne for his wealth."

"I never said I thought so."

"No, I love him; I should be an ungrateful wretch if I did not. He has shown me his whole heart—ah, what a noble heart, Helen!—and it is all mine."

"Then you are a very fortunate woman," replied Miss Devereux, steadily.

"All mine," continued Fanny, her head drooped, her eyes dreamy, as if she were thinking aloud. "He had his youthful fancy once; he told me of it freely."

She paused and looked up now—looked Helen full in the face. She met in return an unfaltering glance. Miss Devereux's countenance expressed a polite but by no means overpowering interest—nothing more.

"He found in time that it was only a fancy," pursued Fanny, "and for long after that he was afraid to trust his own heart."

"It is fortunate that he made no mistake on this occasion," replied Miss Devereux, with an enchantingly careless laugh.

Fanny absolutely respected her; a woman who could fight so gallantly, and never flinch under a thrust like her last, was worthy of admiration.

"Yes, I am a fortunate woman," she said, in her most musical tones. "I have won a grand heart—at least I know it—that is a good deal, is it not?"

"Oh yes," Helen said, still in her voice of polite interest.

"And I want rest and peace; he promises me those, and he always keeps his word."

"Now, I should have thought change and excitement would have been more attractive to you," returned Miss Devereux.

"I fancied you knew me better. I have not had a very happy life; I think you know that."

Helen looked absolutely ignorant of any knowledge whatever in regard to Miss St. Simon's bliss or suffering in the past, present, or future.

"You did?" persisted Fanny.

"Really, you are a person whose real feelings always seemed to me difficult to get at," returned her hostess; and now her voice showed that polite interest was growing an effort.

"Perhaps you never cared to try," said Fanny, sadly. "Ah, well, I dare say I was not worth the trouble."

Miss Devereux looked at her, and felt more puzzled than usual to decide whether the creature was the most consummate actress that ever lived, or absolutely meant what she said at the moment of expressing it.

"Oh, dear me, I wish I were good! I wish, too, I knew whether I am in love!" cried Fanny, laughing and sighing at once.

"Your future husband might scarcely feel complimented by the doubt, if it were repeated to him."

"Ah, but I only say it to you, and *you* would never repeat it!"

The emphasis on the last personal pronoun was so slight that Helen could not tell if it were intended for an impertinence; at all events, it was one which she could not notice.

"Now, if you only had some past idyl with which you could compare your present feelings!" said she, pleasantly.

This time Fanny raged internally. She had always believed, though it was a mistake, that Miss Devereux did more than suspect her real sentiments for Talbot Castlemaine. But Fanny gave no sign.

"Most women of our age— Oh, I beg your pardon! I forgot that I have three years the disadvantage of you. Well, most women of your age or mine could do that, certainly. Let me see," and she looked prettily contemplative. "No; flirtations without end; half an hour's earnestness, perhaps, when some man has talked or danced particularly well; but nothing to found comparisons on in so serious a matter as this."

"Then I fear you will have to leave to time the work of teaching you."

"I see I shall get no help from your knowledge," said Fanny, laughing.

"I am neither married nor engaged, you must remember," returned Miss Devereux, and her voice almost showed temper now: this final insolence was going too far.

"Of human nature—you did not let me finish," drawled Fanny.

"Oh, human nature is a monster I do not profess to have much knowledge of," said Miss Devereux.

"What a naughty speech! sounds like one of my worst," cried Fanny.

"It was not a nice thing to say, I admit," replied Helen, with candor, willing to condemn herself, since such censure must be shared by her guest; then feeling ashamed, as she always did when Fanny goaded her into any exhibition resembling feminine spite.

Presently Mr. Alleyne was announced. Fanny had begged him to call for her: she had a habit of so doing when she went to visit Miss Devereux; and Alleyne, never good at inventing excuses, could seldom find any way of avoiding the little martyrdom.

Of course Helen received him as she would have done any other guest, and he behaved as a man must during a morning call—talked the trifles which made up ordinary conversation, and acquitted himself well enough. Fanny insisted in her own mind that he was stiff and priggish; but

neither statement was true. In spite of Miss St. Simon's clear-sightedness, it was sometimes difficult for her to render justice to the people she hated.

Miss Devereux had no longer doubts as to the motives which actuated the girl in the display of friendship so ostentatiously paraded since their return to Paris, and the artifices employed to bring her and Alleyne so constantly together. But she was in the toils, and forced to endure with a smiling face.

Even to Alleyne there came suspicions sometimes. As the weeks went on, more than once Fanny's conduct made him ask if it was possible that she suspected Miss Devereux to be the girl who had formerly been his betrothed. He remembered her refusal to hear the story when he wished honestly to relate the whole truth.

"Don't tell me her name," she had said; "don't let me ever find out who she was. I should hate her."

Had she discovered? Could she be capable of behaving as she did from jealousy or a wicked desire to wound him? There are men whose vanity might have been flattered by the first supposition, but Alleyne was not one of them. Then, too, she was so altered that often he found it difficult to believe there was any love in her heart. At other times her manner changed completely; perceiving the danger of tormenting him further, she would assume her most potent fascinations.

"Be patient with me," was her cry. "I am not like myself. I don't know what ails me. I can't help teasing you, and yet I can't bear to do it; don't be vexed with me. Once married and away from all these odious people, I shall get my senses back. I have often heard women say they felt as I do before their wedding; but I thought it all nonsense."

"And you are not troubled, not unhappy, Fanny?"

"What a question! Should I be here beside you if I were either one or the other? You know I am too impulsive and ill-regulated to act a part. And why should I do it? What motive could I have strong enough to make me attempt it? For shame, Gregory!"

"I did not dream of accusing you of any thing of the sort, Fanny; I only feared that you were not happy."

"I tell you I don't know what is the matter—nothing, in reality. I'm an idiot; I told you so long ago; you will believe it now. I'm afraid, I can not tell of what; you—myself—every thing—nothing. Love me, Gregory—only love me, and be patient! Go down on your knees, and swear that you love me."

While under the immediate charm of her presence, it was not difficult to convince himself that he felt all the protestations she insisted upon hearing; but perhaps at that instant she would fling Helen Devereux's name into the talk, and over-

whelm him with a sense of deceit and abasement. His words should be true; he would give her his whole heart. He would not show weak and miserable enough to let the ghosts of a dead dream—long since dead—torment him thus. He said this over and over, and struggled manfully. Not a struggle did Fanny miss; there was not a pang she failed to comprehend, and she spared him nothing. He ceased to look forward; that future upon which he had built so confidently during the first months of their engagement looked dim and insecure now. After all his philosophy, his experience, the ability to reason and argue down his fancy upon which he had prided himself, he had chosen under the influence of an inexplicable spell, and was going forth into new paths with as little real reflection as a boy could have displayed—paths which appeared tortuous and dangerous, as the halo which had hidden their course wore off, and they stretched ominously out in the cold light of reality.

And the days got by.

St. Simon's nervous anxiety increased; he hurried on the preparations for the wedding, and went into furies because the merest trifles were not in readiness long before they could be required. At one moment he upbraided Fanny, and fawned before her the next. He drank deeply, too, though none of their respectable acquaintances knew this; but Fanny knew it, and shuddered at so signal a proof of his having lost his head.

His conduct rendered her nearly as nervous as he was himself. She suspected all manner of horrible things, but could find no sufficient proofs to turn her suspicion in any one quarter. His papers and correspondence were kept so securely locked that she could not get a peep at them to discover whether the trouble was in regard to the mine, or merely some money crisis which he had brought on by his mad extravagance and dissipated habits.

She grew as eager as he for the wedding-day, loathing the thought the more because she was eager. But she longed for the moment which should secure her future. If danger were near—if the tempest should burst before her safety was placed beyond a possibility! Then she tried to re-assure herself by arguments which concerned Alleyne. No matter what might come out in regard to St. Simon, Alleyne would not visit the fault upon her; he was too honorable, too just. Then, in the midst of her efforts to be at rest, she would laugh in scorn of her own sophistries. The idea of any body weak enough to have scruples! Judging human nature by her own soul, by St. Simon, by so many who had borne a part in her life, she shuddered lest her old skepticism should be truth, after all; endeavored to believe those creeds false, yet wondered still at her own folly in essaying to doubt them.

She had never yet known intimately a human creature who would not forget honor and justice under sufficiently strong inducements, always except Roland Spencer; but he was not like most mortals; he was something so much better and higher than other men that ordinary rules did not apply to him. Alleyne was a proud man—loved the world's respect. If St. Simon were on the brink of a precipice, and Alleyne should draw back from her—where was she then? Of real, true pride, which, under such circumstances as her fancy depicted, would cause her betrothed husband to stand more closely by her, Fanny's experience could tell her so little that she scarcely dwelt upon the hope, even while offering it to her own acceptance. She hated the fate she had chosen, abhorred the world of decency and greatness and monotony in which her future would be cast; but she could not give it up; the bare dread of losing its splendid dullness showed her that.

St. Simon was right; she had been mad to defer her marriage so long. If she had only listened to his counsels, yielded to Alleyne's wishes, she might have been beyond the reach of danger. How the days dragged! Would the moment of safety never come?

Day by day these fears and forebodings increased in strength. Each morning she saw St. Simon's face a little more haggard, a little more anxious, and trembled lest ere the sun set the blow should fall. She ceased to worry him with questions: he had determined this time to give no confidence even to her; and it was useless to torment and excite his insane temper. It was only to her that these changes were visible; before others he was gay, *insouciant* as ever, and not a doubt seemed to have arisen in regard to him or his schemes.

As the time passed Fanny had something harder than these fears to endure—something more galling than the dullness of that future against which she had so often girded. The idea of being given body and soul to a man whose very touch had come to cause her a shiver of disgust, the sound of whose step was sometimes enough to make her flesh creep and her blood turn to ice—she had this to bear. But there was a harder struggle still; she was forced constantly to fight against her own heart; to battle down that wild, mad love, which seemed only to increase in intensity with every barrier she built above it.

She could neither eat nor sleep; Castlemaine's image haunted her day and night. She went over and over each detail of their acquaintance, from its earliest moment up to that last agonized parting. She lived on the memory of his words and smiles. The glory of his eyes burned into her soul, and woke a fever which seemed to parch its inmost depths. Only to see him again, to gaze into his face, to catch one tone

of his voice! Oh, to fling prudence and propriety to the winds, and hear him say once more that he loved her—just once more!

Why, she would like to kill herself on her wedding-day; to have them come in and find her dressed in her bridal robes—stark, stiff! Ah, she was a fool—a driveling, sentimental idiot—as vacuous as the girls she had sneered at in real life and in plays! Besides, if she were to die, by some means Alleyne and Helen Devereux would arrive at an explanation, and her torture in the next world would be to look back upon this earth and watch their happiness.

See that girl happy who had robbed her of all which made the difference between heaven and hell? Never! If existence grew a thousand times more horrible torture than now, she would cling to it to prevent that possibility. It was Helen Devereux who had put her in the strait where she groveled, whether with intention or not was no matter; she had done it, and deserved punishment, the worst that could be inflicted, though the dealing it hurt herself as much as it could her enemy. If that woman had not paltered with Talbot Castlemaine, kept him dangling in the wake of her golden progress, Talbot would never have seen Marian. Only a few weeks later, and she could have called him back to her heart—such a narrow slip between herself and bliss! Helen Devereux had wrought all this misery—she alone; and there was so little to be done to punish her. Taking away the man the odious woman loved was not enough—not nearly enough.

Oh! wait until after the marriage; wait till the settlements Alleyne was securing her would leave her rich, whatever happened! Then let Helen Devereux be on her guard! Why, it would be so easy then to work her irrevocable ruin and disgrace; yes, and to this man, whom she should hate far more bitterly than now when once bound to him—forced to accept his companionship—to live as his wife—

Always when she reached this point, Fanny broke off her reflections to rage up and down like a lunatic, sometimes to fling herself on the floor, and beat her head in wrath and anguish. But the revenge—she never failed when the paroxysm passed to bring herself back to a semblance of reason by dwelling upon that. They were going to America in the spring; Helen Devereux was going there too. Scandal, divorce, all the horrors which would prove worse than death to those two, might easily be brought about. She would stop at nothing—she cared for nothing! She was down in hell now; what matter if she found new and darker depths? Besides, she need not lose caste; she would appear a suffering martyr; she would have the whole world on her side—that of the injured, deceived wife. If this were not so, what should she care? She had cared for but one thing in all her life—Castlemaine's love. She had been

marble, ice—no heart for any human being—in capable of love or passion as a statue, except where this man was concerned—her Talbot, her lost Talbot!

And this Devereux woman had deprived her of him! Her wedding-day was near! She was to belong to another, and to know that beyond the dreary distance which separated them Talbot's heart yearned toward her; that Talbot, like herself, would joyfully have accepted an eternity of torture just to be happy here.

Night after night fighting with her devils—day after day busy with the petty details of existence—her marriage preparations going on—people always about her—*fêtes* in her honor—guests at the house—a constant whirl and excitement, till living was more like some horrible nightmare than a reality. And under all and beyond all, those growing fears each time she looked in St. Simon's face. Now, it was not so much the loss of her grandeur she dreaded as of her revenge—the bitter, ruthless retribution she was to work on the head of the woman who had thwarted her destiny, and the man through whom the vengeance was to be wrought.

And never any one to whom she could speak a word that was in her mind, except to Roland Spencer, and of course only vaguely to him, just moaning out her misery and despair; but even this was a relief.

Roland's heart ached and yearned with pity. He actually believed that at this season her brain turned somewhat; that she was in reality a little mad. He will hold to this credence as long as he lives, and be thankful that he can.

And at last only ten days remained to bridge over—ten days, and she would be Gregory Alleyne's wife.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONLY TEN DAYS.

ALTHOUGH taking place rather early in the season, Miss St. Simon's wedding promised to be a very brilliant affair. It was known among the American colony that titles without stint were expected, even to royal ones, provided royalty had its rights in this leveling century; so the American colony, with that republican spirit which characterizes it, felt that an invitation to the ceremony and the breakfast was a thing to have.

The presents which poured in were enough to have turned the head of an ordinary girl, but they did not afford Fanny the satisfaction which she had believed she should derive therefrom. Helen Devereux's gifts were among the earliest and most elegant. Naturally nothing less than diamonds could be looked for from a bridegroom of Alleyne's wealth, and they were forthcoming—

diamonds which caused gossip and envy enough. I think Alleyne's conscience could scarcely have been at ease about that purchase, considering his peculiar ideas. The money sunk in those glittering stones might have served for a king's ransom, as the old novels were fond of saying; or, better yet, founded another orphan asylum, erected the buildings, and put it in working order for years to come.

But Fanny had the diamonds, and the only comfort she got out of them was the thought, "They ought to be handsome; this is what I am selling myself for."

Miss Devereux was to be chief brides-maid: such important nuptials required several others, of course. Alleyne had supposed that Spencer would serve as one of his aids, but Fanny spared the young man the pain even of the request.

"No, we must not ask him," she said; "there's something very sad connected in his mind with acting as groomsman—I don't just know the story; he was to serve his dearest friend in that way once, and the poor fellow was killed the very morning of his marriage."

The tale had a foundation of truth, as Fanny's falsehoods usually had—not much this time; all she cared for was to save Roland annoyance. Nothing but her earnest supplications had retained him in Paris. He could not refuse her prayers, however, and hid what he suffered gallantly enough.

"I have no friend but you," she said, piteously; "don't desert me, Roland! There is nobody else to whom I can open my lips. Promise me to stay. I shall certainly go mad if you do not."

She meant every word, and after that Roland could not think of going, whatever personal cost he paid for yielding to her wishes. As the time went on, and he perceived more clearly the state of mind she was in, he became glad he had conquered his selfish dread, and remained. The sight of her suffering rendered him positively morbid; he got to have an absurd feeling that some danger was near—some horrible crisis in which she would need his help, when in all the world there would be no one but himself to stand between her and utter desolation. He marveled at his foolishness, but he could not drive away the presentiment. He watched the days go almost as eagerly as St. Simon, putting his own pain completely aside in solicitude for her.

And now only ten more days hung between them and that morning—only ten.

The Tortoise had suddenly roused up to a consciousness that she was soon to lose Fanny, and she sat blubbering softly in her *salon*, while Fanny tried to console her and laugh her out of lamentations which were becoming as dreary as those of Jeremiah.

Something in regard to her duties obliged Miss Devereux to come to the house this morning. She was shown directly up to the Tortoise's room,

and found Fanny with her arms about the open-mouthed animal, looking more tender and ear-nest than the visitor could have believed her capable of doing. Then Fanny explained what was the matter, and wiped away a few real tears from her eyes, while the Tortoise confided her nose to her pocket-handkerchief, and played a sort of dirge with such energy that the end of her proboscis gleamed red and injured for an hour afterward.

"Confess you are surprised at T.'s caring so much," said Fanny, laughing; for with her usual skill she read Miss Devereux's thoughts as plainly as if they had been spoken.

"It is natural—"

"Ah! but you never believed I was good to her; you rather thought it a pretense," said Fanny. "But it is odd how patient I can be with inoffensive people that nobody else can endure."

The Tortoise gave a final toot in her bugle performance, as if in confirmation of the words.

"Now, T.," pursued Fanny, "you shall have some wine and biscuits, and lie down. Miss Devereux and I must go out."

The Tortoise was amenable as usual to the offer of something to eat, and they left her quite cheerful, but so hopelessly daubed with *confitures* she had begged Fanny to add to her repast, that it was fortunate St. Simon did not chance to appear; he certainly would have been unable to resist giving her a sly pinch.

Later in the day Miss Devereux was back at the house. Fanny insisted on her returning. Miss Devereux had ceased to combat; she went and came as her tormentor bade, though not ordinarily a person given to accept martyrdom without a struggle. But whenever she refused to accede to Fanny's requests, that young woman managed to make her feel that she suspected her of hurt vanity, hurt pride, a sore heart, and other trifling inconveniences which Miss Devereux could not support the suspicion of; so Fanny always had her way. Of late Miss Devereux told herself that the term of annoyance was so nearly over, it was not worth while to hesitate at any thing. She bore Fanny's confidences, Fanny's sneers—harder yet, Fanny's protestations of friendship—and never flinched. She submitted to Gregory Alleyne's society whenever it was the will of the bride elect that she should do so. She endured St. Simon's compliments and soft words, and found herself *affichée* publicly with both niece and uncle in a manner which a few months previous she would have believed could never happen. But it would soon be over now; ten days more, and she should have her freedom. It seemed a little odd that she should look forward with eagerness to Gregory Alleyne's wedding-day. But when she reached that thought she called herself more hard names than Fanny had ever secretly bestowed upon her, and soon waxed so calm and cold that she was able to assure her

conscience she meant nothing whatever by the remark; at least, nothing beyond that it was odd she should have any interest or share in the matter of his marriage.

While the two girls were indulging in the nowadays indispensable five-o'clock cup of tea, Mrs. Pattaker appeared, dragging Roland Spencer in her wake. She had captured that unfortunate youth an hour before on the Champs Élysées, having descended from her carriage for a short promenade. Not only had she turned one of the jabsy men adrift, and taken Roland's arm, but she had forced him to pay a visit to certain compatriots whom he detested; and, harboring the suspicion that he meant, on leaving her, to go to the St. Simons', had brought him herself. Roland looked so utterly miserable and fagged that neither Miss Devereux nor Fanny could resist a smile. They gave him some tea and consoled with him in whispers, while Mrs. Pattaker listened amiably to St. Simon's flatteries. That gentleman had encountered her at the door, and came in, smiling and gracious, in her company. The last time Fanny had seen him—a few hours previous—he was raving like a Bedlamite, and breaking all the breakable articles on his writing-table, because some letter he expected had not arrived, or some person with whom he had an appointment had proved unpunctual; she did not wait to discover which.

After a little, Gregory Alleyne sauntered in with his quiet, grave manner, which Fanny called stiff and priggish, but which Miss Devereux thought weary and melancholy, and directly after informed her conscience that she did not think about it. That conscience of hers had grown troublesome lately; not so pleasant a confidante as Sathanas, with his sharp eyes and enameled tail, whom she used to consult merrily. But she had put Sathanas by long since; somehow, he always reminded her of the days when she and Marian had been so quietly happy in the Devonshire cottage, and she could never bear the sight of him after poor Marian's sky began to pale.

Two or three other people strolled in, and there were laughter and idle talk, and Mrs. Pattaker did long sentences, and glided into and out of the family attitude, and was gracious and patronizing to each person in turn, and fooled by St. Simon to the top of her bent. Mrs. Pattaker hated flattery; but due appreciation of her transcendent merits was not that, and this St. Simon told her he had.

Presently the great lady took herself off, but Roland managed to escape her clutches. When she was gone they really had a jolly hour. St. Simon was in wonderful spirits; his *bonmots* and witticisms kept even grave Gregory Alleyne in fits of laughter. He imitated Mrs. Pattaker, he had a new story at some mutual acquaintance's expense, and he looked so young and handsome, that Fanny, well as she knew him,

fairly wondered if it could be the same face she had seen so short a time before pale and rigid with passion and trouble. "We really are a wonderful pair," she thought. "We must have been born in a wrong century, that is all. Now, put St. Simon a hundred years or so back—titled, rich—bless me! he'd have beaten the wildest politician or courtier Louis XIV. owned. I'd not have done badly myself; but when one is born out of time, and can find no great aims, one must take the little ones. Heigh-ho! how stiff Alleyne looks! and that Devereux, with her head up as if she were a queen; and all the others so tiresome! How I hate every body—except my poor Roland!"

Then she began to talk pleasantly; to say sweet things to Helen Devereux, to laugh at Alleyne, pet Roland, and grew almost as gay as St. Simon.

Miss Devereux's carriage was announced; the rest rose, and soon nobody was left except her betrothed. Fanny's eyes implored Roland to remain, but he had an engagement, and, besides, he felt that he had no right to make himself disagreeable to Alleyne. So St. Simon rose also, and looked at his watch.

"Of course you two will miss me dreadfully," he said; "but I must be off. I promised De Sard to look in at the club."

He stood for a few minutes longer, talking gaily, and then went out and left the pair alone.

"It is wonderful to see a man no longer young possess such spirits," Alleyne observed. "Success agrees with St. Simon."

"I dare say; with most people, I fancy," answered Fanny.

Then she began to wonder how long he meant to stop, and to think what it would be to sit opposite his grave face day after day, and have no excuse for sending him off.

St. Simon passed down into his cabinet before leaving the house. He opened an *armoire*, took out a bottle of wine, and drank a couple of glasses to sustain his spirits, which flagged after his late efforts. Then he lighted a cigar, and began to feel comfortable, almost more so than he had felt for days. He glanced out of the window; his trap was waiting, so faultless in its get-up, from the dark chocolate-colored brougham to the magnificent chestnut horse and tiny tiger, that the whole affair was the envy of half his acquaintances. He would go to the club, and indulge in a quiet rubber; really he was in the mood for society. Who knew? perhaps these fiendish fears which had haunted him for weeks might prove vain. He had gone through so much, tided over so many dangerous currents; his star might not have deserted him, after all. Like most heathens, St. Simon was a fatalist, and worshiped his Dagon with blind devotion.

He turned from the window to take up his hat. Just then some one knocked at the door.

"Come in," St. Simon said, without looking round. He was pinning a rose that he had begged Miss Devereux to choose from one of Fanny's bouquets into his button-hole, puffing out a cloud of pale smoke from his fragrant Havana as he did so.

"A telegram for monsieur."

St. Simon did not move, did not pause in his employment, though the long white fingers busy with the rose seemed cold and dead, as if a sudden paralysis had stricken him.

It was the pattern servant who entered, carrying in his hand a silver salver, and on the salver the telegram. If it had been a sentence of death for high treason the pattern servant looked dignified enough for the bearer, and he would have brought it with the same air of delicate attention. He could see St. Simon's profile, and St. Simon could see him; but there was no curiosity in the pattern man's face. Letters and telegrams had grown a drug since he entered his present master's service, though, like most people of our century, he had a respect for the talent which could turn itself into money. His admiration for St. Simon was extreme, and he had often debated with himself the possibility of putting some of his past earnings—goodly sums, for the pattern man had served princes and powers in his day—into that wonderful mine where so many others were insane to sink their hopes.

St. Simon was too much occupied between the rose and his cigar to do more than nod. The pattern man deposited the salver on a table and departed. Not for worlds would he have lifted the paper; it must appear to have arrived on the silver tray, and never been touched by his or other hands before reaching its destination.

St. Simon caught himself smiling at the whole performance, model bow and all, as he watched with glazed eyes, while his cold fingers still played about the rose-bud. Then the man was gone, the door closed; St. Simon was alone.

He sat by the table staring at the glittering salver and its contents—an ocean telegram, he knew, as soon as he saw the color of the envelope. The next thing he was distinctly conscious of, he held the telegram in his hand—holding it tight, perhaps trying to bring some sensation to his icy fingers. The hand did not tremble; it looked as if it felt, dead and cold, and St. Simon's face was ghastly.

The envelope was open; had he done it? He could not remember; it seemed a long while that he had sat staring at it. The sheet of paper lay spread on the table; it did not seem that he had unfolded it.

"Your friend Marquis is dead."

Only this—just the one line. St. Simon glared at the page with eyes which had lost all human expression; glared at it with a face grown an awful yellowish white, like the face of a three days' corpse.

The telegram had been sent from Nevada, sent by the agent at the mines to a trusty person in New York. Re-sent from New York to St. Simon. A telegram which the whole board of directors in that city, and all the share-holders in the mine might have read had they been so disposed, and gained no perception that it possessed an interest for them.

Yet this is what it meant. The mine had failed! As St. Simon had always presaged from the papers Besson's son left, the drift had proved delusive—broken off short.

A few days longer the news might be kept a secret even from the company in America; a few days, in which St. Simon must take measures to save himself, for this was ruin indeed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUT OF ALADDIN'S PALACE.

THREE days of the ten were gone; only a week remained before Fanny St. Simon's wedding.

Fanny had not seen her uncle since the previous morning; he had been in the house occasionally, she knew, and she had several times sent asking to speak with him. He promised on the reception of each message to come to her, but he had not done it; had slipped away again before she was aware of his departure.

This was a black, stormy day; Fanny neither went out nor received visitors. There were to be guests at dinner to-night, and their presence would force St. Simon within her reach; it was only that thought kept Fanny from wishing some horrible fate upon the unfortunate invited which might keep them one and all at home.

Rather early in the morning came a note and a lovely bouquet from Alleyne, the bouquet clasped by a costly bracelet, and covered with a delicate lace handkerchief as nearly resembling the perfection of a cobweb as clumsy human ingenuity can attain. Alleyne was going to Fontainebleau, as had been agreed between him and his betrothed. He wanted to be certain that the little villa where they were to spend a few weeks before starting for Italy was in complete readiness.

He wrote that he should be unable to return until evening; probably not till nine, as he had business which would prevent his leaving Paris at the hour he had proposed. This would make him somewhat late for the dinner, so he should not come to the house till that ceremony was over. He would join the additional guests invited for the little *soirée* which was to follow the feast.

Altogether it was a pleasant, cheerful, affectionate note. Fanny read it in bed, then carefully folded the paper, and tore it with great precision into a score of tiny bits; it was a childish

performance, but she nevertheless experienced a certain satisfaction therein. She had an impulse to tear the handkerchief to tatters also, and fling the bracelet on the floor; but certain feminine instincts kept her from ruining such costly things, even in her present mood. She did fling the bouquet down, noticing only that it contained a quantity of camellias: she hated them, and Alleyne knew it, or ought to know it; anyway, a man capable of deliberately choosing camellias deserved to be guillotined! But presently she noticed the odor of Cape jessamines, the sight or smell of which never failed to carry her back to the lost days in Italy, when Castlemaine used to weave them in her hair. She picked up the poor flowers, selected the jessamines, and sat holding them to her heart, kissing them, talking to them, going mad, as she did lately over the veriest trifle.

Her solitary scene left her tired and wretched and cross. She sulked all day over the fire in her dressing-room: she always made the first cool morning a pretext for fires in her apartments, and basked in the heat like a tropical animal.

Roland Spencer called; she refused to be at home even to him. The Tortoise felt moved to pay her a visit; but though Fanny, sullen as she was, had not the heart to snub the defenseless creature, she proved unequal to the task of entertaining her, and soon announced that, owing to a dreadful headache, she should be better alone. She sent the poor soul away, though displaying a patience which she would not just then have exercised toward the Emperor of all the Russias, had he bothered her. The Tortoise crept meekly off, not venturing to thwart Fanny when she looked as she did this morning.

The day dragged on. Nobody intruded but Antoinette, who brought her some luncheon and insisted on her eating it, and was not to be turned from her purpose either by excuses or sharp words.

"I shall leave mademoiselle with pleasure as soon as she has emptied this plate and glass," said Antoinette, severely. "Mademoiselle's society is not agreeable to-day, but I shall do my duty first! Here I stand till mademoiselle finishes her luncheon, if I stand till Gabriel blows the great trumpet—*là!*"

Fanny ate and drank, just to get rid of her; then Antoinette rushed out of her severe mood into a tender one, and kissed her, and cried over her, and called her a thousand endearing names, as if she had been a child. There were certain subjects upon which Antoinette never opened her lips; but what she knew, she knew! She talked sometimes of her young mistress's future grandeur, but never of the days when Talbot Castlemaine haunted her path. As the time for the marriage approached, and Fanny's vagaries increased, Antoinette petted her the more, but

that was the only sign she showed of perceiving there was aught amiss. Still, what she knew, she knew; the old woman said that often to herself in these days, and shook her head always with heavy sighs. It was dusk now—two good hours before dinner; but Fanny started suddenly out of her black, dreary thoughts, and determined to dress at once. She would have plenty of time after to get her spirits up to a proper pitch before the people came; such odious people—Mrs. Pat-taker among them, and, worse still, Helen Dev-ereux.

She rang for her maid, a recent acquisition, who was to accompany her on her bridal tour, and whom Fanny disliked in consequence, as she did every thing and every body whose presence reminded her of what had now come so near.

Fanny never opened her lips while the toilet process went on; she paid as slight attention when her treasure or paragon—the waiting-woman's testimonials gave an opportunity to bestow either name as her present mistress might see fit—attempted little remarks, as she did to the curious glances which that epitome of human excellence cast slyly at her in the mirror.

There were wild rumors afloat this day in London and Paris. St. Simon's name was on many lips, and there were strange hints and conjectures, but the reports lacked verification. Visitors enough there had been for St. Simon, but they did not find him. I suppose during the past twenty years no single novel has omitted to mention that servants always know more than other people about their masters' affairs, and are the first to entertain suspicions when matters begin to go wrong. I shall chronicle the remark here just to show that I am not too proud to repeat a truth at once patent and profound.

The servants in St. Simon's household had decided there was something amiss days before these vague reports began to fly about the Bourse and clubs, and Fanny's elegant Parisian angel watched her mistress with eager eyes, sleepy and unconcerned as she forced her scrutinizing glances to appear.

"*Ciel, qu'elle est belle!*"

The Parisian seraph or paragon uttered this apostrophe so loudly, dropping a hair-brush at the same time, that the combined noises roused Fanny from her dark reverie. This was what the maid wanted. She had borne the disregard of her conversational efforts with lofty patience; but the toilet was finished, she had done her best, and had no intention of allowing her success to pass unappreciated.

Fanny looked up for the first time, and caught sight of herself in the mirror. She was dressed in her favorite amber color—jewels in her hair—delicate lace, making her white neck and arms appear softer and whiter still. The French-woman's theatrical exclamation had a great deal of truth in it. If not positively beautiful, Fanny

certainly looked very handsome to-night. The unrest of the past weeks had only added new brilliancy to her eyes, and new delicacy to her complexion.

"You have your Circe look on!"

The words sounded so distinct to her inner sense, that for an instant it seemed as if Castlemaine's voice rang in her ear. It was a speech he often uttered. It recurred so suddenly to her mind—she heard it rather than thought it—so plainly, that a superstitious thrill shook her, as if his soul by some strange power had called to hers through the distance.

She rose from her chair—saw the woman closely observing her.

"You have done wonders for me, Celestine," she said; "thanks; you have made me look almost pretty."

The paragon began a volley of exclamations, but Fanny interrupted her.

"Do you know if monsieur is in?" she asked, carelessly, as she clasped about her arm the bracelet Alleyne had sent that morning, apparently more attentive to its effect than her own question.

The treasure thought—she was not sure (it was a primal creed with that admirable creature never to admit point-blank ignorance in regard to any matter)—she would go and see, if mademoiselle desired.

"Monsieur has been in very little to-day," she added; "and so many persons have called for him—oh, so many!"

"It is so every day," Fanny replied; "he is much occupied. Have the kindness to inquire whether he has returned."

The paragon would go—fly was her energetic expression—and she glided across the room; though her movements, graceful enough to have excited the envy of many of her betters, reminded one somehow of a serpent rather than a bird. She opened the door, started back, and gave three of her affected shrieks in rapid succession. She had almost flung herself against the gentleman of whom she was going in search. "*Dieu! Ciel! Vir-r-rament!*" She begged a thousand pardons; the unexpectedness of the encounter startled her! She was just seeking monsieur by mademoiselle's desire, and here monsieur appeared, like—like—"She squeaked the fourth time in her inability to find the comparison she sought. Then she retreated, to allow monsieur to enter, giving him the benefit of a side glance out of her handsome eyes, and beseeching him to say that he had never seen mademoiselle so beautiful, so ravishing.

St. Simon spoke pleasantly to her, as he always could and did to a pretty woman, admired his niece, complimented the paragon on her genius, and then that treasure was obliged to depart, sorely against her will.

St. Simon opened the door after she closed it

—a habit taught him by certain little peculiarities of his own. The paragon was still near the key-hole, stooping to arrange her shoe; but she fled as rapidly and noiselessly as a feather, not considering herself safe till she was a whole flight of stairs away.

St. Simon shut the door again, and approached Fanny. She had moved to the fire-place, and seated herself in a low easy-chair. He leaned his arm on the chimney-piece, and glanced down at her. He was already in evening dress, looking very handsome and young; his countenance had recovered its usual *insouciant* expression.

Fanny neither raised her eyes nor spoke: she sat gazing sullenly into the red embers. She was madder than ever after her long solitude. He might stand there till doomsday without speaking, if he pleased; she would not open her lips.

He remained silent for several seconds; studied her face; glanced at the fire; altered the position of an ornament on the mantel; regarded it carefully, then restored it to its former place. He was smiling now—an awful smile; his eyes caught the glare they wore the night he opened the telegram. The coals crackled and snapped, a gust of wind moaned in the chimney; there was no other sound. Fanny sat dumb, looking each instant more hopelessly obstinate; again St. Simon smiled, and the glare in his eyes deepened.

"It is all up," he said, very quietly.

Fanny turned now. One glance at the features, whose every change she knew so well, told her that the forebodings of the past weeks were realized; ruin had come! She did not speak; strong as her will and self-control were, for an instant she could find no words.

"Did you hear?" he asked, in the same low, passionless tone.

"What do you mean?" she asked; and though the hands clasped in her lap trembled slightly, her voice was as low and cold as his.

"Just what I said! We are done for—dish-ed, if slang will make it any plainer to your comprehension." And there was the cat-like snarl in his voice as he went on: "You have put off and put off, dallied and shilly-shallied, in spite of every thing I could say—"

"This is not giving me any information," she interrupted, calmly.

"Is it not? Well, then, I doubt very much, my lady, your ever becoming Mrs. Gregory Alleyne, near as you had the game in your own hands."

"And why? I have done nothing that he might not know."

"Do you think he is likely to marry a convict's niece?" retorted St. Simon.

The words were uttered almost in a whisper, but they sounded like a shriek in Fanny's ear. She was on her feet now.

"In God's name, what have you done?" she groaned.

"Keep cool; it's no time for heroics. I want all my nerves and my wits too," he answered; and now that dreadful smile came back to his lips.

"St. Simon, what is it? what has happened?"

"The mine has failed."

"The mine failed?"

"Yes; I knew it several days ago."

"But you are not to blame for that. You suffer like the others."

"Ah, there has been an explosion! That fool in New York let himself be caught, instead of making off, as he had plenty of time to do."

"But even in that case, I thought—"

"He has peached! He has given up the double set of books—let every thing out—do you see? It is not only the money I have spent and can't replace; they have me on every side."

He was perfectly calm; she too. They looked wonderfully alike as they stood opposite each other, with that dreadful light in their eyes.

"Is it a case the extradition treaty touches?" she asked.

"Yes; but I could be arrested anyway: the operations have been carried on here."

"Is it certain—quite?"

"I shall be arrested before to-morrow morning," he said, rolling a cigarette as he spoke.

"Then what are you doing here?" she cried.

"You must be mad!"

"I'll play it out to the end," he said, with a laugh. "I'll dine comfortably—take old Pattaker into dinner too."

"But it must be known; nobody will come."

"Only rumors. It has been kept denuded close for fear I should make off—the idea of expecting to catch me asleep!" He was puffing quietly at his cigarette now. "The people will come fast enough, Fan, just to see what they can find out."

"Are you ready? Can you get off?"

He nodded, sending a triple ring of blue smoke from his lips.

"How? Where are you going?"

"I? Nonsense! Nowhere, of course." She waited, her face full of eagerness; she knew by his manner that all his plans were arranged.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well! Jonas Petty is going to America," said he. "Jonas Petty has his passport. He's a sandy-haired, red-bearded fellow, is Jonas; limps a little—not a beauty to look at—but he'll get off neatly."

Fanny seized his arm in both her hands, and fairly shook him to and fro.

"The power of attorney!" she gasped. "You can use it, you are sure?"

"Perfectly; but I shall wait to see whether it is necessary."

"How do you mean?"

"Suppose Alleyne holds to his bargain. Yes,

I see you shrug your shoulders, but you do care! Don't be crazy; don't let him off. Try every thing—tears—broken heart—"

"Leave that alone," she broke in. "If he marries me?"

"Why, if he does, he may be willing, for his own sake, to try and settle matters. I can't tell, but money enough might keep the company quiet."

"It is you who are crazy, St. Simon."

"Never can tell! Well, at least Alleyne might be willing to set me up in a new country—"

"But if not?"

"Then Jonas Petty will go to the United States. That power of attorney will bore a fine hole in the fair Helen's possessions, and start me in Brazil. Now, Fan, if Alleyne makes off—and it's an even chance—one can't wager which way his fine scruples will go; nine men out of ten would leave you in the lurch; but he has so many wonderful theories that perhaps he will keep to the mark."

"I think he will, St. Simon; but I am morally certain he will not help you. I would do all I could, you know that; but I could not influence him there."

"Possibly not; I don't much expect it; but there's the bare chance."

"Oh, you ought to be gone," she moaned, "not standing here talking of impossibilities. How are you to get off? The police are keen as so many blood-hounds."

"Jonas will go to Bordeaux, and stay there till he hears from you. There is not the slightest danger; I have it all as clear as a map. Put your fears out of your head."

"You mean to go to Brazil?"

"Yes. Now, Fan, if Alleyne backs out—and an awful fool he will be if he doesn't, in such a smash—you must go there with the Tortoise; that is, if you can do no better. I suppose you must have some money—more than enough, I fancy, though you have been very close about your goings-on; anyway, there's the little windfall from Besson."

"I have enough to get on; never mind about me. But don't wait here; why, every moment is precious!"

"There's no risk, I tell you. I shall have a full hour's warning. A fellow has his friends even at a pass like this. I have made up my mind to dine with the people, and have the Pattaker by me at table, and tell the story out; it will be a jolly lark."

He saw that she was really alarmed for his safety, so he explained every thing. An associate in London and another in Paris were on the watch. It was for their interest that he should escape, and, as so often happens in such cases, their arrangements were far more astute and complete than those of the police.

"So we will have one more feast in our Aladdin's palace, Fan," he said. "Heigh-ho! it is rough to turn out into the cold again, after having been comfortable so long! But what a year we have had of it, eh?"

She did not remind him that it was in a great measure his own reckless expenditure which had brought them to the present pass. Had he let cards alone, avoided certain other temptations which had cost rivers of gold, his present position might have been no worse than that of other stockholders or directors. If his villainy had come to light, he would in that case have had the money by him to restore; nothing but suspicion could have attached to him. But she uttered no word of recrimination. Indeed, she scarcely thought how different his conduct in the past twelve months might have rendered this crisis, except with a sensation of pity for him personally. Where she was concerned, she did not reflect much as yet. She thought it very probable Alleyne would hold to his vows; the prospect of that married life loomed so especially dreary after her day of solitary musing, that she almost wished he might not. But this was silly; she told herself so while she sat looking at St. Simon. Of course she should marry the man; her art would carry her through. Even now she trusted to this rather than to Alleyne's honor, or tried to believe she did; for she hated to admit that she knew he was noble and earnest and true, in spite of the contumely with which for weeks she had striven to cover him in her thoughts.

"They will talk about St. Simon and his silver mine for more than nine days to come," she heard her companion say, through the host of reflections which his last words had called up. There was a sort of exultation in his tone, as if in admiration of his own wickedness. "Well, Fan, they say there is only a cast of the dice between a hero and a murderer! A little more, and instead of an outlaw I should have been one of the great moneyed powers of our day. By Jove, its enough to make one curse fate! But *cui bono*? It was to be, I suppose—*kismet*, as the Mussulmans say. Mind you, I don't give in yet. After all that is done and gone, and what I must do still, I don't give in. I shall die in my bed a respectable capitalist; mark my words. How I did the respectable, eh?—church-going, and all;" and he began to laugh again. "But I lost my head; I'll own that. You're a good girl, Fan, not to have reminded me of it. I swear the most I care about is that I couldn't have held out till you were safe. You don't often believe me, but you may believe that."

"I do, St. Simon. But you need not mind about me. Of course I shall do my best to marry Alleyne. If I don't, I dare say I shall be glad to have escaped all the dreariness and weariness."

"Don't talk nonsense, Fan. I tell you there's nothing like respectability. It's the merest pretense and phantom possible, but there must be something in it. Look at the people outside the pale, how they fight to get back."

"Yes; I suppose you are right."

"I know I am. If Alleyne fails, you will feel it. Why, what else shall I struggle for? One despises the world, but one wants to live in it all the same, Fan."

"And by the world one means a narrow set of brainless, soulless idiots," she cried.

"Never mind that. Let me see why it is. A little, I suppose, from the feeling that made the Frenchwoman wish it were a sin to drink a glass of cold water. If one is out in the dark, and obliged to live among the offscourings of the earth, there's no pleasure in wickedness; that must be it. One wants the excitement of intrigue and secrecy, and all that kind of thing, eh?"

"I dare say."

Her voice sounded absent; she scarcely heard him. She was thinking of a spring day in Sorrento, when she and Castlemaine sat on the cliffs overlooking the sea, and gazed out across the sunlit sweep. She could recall every word he spoke, each smile, each passionate glance; could hear the murmur of the waves, and catch the glory of the blue heavens and the opal waters.

Then St. Simon's careless tones reached her again, and shut out the magic scene.

"Here we are discussing metaphysical subjects, and the wolf just at the door," he was saying. "Now, I call that coolness. Fan, we are trumps, if only we could have a fair show."

A fresh tremor of alarm shook her, but she recollected his explanations, and subdued it. He was safe; there was no use of irritating him by any weak outburst or theatrical display.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Half-past seven; an hour yet to dinner. I'll wager what you like, Fan, that nobody is late to-night."

"I should as soon expect vultures to be late," returned she, bitterly. "They will all come, wild to see how we look after the stories that have been going about to-day."

"We shall have a fair show, no doubt of that. Lord! to think of the Pattaker's face when the *dénouement* comes! It is too bad I shall have to miss that."

"I wish she was as safe really to suffer as the Devereux is," cried Fanny, venomously.

"Poor Helen!" laughed he. "Why, hitting her almost consoles you for every thing, Fan."

"Don't talk about her; I can't bear it, just now."

He pulled the bell, still laughing.

"I shall order some brandy-and-soda," he said; and he did so when the servant appeared, ordering sherry also. "It is for you, Fan," he

observed; "you will find that and the Champagne at dinner set your nerves as steady as a rock."

Fanny did not want the wine. She pretended to drink it, that he might be satisfied in regard to her composure, but her throat felt so hot and parched she could not swallow. Besides, her nerves would support her to the end; she knew that. What might happen afterward was no matter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LAST FÊTE.

HALF-PAST eight came. St. Simon, Fanny, and the Tortoise were in the *salon*.

The Tortoise was rather miserable; a pin pricked her in a tender quarter, and when she attempted to stir she had a feeling of insecurity which portended ill-attached strings in some secret portion of her attire, and direful results therefrom. She was afraid to tell Fanny because of St. Simon's presence, but they both perceived there was something amiss by her signs and piteous grimaces; so St. Simon good-naturedly sauntered into an adjacent room while Fanny put the crumbly sufferer in order again, and took out of her neck a huge pin, which seemed to have got there for the express purpose of lacerating her flesh and nerves.

When St. Simon returned, the Tortoise was at ease, and laughing in her feeble way over some nonsensical speech of Fanny's. St. Simon laughed too. He went up to the partner of his joys, and laid his hand on her arm with a caressing movement. The Tortoise swerved and winked at first like a child accustomed to having its ears boxed, then stared from him to Fanny in bewilderment.

"You look very nicely to-night, T.," he said, and there was no tinge of the mockery usually audible in his voice when he addressed her. "You were a wonderfully pretty girl, T., a quarter of a century ago, and you are pretty yet."

"Lor, St. Simon!" quoth the Tortoise.

He let his hand rest for an instant on her shoulder; he smoothed a stray curl that had wandered out of place, then resumed his slow march up and down. He was neither silent nor moody. He laughed and jested with Fanny, and seemed in his highest spirits; but Fanny knew how deeply he was moved under this show, when she saw him caress the Tortoise for the first time in her long acquaintance with the pair.

The guests arrived punctually, as St. Simon had predicted—three or four at the same instant, in their eagerness to discover, if possible, whether there could be any foundation for the strange rumors. Mrs. Pattaker owed it to her dignity not to appear among the earliest comers, though there was nobody more curious and anxious than

she. All day she had been exceedingly busy, driving about to every house where she could hope to obtain tidings, and persecuting each man of her acquaintance for news. The mind of the great lady was divided between two emotions—a dread that the reports might prove true, and so all those fine shares St. Simon had presented her be worth nothing; and a desire to see retribution overtake Fanny, in order that she, Mrs. Pattaker, might perceive a special providence in the blow, and an awful warning to all godless young women who presumed to thwart her will or treat with disrespect her claims to absolute sovereignty.

St. Simon was delightful, gay, and smiling, and Fanny was bewitching as only she could be. When she moved toward the Signer's descendant, so perfect in dress, so composed, with such pleasant words of greeting, and yet such an utter ignoring of any special claims to attention on the part of the lady, the illustrious woman felt that if a special providence in the shape of a terrible downfall did not overtake the insolent creature, then her belief in eternal justice must meet with a shock.

Eighteen guests in all. Foreign titled people—two stately ambassadors: Sir John and Lady Dudgeon (the latter struggling fiercely with a whole pot of roses which she carried on the top of her head), Colonel Judd (creaking, as he walked, more like a pair of tailor's shears than ever), Helen Devereux and her mother, and Roland Spencer. The last named had originally only been invited for the evening along with the generality of the young folk; but when he called at the house during the morning Fanny sent him word that he must come, because Alleyne could not return in season.

By the time St. Simon had finished his compliments to Mrs. Pattaker dinner was announced. The eyes of the illustrious were sharp as daggers; she perceived Alleyne's absence. Could the reports be true—had he drawn back? At least here was an opportunity to chastise Fanny, and she must do it.

St. Simon was offering his arm: Mrs. Pattaker looked at his niece, and said, audibly,

"And you don't beg your uncle to give Mr. Alleyne five minutes' grace? I see he has not arrived."

"Oh no," laughed Fanny; "five minutes' grace is too much for any man; it would not serve in this case either. Mr. Alleyne is not coming."

Mrs. Pattaker glanced slowly round the circle—every body had risen, and was waiting for her and St. Simon to head the charge; still, considering what was in most minds, Fanny's words produced a certain effect.

"Truly, I perceive we have an even number," said Mrs. Pattaker, and she turned to Fanny again: there was a grand compassion now visible in her countenance.

"Miss St. Simon was good enough to send for me to fill the vacant place," said Spencer, perceiving the lady's drift.

"You mean you were good-natured enough to grant my request," returned Fanny, merrily.

"I trust that Mr. Alleyne is not ill," observed Mrs. Pattaker, with a lofty show of interest.

"I am sure I hope not," said Fanny, coolly.

Scarcely a face now that could control an expression of eager curiosity; this certainly looked as if something were wrong. Helen Devereux's detestation of whatever was malicious caused her to speak.

"I met Mr. Alleyne on his way to the station, Fanny," she said; and it was the first time in her life she ever addressed the girl with such friendly familiarity. "He told me he could not get back from Fontainebleau before nine o'clock. I suppose if a single chair were not just in its place in that *bijou* of a villa, he would be wretched."

The mystery was cleared up. People began to glare at Mrs. Pattaker covertly for detaining them from dinner. Fanny appeared just sufficiently conscious; St. Simon offered some fitting remark; the march began. Mrs. Pattaker was not to be put to confusion, however; she had time to let one look of extreme thankfulness be visible to Fanny. If she had no need to pity the girl, she would at least show her gratitude to Heaven because the necessity did not exist.

They were at table. In the brief silence which followed the removal of the soup-plates, St. Simon turned to the great lady at his side. "Have you heard the news?" he asked.

Mrs. Pattaker did not mean to be led into a second blunder; she could not allow her reputation for astuteness to run such risk.

"Oh no," she replied; "one never hears any news nowadays."

"Ah! but there was news to-day," he rejoined.

Every body was listening.

"You must have heard it, Sir John," continued St. Simon.

"Never listen to any thing myself; keep my ears shut; sure to hear lies if one does not," puffed the baronet; but he looked slightly confused, notwithstanding.

"I heard that the Nevada mine had failed," said St. Simon, laughing. "As if that were not enough in the way of a surprise, certain persons got up a report that I was to be arrested for purloining other people's goods."

Nearly all the guests were glad to join his laughter in order to cover their embarrassment. Fanny glanced from one to another. She wished to see who laughed most heartily; of course it would be those who had been the first and loudest in repeating the stories.

"By Jove!" puffed Sir John again in his

stuffy voice. "Did I not just say it? People will tell any thing, provided it is a lie."

Colonel Judd and several others hastened to add their verdict to this assertion.

"It makes one ready to weep for poor human nature," said Mrs. Pattaker. "Thank Heaven few slanderous reports ever reach me;" and she looked up as if enthroned on a height so lofty that such vile sublunary things were too weak-winged to attain to the pure airs wherein she dwelt.

"I have heard rumors of the failure several times to-day," observed Helen Devereux; "but nobody could tell where they originally came from."

"Did you believe them just because they were so delightfully vague?" demanded Fanny, gayly, though the lady whom she addressed understood, what no one else did, the covert sneer in the speaker's words.

"I decided to wait for positive confirmation," Miss Devereux replied, calmly. Her conscience was too clear for her to show confusion, and she had made up her mind, whether it were dignified or not, never again to suffer Fanny's sly thrusts without returning them in kind.

"Now, that is being better than human nature has a right to show itself," returned the other, quite able, much as she hated the girl, to appreciate her courage. "I should have believed the worst at once, and vowed that I had expected it all along. Please admit that you did so, Helen."

Every body laughed at Fanny's nonsense; but Miss Devereux said, coolly,

"If it were true, I would without hesitation." Then, afraid that her speech might have sounded a little hard, she added, "Have you any idea how the reports got abroad, Mr. St. Simon?"

"A bit of stock-jobbing trickery in London," he answered. "They will pay rather dearly, however, before we have done."

"They ought to be gibbeted," asserted Sir John. "Yes, by Jove! drawn and quartered into the bargain. Those broker fellows are capable of any thing."

Most of the company joined in repeating both opinions.

"Can you track the thing to its source, Saint?" asked Colonel Judd, with that odious familiarity he was fond of displaying toward people whom "the king delighted to honor."

"Yes, without doubt," the host said, firmly. "I may very probably have news to-night which will clear up the whole matter."

"It will be likely to prove a somewhat dangerous business for the perpetrators," one of the ambassadors remarked.

"Slightly so," returned St. Simon, with a meaning smile.

Every body deemed it a duty to say something, but Mrs. Pattaker exceeded all others in her condemnation of such wickedness—her horror that human infamy could have gone to the extent of

assailing the name of her friend—yes, her valued and esteemed friend, if he would permit her to give him this title. She positively extended her hand to St. Simon as she uttered these words with theatrical emphasis. St. Simon took her hand, bowed over it with perfect grace, and declared that her sympathy went straight to his heart—ay, down to the very core of that susceptible organ. For he could not help feeling such goodness; he was old enough to be ashamed of his own susceptibility, but he could not help it; indeed, he would not if he could. He made his voice tremble beautifully; and Fanny, who was certainly a judge, thought she had never seen a bit of acting more neatly done.

Then St. Simon laughed at his own earnestness, and recovered his playful tone. He talked a great deal about the affair, and caused his guests to laugh heartily over a picture he drew of himself in prison, with Fanny beating wildly on the outer doors, and demanding her uncle, while his spouse sat flat on the ground dissolved in tears, having lost one shoe in her frantic race. St. Simon never did any thing better in a conversational way than that description.

The Tortoise fortunately neither heard nor understood the jesting talk, else she would have grown frightened. She perceived dimly there was some joke afoot, and closed her ears resolutely, as she always did on such occasions. A joke was a puzzle which caused her head to ache worse than the severest algebraic problem ever did that of a mathematician.

The dinner was a very gay one; much wine was drunk, many witty things were said. Altogether, famous as St. Simon's feasts had grown, this certainly was the crowning one in every way.

"I am so glad it was only a rumor," Spencer said to Fanny; "I mean about the failure. Of course the other story was too ridiculous to notice; but mines are such slippery things."

"Yes, *you* would have been sorry," returned Fanny, in the same low voice; "but fancy the exultation of these wretches."

"Oh no! nobody could be wicked enough for that."

"My dear boy, I have often told you that you were too good for this world," said she.

"At least I will not think people are so wicked as you pretend to believe."

"But suppose it had all been true," she persisted, "then you would have had to believe in our wickedness."

"I don't see what you could have to do with it."

"You could not separate me from St. Simon—I show his confidence; I have rather a head for business, he says. Come now—if it had been true?"

"Then I should have pitied you both."

"Oh! this dear old Roland!" she muttered.

"Yes, you certainly are much too good for this dreary world."

"How absurd it seems even to talk about such possibilities," he said, "sitting here and looking at you and St. Simon."

"Does it not?"

He was laughing, and she echoed his merriment. Fanny looked about; every body was talking at once; next to her sat a fat Frenchman, who spoke little English, and was deaf, besides.

"The gayest dinner we have ever had even here," said Spencer.

"Yes! Bend your head, Roland; pretend to keep my fan from falling."

He gave her an odd glance, she returned it with a smile, signing him to obey.

"Well?" he asked, stooping for the fan, which she allowed to drop against his chair.

Fanny bowed her head.

"It is all true," she whispered, "every word is true."

The fan fell with a little crash; Roland raised himself, pale and startled. She met his gaze with the same smiling composure.

"What a goose I am!" he said; "you frightened me."

"If I can bear it, you may," she answered, still smiling, though for an instant he saw the muscles of her mouth twitch, and something in her eyes brought a new pang of terror to his heart.

"Fanny!"

"I meant it—every word!"

Roland's brain positively whirled; for a few seconds he could see nothing distinctly. When he was able to hear again and look about, Fanny sat talking gayly to her opposite neighbor, and St. Simon held his wine-glass in his hand, a picture of content. Roland felt as if it must be some horrid dream; but he recalled the expression in Fanny's eyes, and knew that it was real.

Dessert was on the table. A servant placed a note in St. Simon's hand.

"Will you permit?" he said to Mrs. Pattaker.

The Signer's descendant beamed a gracious assent. St. Simon read the billet, and smiled: stealing one rapid glance at Fanny, who missed nothing of the scene, though she did not seem even to be looking that way.

"Sir John!" cried St. Simon, "we have the clue. Huzza!"

"Huzza!" echoed from half a dozen masculine throats. At such an announcement, and at that stage of the repast, enthusiasm was allowable even in Mrs. Pattaker's opinion. Indeed, the great lady fairly smote the tips of her jeweled fingers together in sign of approval. Roland Spencer stared confounded, more undecided than ever as to whether Fanny had jested or he turned idiotic.

"Bravo! bravo!" wheezed Sir John. "Punish the rascals well, my dear St. Simon; clemency would be weakness in a case like this."

"Justice shall be satisfied, or own herself a very ill-used female," laughed the host. "Mrs. Pattaker, I am sure you will persuade our friends to excuse my rudeness. I will join you in the *salon*."

"Yes, yes; by all means," returned she. "But what is it? Tell me the good news—the glorious news!"

"You shall hear it all when I come back," he said, affecting to lower his voice. "A man from London has just arrived; he says his information is complete, and must be acted on at once. I shall not be long."

He left the room, jesting and laughing to the very door, which the *maitre d'hôtel* held open with even lower bows than usual, feeling it an honor to serve a master like his.

Great confusion of a pleasant sort ensued upon his departure. Mrs. Pattaker and Sir John were most vehement in their expressions of delight and their praises of St. Simon. There was laughter and merry talk; Fanny took her part with perfect ease. The Tortoise and Lady Dudgeon nibbled nuts, not in the least understanding what had happened. Helen Devereux alone sat rather silent; she had caught the glance St. Simon gave his niece as he opened the note; she knew enough of the man to be alarmed. Once she looked at Fanny, and Fanny met her eyes with a haughty, defiant stare, which she took no pains to soften.

At last a servant brought Miss St. Simon word that other guests had arrived.

"Aunt," she said, "at least we females must depart. Sir John, have the goodness to play host to such of your sex as like to wait a while here for my uncle."

The ladies rose; most of the younger men were ready to go. Sir John and a few others stood up, but resumed their seats as the females floated out, inclined to imbibe another bottle of claret, and talk over the reports of the day. And while they talked, growing so much interested that the solitary bottle swelled into several, St. Simon received his full meed of praise as a wonderful man, and a splendid fellow in every respect.

"By Jove! he'll give those claps a bad half-hour," chuckled Sir John.

"He's a genius, you know; and that's the fact," chimed in Colonel Judd. "We shall see him a second Rothschild yet."

And the others joined heartily in this prediction.

In the *salons* more guests were constantly arriving. The brilliantly lighted rooms were a gay sight. Some professional was doing wonderful things on the piano; the young ladies were contemplating the possibility of a dance. Fanny knew that an hour had gone by, but she managed to make the time pass so swiftly that even Mrs. Pattaker had not begun to wonder at

St. Simon's absence. In the dining-room the claret and the conversation caused the moments to fly so pleasantly that none of the party were conscious how long they had sat waiting.

Fanny was the life and soul of each group—she seemed everywhere. Roland Spencer watched her in silent wonder and pity, but she never once flagged or faltered. It was after ten o'clock. Alleyne had not come. She had been so busy thinking of St. Simon that till now she found no leisure to remember him. Had he heard? She must know the worst; she could not wait.

The Tortoise and Lady Dudgeon were dozing comfortably in the boudoir.

"Where are the poor souls?" Fanny said. "I must see that Lady Dudgeon has some tea. Mr. Spencer, please give me your arm."

He led her through the rooms. They reached the boudoir, where the elderly pair sat nodding at each other like a couple of strange puppets kept in motion by some hidden machinery.

"Wait for me," Fanny said to Roland.

She seated herself at a table, wrote a hasty note, rang the bell.

"Some tea for Lady Dudgeon," she said to the man. "Send Antoinette to Mrs. St. Simon for a moment."

Roland approached her as she stood waiting.

"Don't speak to me," she whispered—"don't."

He retreated; began mechanically turning over a book of engravings. Fanny joined him. Presently Antoinette appeared: Fanny gave her the note, ordered her to take a *fiacre* and go herself to Alleyne's hotel; see him, if possible; obtain an answer at all events. She could trust the old woman's fidelity and keenness to execute her errand.

"Now, take me back to the people," said Fanny, putting her hand on Spencer's arm. "We must dance, I think; you like to dance, Roland."

He was incapable of answering; he led her on in silence.

The music began anew; Fanny had arranged for a carpet dance; people had chosen partners, and were taking their places.

Weary at last of waiting, Sir John and his companions entered the *salons*; only Colonel Judd was missing. Important as he considered himself, nobody appeared to notice his absence. But just as the music rang gayly out, he appeared in the door-way of the principal *salon*, as white and wrathful a man as one could wish to see.

"By the Eternal, it was true!" gasped he. "The officers are down-stairs to arrest him now."

Five minutes of utter confusion and horror. Away trooped the men to see if St. Simon had been found; the women fled to seek their wraps—Mrs. Pattaker the loudest in oburgations.

The Tortoise, conceiving an idea that the

house was on fire, ran off, and hid in her chamber. Fanny St. Simon stood immovable at the upper end of the room. One woman did approach her: it was Helen Devereux.

"It is some awful mistake," she said, kindly; "don't be frightened."

"I am not frightened," returned Fanny, with a fiery glance. "Don't you see the people running? You'd better go too, and escape contamination."

It was a pleasure even in this awful moment to fling off the disguise of the past weeks, and let the girl see the truth.

"Indeed, I will not leave you if you would like me to stay," Helen said, thinking only that Fanny was half mad with grief and fear.

"I would not ask the sacrifice for the world," cried she. "Let them all go; go with them."

"I don't believe this—I can't," Helen continued, so full of womanly pity that she did not heed.

"What do you stand here for, making pretty speeches?" exclaimed Fanny. "You are glad, and you know it. You always hated me."

"Miss St. Simon!"

"There, there! Do you still say you would be my brides-maid?" asked Fanny.

"Even if the thing were not a mistake, which I am sure it is, you would not be to blame," Helen said, softly. "I should no more think of retracting my promise to you than would the man who is to be your husband."

The half-hour sounded from a gilded clock on the mantel. Fanny knew now that Alleyne had drawn back. The story had reached him; he had failed her; so the ruin was complete. No use to cover her hate for this woman with civil words; nothing to be gained longer by artifice or lies.

"How well you put it!" she sneered. "Bah, Helen Devereux! do you suppose I am deceived? You are glad—glad! You think I have lost him; you think you will get back the man who jilted you; yes, jilted you. I know the whole story. Why, I'd have thrown him over long ago, but for the pleasure of hurting you."

Without a word, Helen Devereux turned and walked down the room. Fanny laughed aloud; she was so insane she could not have checked herself, even had she ruined her last shadow of hope by speech.

"Go!" she cried. "You'll never get him; of that you may be sure. Defeated I am, but not quite powerless. You loved him, and he jilted you. Go!"

She stopped abruptly; Helen had disappeared. Noise and confusion below stairs: nobody came near her. She knew that St. Simon was gone.

She sat still in the brilliantly lighted apartment, looking straight before her with a dreary gaze.

Suddenly Antoinette entered quickly, trembling with an emotion half rage, half terror. Fanny checked the questions which began pouring from her lips.

"Have you an answer?" she demanded.

Antoinette placed a letter in her hand. Fanny motioned her out of the room with a gesture she did not venture to disobey. The girl's white fingers tore the envelope so roughly that the inclosure fell upon the floor. Fanny stooped and picked up the paper—glanced down the page. It was her own note, returned without a syllable of explanation.

She laughed aloud, then sank back in her chair, and sat gazing at vacancy with the same dull, absorbed look in her face.

Again a step crossed the outer *salon*; preoccupied as she was, she heard it. Even in her sullen despair she smiled at the folly which had caused her to start at that tread—her insanity in thinking it sounded like the one step which had ever possessed the power to quicken the beating of her heart.

She did not move or turn toward the door, no matter who it might be. A servant to put out the lights, a stranger, or belated guest—it made no difference. Let whomsoever would, come and stare at her; nothing mattered now.

She heard her name called eagerly,

"Fanny, Fanny!"

She sprang to her feet then, with a cry of mingled incredulity and fear, facing the entrance as she rose.

Talbot Castlemaine stood before her again.

CHAPTER XXXV.

INTO THE GULF.

FANNY ST. SIMON felt no surprise at sight of the man, little idea as she had of his being within reach; she was too stunned and frozen for any ordinary sensation. Nor was it joy which caused her suddenly to tremble from head to foot. As she looked down the room, and saw him in the door-way, her first impulse was fright and dread, undefined as it was swift. Horrible fear—of herself—of him—of the pass to which life had brought her.

She sank back in her seat and waited. He stood an instant on the threshold, staring eagerly about; his eyes rested on the drooping figure huddled passively in the great chair. Once more he uttered her name—uttered it with a wild joy, a triumphant ring in his voice—and hurried toward her with extended arms.

The fear passed—the rapid warning which had struck her soul. She remembered nothing, knew nothing, cared for nothing, only that he had caught her to his breast, and that he was raining hot kisses on her cheeks and lips, whis-

pering words of passionate love, gazing into her eyes with that glance which, from the first time she ever met it, had possessed the power to fill her soul with a delicious tumult.

Only for a little; her reason and something like strength came back. It seemed as if some extraneous force had suddenly animated her almost against her will. She had lost every thing this world had offered to her—wealth, position; she was losing herself now. She pushed him gently away.

"Is it really you, Talbot? I did not dream of you being near," she said, speaking with a quiet which formed an odd contrast to her appearance.

"I only reached Paris a couple of hours ago. I hurried here as soon as I heard what—"

"You had heard it already?" she added, when he hesitated. "Oh yes; I suppose every body knows it by this time."

"My poor girl—my poor Fanny! That man must have been mad. I thought every thing was going so prosperously with him. It seems to have been all humbug—mine and every thing."

"Oh, there will be people enough to blame him; we need not," said Fanny, impatiently.

"It was not St. Simon's fault that the mine failed; it deceived every body. Other things, I suppose, he has been wrong in. No doubt he thought he could replace the money. Poor St. Simon!"

"He is off? They'll not find him, you think?"

She shook her head.

"And—and—the other one; that stately bridgroom of yours; where is he, Fanny?"

She laughed harshly.

"Followed the rest of the world," she answered. "He was to have been here at nine o'clock; he did not come. You understand what that means."

"The miserable cad!" exclaimed Castlemaine.

"You are well rid of him, at all events."

"What brought you to Paris?" she asked.

"Is your wife with you?"

"What do you talk about her for?" he said, roughly. "No, she's safe enough at home. What did I come for? I told myself because I was a fool—a stark, staring maniac! To have one last look at you. I believe I rather meant to blow my brains out after. But what a blessed chance that I came just when you needed me! for the rest are gone: there's not one of your fine friends to stay by you now."

"Not one," she said; "I am all alone to fight my battle as I can. No, there isn't any battle to fight; it is over, and I am beaten."

"You are not alone, Fanny; you have me! You don't think I shall desert you at this crisis."

"You are very good; but there is nothing you can do, Talbot."

The color flamed into his cheeks, the light into

his eyes. He knelt before her, and wound his arms about her again.

"Come to me," he whispered. "All the world is false, but I am true. Come to me, Fanny. Oh, my darling, my love—come!"

She sat passive for a little while. He poured out still wilder words, scorching her cold hands with his kisses.

"Let me go?" she cried, as again that warning struck her soul, and partially roused her from the spell which bound her.

"Where would you go?" he asked, holding her more closely.

"I don't know—anywhere," she muttered; "there must be some place where I can hide myself."

"Just that; nothing else left!" he cried.

"Oh, Fanny, don't think me cruel, but you may as well look the matter in the face. Not one of these miserable beasts will ever speak to you again. The women were all envious of you; that will make them doubly bitter now. That coward has followed the rest of the hounds—"

"As any other man would have done," she interrupted.

"No, I would not; you know I would not, Fanny! If he had stood firm, the business need not have affected you much. People would soon have forgotten to connect you with St. Simon—"

"Well, well, he did not stand firm," she broke in again. "It is no use to go over what might have been."

"I'm a fool!" he exclaimed. "There is so much I want to say, and I have no words. I love you, Fanny; I can prove true. There may be a whole life of happiness before us. Why should you go off into poverty and solitude? Come with me; we'll find a home in some beautiful place, out of reach of these worldly idiots and their contemptible laws."

"Just that—their laws. God's laws, you mean."

She could not struggle; she could make no effort to release herself from his embrace; she could not so much as lift her head from his shoulder where it had fallen; but these words rose to her lips, and seemed to utter themselves without any volition of her own.

"God's laws, Talbot; and I believe in God, and so do you, and I believe in heaven and hell, and I can't let you drag us both down into the darkness. I don't care for myself, but you—you!"

"Think what your life will be," he continued.

"Why, how will you live?"

"I am not afraid—I could work. I have often thought that any thing— toil, beggary—would be better than the life I had chosen. Each day, as the time for my marriage came nearer, I thought it more and more. Let the world go—what do I care? I wonder now that I cared so much."

At least, in all this horror and degradation I am free—free!”

“Think how I love you, Fanny; you know, you know! Look back over those weeks we spent together this summer—such dear weeks! Think of our Italian days. Happiness is once more within our reach: oh, we should be mad to throw it away for scruples that are only of men’s devising. Darling, darling! look at me—speak to me! You can’t go—you sha’n’t go! You love me—you do love me! All my heart and soul are yours! I would accept cheerfully a whole eternity of torture just for one kiss from your dear lips—one loving word.”

Ay, now he moved her; he had struck the right chord! When he talked of his love, she forgot every thing but his voice and presence. The horrible suffering that succeeded those weeks spent in his society had left her feeble. The awful catastrophe under which the future had so suddenly crumbled in ruins at her feet rendered her still more reckless and insane.

He loved her—he loved her! In the whole world she had nothing save him! Position gone—respectability gone too; no way open but one—no hope but one—his love.

She was thinking this while he hurried on in passionate speech; thinking it vaguely, in the enervating delight of having him close beside her. Yet, even as she listened, another thought sprung into her mind—a picture, rather. Fasten her eyes on his features as she would, blinded and deafened to all reason and better instincts as she was by his voice, she saw it always—that picture.

Gustave Doré’s painting of “Paulo and Francesca in Hell.” The artist himself, in the most absorbing moment of inspiration, never beheld those faces more clearly than she saw them in their wondrous beauty and remorse. It was as if the two ghosts had come straight out of the depths to warn her; she thought that too. And all the while Talbot’s pleadings sounded in her ears; Talbot’s kisses burned on her cheeks and lips.

“Come with me, Fanny—come!”

“I will not go,” she answered. It seemed to her as if her voice rose to an absolute shriek, but it was barely audible. “I will not go! I don’t care for myself—but you!”

He released her and started to his feet. She sunk back in her chair and stared at him. He would leave her too—she was alone! Just to lose the pressure of his arms smote her with a mortal chill—the chill in which she must henceforth exist.

“Answer me one question and I’ll go!” he cried. “Do you love me? It is not too much to admit. If you will condemn us both to misery, let me at least take that thought with me. Do you love me?”

One quick gesture, then her hands drooped

into her lap again. For the first time a few great tears rolled scalding down her cheeks. There he stood in that beauty which seemed as if it must be eternal—stood like a human type of the great archangel who fell through sin and pride. And she might belong to him—might have such love and happiness as common mortals could not even dream! And what stopped her? Old creeds, weak sophistries, men’s laws! And he was speaking all the while—words at once tender and reproachful, which stung her heart with a bitter pain that no other human being’s harshest or most just condemnation could have caused.

“You do love me, you can’t deny it! You are letting what is called pride, respectability, a dozen things that have only a name, stand between us. You are sacrificing us both to them! I have no life except as you share it—I will have none. I’ll never go back to the accursed bondage of the past months—never! I am going away—off to Greece—Egypt—as far as I can get from this dull old narrow world I am weary of. You wrong no one by sharing my fate. I mean to have my freedom—I will have it. I told you I was going—I’ll go; we shall never see each other again!”

“Talbot, Talbot!”

“Perhaps you will find something that can compensate for the happiness you refuse—a life just for us two—the protection of my love. Take it, if the prospect pleases you; go fight your battle, if you think it worth fighting. You hate and scorn the world, yet you are afraid of it. You know this day’s exposure has set you outside its pale—you can never get back; still you are afraid!”

“Talbot, Talbot!” Only that despairing cry in answer to his cruel words, but he went on unheeding—not acting—not trying to tempt her—mad with this passion which consumed his soul.

“I don’t know what you will do! Perhaps you’ll beg and entreat that hound to marry you. You hate him, but you want to be reinstated among the people you despise.”

“I would die a thousand deaths first!” she gasped. “If he were to repent—if he stood here now begging me to marry him, I would not do it!”

“You are sending me away,” he continued; “this time it is forever; I shall not come back. There must be some way of making my life a short one; I am not talking about suicide—that’s too idiotic! But one can wear out bodily strength pretty fast when one’s soul is burning up. Oh, Fanny, Fanny, and we might be so happy! I love you—I love you! Think of our life away from this wretched Europe—a whole new world! But you’ll not have it—you don’t want it! Oh, my God! You have broken my heart—you have driven me mad—and you profess to love me!”

He flung himself on his knees by her chair, and hid his face. She could not bear his agony—she could not struggle longer. She put her two arms about his neck—she laid her cheek down on his golden curls.

“I’ll go!” she said, slowly—“I’ll go! I’ll do just what you tell me; don’t be unhappy—I’ll go!”

“My own—my own!”

She shrunk away when he tried to clasp her anew in his arms.

“Don’t!” she moaned—“don’t! You look so glad—so horribly glad!”

She leaned back and closed her eyes, oppressed by a deathly faintness. She felt his touch again, his breath warm on her cheek.

“I shall go crazy if you stay,” she said, in the same strained voice. “I have promised—isn’t that enough?”

She saw the two faces still—the beautiful, despairing faces which had come out of hell to warn her. But they were less distinct now; they were floating slowly away—slowly away; their hopeless eyes still fixed upon her, full of an added pain because the warning had so utterly failed.

“Fanny!” cried Castlemaine, in alarm. “Don’t look so! You are tired—ill—this night’s business has been too much for you. See—I am here! I love you—only think of that—I love you!”

She turned her gaze upon him with the ghost of her glorious smile on her lips.

“You are very good,” she sighed. “You are not angry now—you are not going to leave me? I have promised, you know.”

“And you will not hesitate—you are too brave for that, my beautiful.”

“I have promised,” she said, in a hollow tone. “Is it time; ought we to go at once?”

“Not till to-morrow; you must get to bed and sleep! See—it is easy to arrange; try to listen. Now, then, lay your head on my shoulder—lean on me—so!”

She let him draw her toward him; the lips he kissed were cold as death; but her dim, blurred eyes were full of love—the love which had ruined her life. Through all her weakness and faintness she could realize in a way what she was about to do, but it did not matter. She would not have cared if she had been following those phantom shapes down into eternal pain; she should be with him—she should be with him!

“Are you listening, darling?” he asked.

She patted his hand with her icy fingers—she could not speak.

“I had told M——, I had told them in England I was going away for several months; my yacht is at Marseilles. To-morrow morning early, take the train to Fontainebleau; nobody need know where you have gone. It is only for you I care, beloved—you are sure of that?”

She pressed his hand again. It was true, and she knew it; he was too utterly reckless to heed the world’s verdict, or attempt any concealment on his own behalf.

“I have business which will take me all the morning—arrangements about money, so that I need not come back for years and years. Why do you start? What is it, Fanny?”

“Nothing; I’m tired—nervous. I’ll not be so silly again. I have promised, you know.”

She uttered the words slowly, and with difficulty. Why had she started? As plainly as she saw his face—oh, more plainly! for, bend as close to him as she would, there seemed to come a mist between—she saw the two beautiful, despairing phantoms pause at the door, and stare back upon her. Her soul heard their souls’ voices in that speech which has no mortal words, “Always with us now—always!”

She shut her eyes; she pressed her head down on Talbot’s breast till the tumultuous throbs of his fiery heart dizzied her brain anew.

“You hear me, Fanny! You will wait at Fontainebleau; I shall come by one of the afternoon trains; we can go on together in the night express.”

A quick hysterical spasm shook her; she laughed and groaned, her features contorted somewhat; he cried out in terror.

“It is nothing—I’m tired—only—only—I laugh—we were going there—he and I—he and I.”

“So much the better! Think while you are waiting for me what misery you have been spared. It is a good omen, my darling.”

She was quite composed in a few moments; he had brought her some water. She could scarcely swallow at first; then drank eagerly, conscious of a raging thirst, chilled and stony as she felt to her very heart.

“You’ll not be ill—”

“No, no! I shall be strong in the morning.”

“Together—always together! Think of that—say it over and over!”

More mad words, more passionate utterances. He repeated his explanations, held her in his arms again, heard anew her promise, then went away.

As he descended the stairs, Antoinette was speaking to some gentleman in the entrance hall. Castlemaine hurried past without noticing that it was any one he knew, but Roland Spencer recognized him.

“Miss St. Simon must still be in the *salon*,” he said to the old woman, and darted by her before she could expostulate.

Fanny was sitting where Castlemaine had left her—not frightened—not remorseful. She looked about; the phantom faces had disappeared. She was very, very tired. There was a good deal to do before she slept—all sorts of commonplace things; she tried to fix her mind upon

them. Her trunks must be packed; the house, of course, was guarded; but no one would hinder her departure. Pertinaciously she fastened her thoughts on the merest trifles. She must not forget that gown Talbot had admired in the summer! She would take two boxes; they would hold every thing. Still she looked drearily about; but there was nothing there; she was alone.

Roland Spencer entered quickly; she saw him—this noble soul who believed in her—who had faith in her honesty and truth—who was her friend always, though she had hurt his heart so cruelly. Oh, she would rather that all the ghosts from Hades should come to haunt her, than have been forced to meet his eyes now!

"You ought not to be up," he said. "I came back to know how you were—to ask Antoinette if there was any thing I could do."

"It was like you, my good boy!" she answered, softly. "I am going to bed; I am tired."

"What did that man want?" he asked, abruptly. "Fanny, keep Talbot Castlemaine away from you now."

She shivered slightly, but there was neither confusion nor betrayal in face or voice.

"You were very good to come, Roland," she said; "very good."

"I went to Alleyne's hotel; I could not see him. His man was not to be found, and the stupid people in the bureau said no one could go to his rooms."

Fanny laughed.

"Have you sent? have you heard from him?"

She glanced about for the note which had been returned to her—saw it lying crumpled on the floor near her chair.

"Look at that," she said, pointing to the paper.

He picked it up—read the hurried lines.

"Why didn't you send it?" he asked. "You know he has been at Fontainebleau all day; it was late when he got back; he could not have heard what had happened; he would have come at once."

Again she laughed; the low, mirthless sound troubled him.

"My foolish Roland!" she said. "Don't you understand? I sent my note to Mr. Alleyne; that was what he sent back. He had heard; this is his answer."

"Great God!" exclaimed Roland. "He could not have meant it; there must be some horrible mistake. I'll go to the hotel. I'll see him, if I have to burn the house down!"

"There is no reason for seeing him," she replied. "He has done what most men would. I don't blame him. He could not marry me now—he, the respectable gentleman, the rich land-holder. Oh, he could not marry a criminal's niece!"

"Fanny, I don't believe it—there is some mis-

take!" cried Roland. "Alleyne is a man; only a brute, a devil, could behave like this."

"Oh, I don't care what he is!" she answered, impatiently.

"I'll find him! If it is true that he means to behave so like an infernal scoundrel, I'll cut his heart out with—"

The words came hissing from between his clenched teeth. He checked himself. This talk was like that of a person who meant to be content with dramatic words, and Roland meant to do just what he had said.

"I don't want him," pursued Fanny, in the same absent voice. "I'm glad he saved me the trouble of saying I would not marry him—glad to know he is mean. I hate him! I always hated him! At least I am free now; I am free."

There was neither fire nor energy in her voice; somehow the half-apathetic manner in which she said the words gave them added force.

"That alters nothing where he is concerned. He had a plain duty," Roland began; but she stopped him.

"Dear old boy," she said, "you have always been good to me; will you do me one last favor? give me one last promise?"

She understood what he purposed to do; she knew he would carry out his intention if she did not prevent it. She wondered that she cared; but she did. This boy should run no risk for her sake. She could not be damned more irrevocably than by the step she was about to take. Nothing mattered; still she would always have it in her mind that she had not allowed him to incur danger for her.

"I'll promise you any thing," he said; "do any thing you want me to. You can't think I would hesitate?"

His blood was boiling at the insult which had been put upon her in her helplessness by this man. She wanted his punishment. Oh, she should have it!

"You have promised," she said. "Never quarrel with Gregory Alleyne on any pretext; never go near him. I don't want revenge; he is nothing to me. I tell you I would not marry him. If this trouble had not come, I believe I should have drawn back at the last moment. At least I am free—free!"

"What do you mean to do now, Fanny?" he asked.

"Oh, I shall do well enough, well enough," she replied, in the same dazed way. "Don't bother about me. It is late, Roland. Say good-bye; you will never say it to me any more."

"Never say it any more?" he repeated, in bewilderment. "Where are you going? You mustn't follow St. Simon; it would be madness. He is sure to get off, I suppose?"

She nodded.

"So much the better," he continued. "Of

course you must go away at once, you and the poor helpless wife. Have—have you money?"

"Oh yes; I know what you are thinking of. We don't need any; and it is my money. I have a right to it—not stolen, you understand."

"You must not be cast down," he said; "you are not to blame. Each man or woman has to live for him or her self. St. Simon's sin touches you no more than me. Forget it; put him out of your life. No creature with heart or decency could do any thing but sympathize with you."

"Sympathy—I should get a great deal of that! Don't deceive yourself, Roland; I should be shunned like a pariah, hunted like a leper, if I did not hide myself securely."

"You are wrong, Fanny. Why, if that coward, that fiend, had stood by you as he ought—"

"I tell you I don't want him. If he had been true, I'd not have dragged him down."

"You feel so because of your dislike. I told you, Fanny, how wrong it was to marry him. But think; if a man loved you, toward whom you felt kindness and friendship, who would be patient and true, who would earn your affection by his devotedness! Fanny, married to such a man you would be protected and safe."

He spoke rapidly, his color coming and going. His love for this woman had been the one passion of his youth. The fervent idolatry had changed somewhat, but he pitied her so sincerely that his sympathy brought up a tenderness which left him ready to accept any worldly sacrifice for her sake, in this her hour of need.

She heard his words, but they conveyed slight meaning to her. She was dull, worn out, could only hear sounds half like Castlemaine's voice, half like the Eastern breeze blowing over the enchanted land of which he had talked.

"Don't be angry, Fanny," Roland continued. "I never meant to trouble you with such words again; but I ask you to marry me."

She heard this; she started up erect in her chair.

"My God!" she muttered. "He asks me to marry him—me!"

"I do ask you, Fanny. I think I can make your life happier than it will be in the loneliness to which you mean to condemn yourself. I have always loved you. I had never cared for any woman till I saw you. During these months, when such love was a weakness, a sin, I tried hard to root it out of my heart. I thought I had succeeded; but now—now that I see you in trouble, it all comes back. I know I deceived myself; it has always been there."

"He loves me! he loves me!" she only moaned.

"Don't be afraid to trust yourself to me," he pursued. "I will be so patient; I will teach you to like me—I am sure I can. Why, dear, it would be much better than bearing this trouble by yourself. Come to me, Fanny. Let us

waste no time. For your own sake, it would be better you should marry me at once."

"Oh, stop, stop!" she groaned. "I'm bad enough, wicked enough, but I couldn't do that—I couldn't do that! God bless you, Roland! Let me kiss your hand; let me kneel to you; let me thank you; but I'm not bad enough for that."

She was on her knees before him so suddenly that he could not prevent her. Inexpressibly shocked, he raised her and forced her back into her chair.

"You are out of your senses," he cried. "For Heaven's sake, don't do that!"

"Yes, that is it; always say that to yourself; promise me! Oh, Roland, go away. Don't stand there looking at me; don't!"

She flung up her hands and moaned aloud, but the hysterical spasm passed as quickly as it had come. Before he could do more than rush frantically about, imploring her to be calm, she was leaning back, quite composed.

"Say good-bye, Roland," she said, holding out her hand.

"I ought to go. I was a brute to tease you to-night," she replied. "I'll come in the morning. You will think of what I have said, Fanny? You will try to like me well enough to give me the right to care for and protect you all my life?"

"Good-bye, Roland," she said; "it is forever."

"You refuse? You will not? You can not?" he cried.

"I can not. Don't say any more, Roland. I wish I could thank you. I wish you could know how I honor and venerate you. Oh, Roland, Roland!"

"Fanny," he exclaimed, while a sudden vague dread shot up in his heart, "why do you speak so? There is worse than this trouble St. Simon has brought on you. What is it?"

"I can't talk any more," she said. "Go, go! Wait; give me your hand, Roland."

He went close to her, and laid his hand on hers.

"The dear hand," she murmured, softly; "the hand of a true, honest man. I did not think there was one left." She stooped her head as if about to kiss it, then drew back with a shudder. "I mustn't do that; I mustn't do that."

She was so utterly exhausted, so like a person whose senses were positively tottering from terrible mental excitement and bodily fatigue, that he knew it would be only cruel to remain.

"I shall come back in the morning," he said. "Good-night, now."

He went softly away, stopping down-stairs to find Antoinette and bid her get her mistress to rest.

Fanny let him go. As he was disappearing behind the draperies of the door-way, she had an impulse to call him back, to tell him the whole truth. But she let him go.

She rose and walked steadily out of the room; met Antoinette, and asked about the Tortoise, whom she had forgotten. Antoinette had put her to bed long ago; madame was fast asleep. Mademoiselle must go now.

"I have a good deal to do first," Fanny answered. "Come to my room."

The old body was rather taciturn for a French woman, and wearied Fanny little with talk, even when the young lady astonished her by bidding her help pack the boxes.

"There is no need to-night," Antoinette said. "We must leave this house, of course; but there's no hurry."

"I am going on a journey," said Fanny. "You must ask no questions; you must tell no one any thing about me."

"And mademoiselle's wedding, and madame?"

"There will be no wedding, Antoinette."

Antoinette threatened to become voluble; but Fanny went on, unheeding.

"You must promise me to stay with madame; you are good and kind; you will be faithful. You will go to-morrow and hire an apartment near Paris. You like Montmorency; go there. Madame will receive money every three months."

"But how long before mademoiselle will return?"

"I don't know; ask no questions. Do you promise to do what I want?"

"Of course. I have been for years with madame; why should I change? I am too old a bird to like strange nests."

"That is right; I thought you would say that. Now I want to get ready such things as I mean to take."

"And mademoiselle's trousseau, all the new, beautiful things—"

"Whatever has come I shall order taken back. I have clothes enough which are paid for, without taking those that are not."

It was past three o'clock when the necessary preparations were ended. The last thing Fanny did was to write to the Englishwoman who had brought her stocks, and make over to her order the ten thousand pounds.

Then she lay down on her bed and slept soundly for several hours, as men sleep when the dawn of their execution is at hand.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"HOW SHALL I TELL?"

It was very late when Gregory Alleyne persuaded himself out of bed the next morning. Usually he was an early man, having acquired the habit during the years which he had devoted to business. I observe we always employ that formula, "acquired the habit," in speaking of

people given to emulating the lark—the surest proof in the world that it is a practice against nature. In general, too, it is a habit which does not grow easily, any more than the taste for smoking or burning one's interior with cayenne and hot sauces, or other among what are termed depraved practices.

This morning Gregory Alleyne allowed the Old Adam to subdue him, and slept till late, as the fiercest Spartan might be excused for doing after that intolerable malady yecept sick-head-ache.

The previous day had been gloomy indeed—to a degree beyond what could be accounted for by the storm and exterior unpleasantness. The gloom came from within; nor could physical pain be called on to bear the entire onus. He had attended to his affairs, thinking that after all there was nothing which might not have been relegated to an agent. He had gone over the villa with the talkative proprietor; settled the last trifling arrangement; seen that the alterations he desired were complete. A pretty suite of apartments; a place where one might have spent even a longer season than a honey-moon without wearying of it. The *salons*, the boudoir, the *salle à manger*, even one of the bedrooms, gave upon the green recesses of the famous forest, which looked dismal enough in the gray light, but would be beautiful during the brightness of the late autumn.

Alleyne got rid of the voluble proprietor—a bandy-legged Gaul, with blue spectacles, a washed-out appearance, and a voice like a cracked dinner-bell—and sat down in the tiny boudoir, which had been refurnished with as close an attention to Fanny St. Simon's tastes as if she were expected to pass years there instead of three or four weeks at the most.

The room reminded him of her; he had succeeded well in the carrying-out of his design. He could easily fancy her changeful, capricious beauty adorning the spot; and he began to wonder how it would seem when they did actually sit face to face, the new life begun, the intimate union which only death could sever.

He hoped he had done the best possible for her and himself; he had meant to act rightly. It would not be just to say there were doubts and fears in his mind; yet, beneath his most cheerful thoughts during the past weeks there had swept an under-current of restlessness which possessed these elements. He knew that he had been precipitate in entering into this engagement. He was a little ashamed of a certain weakness which he had shown. He had yielded rather to a strange fascination than to his reason. But it was not of this he thought so much, nor of the consciousness—a consciousness which stung and galled him—that the dream of early manhood yet asserted its power. If he had erred, he must pay the penalty; if he suffered, at least Fanny

must not suffer, or ever be troubled by this old folly of his. Still, it was for her he felt anxious now. He perceived a great change in her since his return from America. In spite of her artfulness, she had not wholly concealed from him her struggles, and indeed there had been times when she was inclined, as we know, to throw off all disguises, give up her coveted prize even then.

Alleyne was too sensitive a man not to be acutely affected by the moral atmosphere of those about him. He felt that Fanny St. Simon was not happy; and though he tried to accept the explanations she gave, he found it difficult. As he sat in that silent apartment, going over the events of the past year, this under-current of doubt and dread became powerful and strong. Altogether it was a hard day; and when the physical pain added itself to the mental disquietude, he was so worn and miserable that nothing but bed and entire repose could be thought of.

He was up now and dressed; had taken his coffee, and was looking out down the busy street, down into the Place Vendôme, where the sunlight, watery and uncertain still, played about the shattered base, which once supported the famous column and the great emperor's statue.

The clocks were striking eleven. He would go and see Fanny as soon as possible; but he could not well do that before twelve. He had not read the papers. When he rose, his head still felt dizzy from the severe pain of the preceding night. The first journal he opened was the London *Standard* of the preceding day; the first paragraph which chanced to meet his eye, something in regard to the Nevada mine. He was inclined to suppose it the work of some one with a personal reason for trying to injure St. Simon. He took up a Paris paper, and came upon the account of the awful catastrophe and exposure of the previous night. There was scarcely a moment given to the paralyzing horror and suddenness of the thing. His thought was of Fanny; he understood now why she had sent for him. He hurried out of the house, hailed a *fiacre*, and the coachman, animated by the promise of a double *pour-boire*, urged his horse to the best of his speed along the Rue de Rivoli and up the Champs Élysées.

They turned into the street where the St. Simons lived, and stopped before the entrance to the house. A brace of policemen were lounging near; they looked sharply after Alleyne, but that was all. He passed through the *porte-cochère*, across the court, and reached the entrance doors. Old Antoinette appeared in answer to his ring. She was dressed in her Sunday attire, and had on her most pointed cap. She did not bestow either the smile or courtesy with which she was accustomed to greet Alleyne. She stood stiff and grim, and her heavy brows met over her eyes in a frown; but he had no time to notice her demeanor.

"Is mademoiselle in her morning-room? Can I go up?" he asked.

He was stepping forward to pass her as he spoke; but she planted herself directly in his way.

"Mademoiselle is not in her morning-room," said she.

"Where, then? Please tell her I am here. I want to see her at once."

"Mademoiselle is not in the house"—with a defiant sniff. "*Mademoiselle est partie en voyage.*"

"Good heavens! What do you mean?" cried Alleyne, aghast. "Gone—where—not with him?"

"With monsieur her uncle? No, indeed! Monsieur was not likely to have taken her with him."

"Where is she, then?"

"Departed on a journey." Only that sullen repetition of her words could he obtain.

"Is Mrs. St. Simon here?"

Yes, madame was there. She was not dressed yet, though; nobody could see her. The woman's dogged obstinacy and quiet exasperated Alleyne beyond control in the agitation which seized him.

"For God's sake, Antoinette!" he exclaimed, "tell me where mademoiselle is. You know I have a right to ask; you know we are to be married."

"*Mais non,*" retorted Antoinette, frowning more darkly; "*je n'en sais rien!*" There is to be no wedding; mademoiselle told me."

"Has she left no letter for me—no message?" he asked, not catching her words. "There must be; go ask madame."

Antoinette shrugged her shoulders in silent contempt at the idea of mademoiselle's confiding either epistle or message to that lady.

"There must be a letter," repeated Alleyne, imperatively. "Go at once."

"There is none!" Antoinette looked fierce enough now. "If monsieur had wished to see mademoiselle, he should have come when sent for."

"But I was in bed, ill. I did not know there was any trouble."

Another shrug of Antoinette's shoulders. It was all one to her. Mademoiselle was gone; no, she did not know where. Yes, gone on a long journey; had taken two trunks. No, he should not see madame; he would frighten her to death. Madame knew little of what had happened; she was well; more dull and stupid than usual. Antoinette was to take her to Montmorency at once.

All these brief answers to Alleyne's hurried questions. There was nothing to be gained by waiting. He turned down the steps; Antoinette slammed the great doors vengefully behind him. Where was he to go? what course

must be adopted? He thought of Miss Devereux; Fanny seemed more intimate with her than any other female friend; she might be able to give him some information. He was so completely in the dark—the bewilderment was so excessive—that he felt stunned. He got into the cab, and gave the order to drive to Miss Devereux's. The lady was in; she would see him. In a few moments she entered the room where he was walking up and down.

"Do you know where Miss St. Simon is?" he asked at once. Of course Helen knew nothing.

"I only learned this morning what had happened," he continued; "I read it in the paper. I was ill last night. You were at the dinner; tell me every thing."

She told him all the occurrence; she told him, too, that she had been anxious to stay with Miss St. Simon, but the young lady preferred to be alone: not a word in regard to the insults she had received. She sympathized deeply with his distress and alarm when he explained that Fanny had disappeared, leaving no trace.

"She wrote me a few words last night. I was in bed with sick-headache," he said. "There was nothing in the lines to make me think any thing was amiss. Wait—here it is in my pocket."

He took out the note, and gave it to her. She drew it from the envelope; read the hasty scrawl, and turned toward him in surprise.

"This is a note from you to Miss St. Simon," she said.

He looked at her incredulously. She put the billet back in his hands. He glanced at the paper—saw his writing—recognized the excuse he had scribbled on the previous night while literally unable to raise his head from the pillow, and so racked with pain that he did not even hear the waiter's explanation that an old woman had brought the letter, and desired, if possible, to see him.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "What can it mean? Why—"

Miss Devereux's feminine quickness grasped the truth at once.

"It is very unfortunate," she said, hesitatingly. "In your hurry you must have put her own note in the envelope you meant for this."

He groaned aloud.

"She has gone—no wonder—gone, thinking me the vilest of men! Don't you see how it was? She believed I had heard—that I took this cowardly way of—of— Oh, it is horrible!"

Tears of sympathy rose in Helen's eyes; his usual stern self-control had broken down utterly, and his distress was painful to witness.

"Do not despair, Mr. Alleyne," she said. "We shall find her; I'm sure we shall."

"But where to go—which way to turn?" Then he recounted as clearly as his agitation would permit his unsatisfactory interview with

Antoinette. "I understand now why the faithful old thing was so sullen and obstinate."

"I will see her myself," Miss Devereux said. "Let me think; Roland Spencer is one of Fanny's warmest friends—go to him. Come back as soon as you can; I shall be home by the time you reach here. One or the other must have news. I will explain to Antoinette—she is devoted to her mistress; she will tell me what to do when she knows why you wish to find her."

An hour later they met again in that room, but neither brought any tidings. Each had returned hoping the other might have been successful. Spencer could not be found; Antoinette had taken her mistress to Montmorenci.

"Then I must go there," Alleyne said.

"You would not find Antoinette; the man in charge told me that she was coming back to Paris: she had matters to arrange for Miss St. Simon."

"But to sit still and wait is so frightful!"

"I know; yet there is nothing else to do. I left a note for Antoinette; I am sure she will come to me this evening."

Miss Devereux also wrote to Roland Spencer, asking to see him the moment he received her message. So there was no more, as she said, to be done at present. He must bear for this day at least that dreariest of burdens—suspense. She was very kind and sympathizing, and Alleyne had need of sympathy; the catastrophe utterly unnerved him in spite of his strength. It was horrible to think of his apparent treachery falling as an added blow upon Fanny in the agony of discovering her uncle's crime. Miss Devereux's idea was that she had hidden herself for a while to escape either friendliness or curiosity from any acquaintance.

"From what I know of Miss St. Simon," she said, "I am sure she could not bear either just now. I can quite understand the feeling."

"Poor girl—poor Fanny!" he sighed.

"It will all end well; don't despond, Mr. Alleyne. If I can not persuade Antoinette to give me her address, at least you can write to her at Montmorenci. She will probably go there in a few days; if not, she will get the letters, and then every thing will be cleared up."

He wrote his epistle seated at Miss Devereux's table, Miss Devereux sitting near him. For a time neither was calm enough to remember how strange it was that they should be thrown together at such a crisis in his life—that fate should have forced him to turn to her in this dark hour.

At last he recovered his practical good sense sufficiently to recollect that he had no right to intrude upon her. He felt no shame in having shown her his trouble—her sympathy prevented this, but he feared he had been selfish in his absorption. Several visitors called, and were denied admittance; he roused himself at her last refusal.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I must ask you to forgive my detaining you so long; your kindness made me forget how selfish it was. I thank you, Miss Devereux. I will go now."

"You need not unless you choose," she replied. "My mother and Miss Cordy are out for the day. I should not have admitted those people; I am too anxious and troubled."

He had risen, and was holding out his hand; she took it; their eyes met; they both remembered how odd it was they should be together at this time, and she trying to offer him aid and consolation. A quick flush passed over Helen Devereux's face, and was succeeded by a pallor and trouble which she saw reflected on his.

"I thank you—I do thank you," he said, as he let her hand go.

"We are very old acquaintances," she replied, steadily, and her countenance was calm now. "There is no need of thanks. I am sure if I were in any distress, you would be glad to help me."

"Yes," he said; "yes."

How the memory of the old days rushed across both their minds as they stood there!—a wonder rising, too, that they could have so utterly forgotten them even under the exigency of the circumstances which brought him to her side. Those beautiful days before pride, distrust, belief in each other's changed heart, dug the gulf between them across which they looked at each other now.

Alleyne broke the silence.

"I did not think I could ever have sufficiently forgiven you to be willing to receive a favor at your hands," he said, just uttering his thoughts aloud. They were words which he would not have spoken at a calmer moment; but he was so sick at heart, so stunned by this present great affliction, that he gladly put by the last trace of resentment—rejoiced to think at least he and this woman might be friends. He knew now that his chief feeling in this crisis was anxiety for Fanny, and dismay at finding himself placed in a dishonorable light—apparently capable of drawing back from his promised wife, and deserting her in an hour of bitterest need. These emotions were the prominent ones in his mind; not the awful heart-ache, the dull despair which had stricken him when Helen Devereux's inexplicable conduct shattered the dream of his youth.

He did feel keenly the stain which must cling to Fanny from St. Simon's crime—to him also, through his connection with her. It was horrible; struggle as he might, the blot would remain a humiliation while life endured; but this did not cause him to falter. Fanny's desolation only formed a new claim upon his regard. At any personal cost he would shelter and protect her. If possible, he would guard her more carefully, be more patient with her caprices and

varying moods, than if this misery had not overtaken her.

His softened state of mind made him long to obliterate the final tinge of bitterness which his heart had cherished toward Helen Devereux. Hereafter they would not probably meet often—their lives must lead in opposite directions. He should be glad if she might say any words which would enable them to part really friends—express at least regret for the harsh manner in which she had brought about the old rupture. So thinking these things, almost before he knew it, he had uttered that speech. At another time his admission would have roused Miss Devereux's haughty spirit to indignant anger—his insolence in presuming to accuse her; but she was too sorry for him to be offended.

"I can accept the favor now without anger or mortification; I do thank you, Miss Devereux. We part friends."

"At least there is no harshness in my feelings," she replied; "I can safely assert so much."

"I never expected in any way to revert to the past," he said.

"Nor did I ever expect you to do so," she exclaimed, lifting her head with the old impatient movement of pride he knew so well. She checked herself quickly, and added, "But since you have done so—"

"Yes; it seemed right after your great kindness of to-day. I think scarcely any woman in the world could have been so tender and gentle." He stopped for an instant, then continued, "You were very young; it was natural enough, perhaps, that you should change; it may be you might have let me know in a gentler way. Still, that is all over."

She had grown white as death, but her eyes never wavered from his face while he spoke.

"I do not know what you mean," she said.

"I never thought to live long enough to ask the justification of your conduct; but now, I repeat, I do not know what you mean."

"Miss Devereux!"

The color brightened in her cheeks again; her great eyes flashed hotly.

"You sent me back my letters without a word—"

"Except the last," he interrupted. "I kept that! I thought to look at it occasionally would make me a wiser man; I kept that letter! It told me that the world had been more potent than my love! You wanted your freedom; you asked me not to blame you. Well, at last I can promise to obey your wish."

Her face was full of unutterable amazement; there was an accent of truth in her voice which could not be doubted.

"I never wrote you such a letter," she said; "never!"

"Helen!" He did not know that he had uttered the old familiar name, but she heard it.

"I never wrote you such a letter," she repeated. "You sent my letters back without word or sign. I could not ask your reason even when it mattered to me; it does not matter to either of us now."

Before he could answer, a servant entered and placed a telegram in Miss Devereux's hands. She read the message, and cried out,

"Tell Marian! How am I to tell Marian? Oh, Mr. Alleyne, read, read! Talbot—and Marian; how can I tell Marian!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THEIR JOURNEY.

ROLAND SPENCER had been a much earlier visitor than Mr. Alleyne at St. Simon's hotel that morning, though his inquiries met with as little success. But at least Antoinette was civil to him. Indeed, under the potency of his persuasions—especially certain golden ones—she might have given him some clue to Fanny's whereabouts, only she had none to offer. Fanny knew that when it came to a struggle between the old woman's reticence and stupidity the latter would undoubtedly conquer, so she kept her own counsel. She had presaged this visit from Spencer. There was no one else who would take the trouble to ask what had become of her; but he would not only do his best to find out, he would follow if he could discover her route.

There was one person who might have told him—a mild, deprecating-looking little man who haunted the darkened rooms. Talbot Castlemaine had not forgotten on the previous night to make arrangements so that Fanny should suffer no annoyance in leaving the house. He had held an interview with the little man, whose every look seemed an humble apology for being alive. This mock individual was a very important personage among the higher rank of Parisian detectives. He had no objection to Miss St. Simon's going down to Fontainebleau to escape curious acquaintances; no objection to her going on to Marseilles if she chose. There would be some one to overlook her every proceeding unnoticed, though the little man scarcely hoped any good would come of it. The police had reason to suppose that the fugitive they wanted was hidden in Paris itself.

Roland wasted valuable time trying to do a bit out of a modern novel; that is, he hunted up hack-drivers, he talked to the policemen; he gained just no information whatever. There was no miracle of ugliness and acuteness in the shape of a *gamin* to beckon him with dirty finger into a corner, and give the clue he desired in a wheezy whisper, with much eye-rolling and many remarkable specimens of *argot*. There ought to have been such a boy—attached to Spencer by kind-

ness shown him—a boy fiendish where other human beings were concerned; a very lamb of the millennium to his benefactor—but there was none.

There was neither a crowd nor confusion about the house. As the morning went on there were trades-people enough to present themselves with bills, clamorous for payment; but the money which Fanny had given old Antoinette enabled her to settle these. The proprietor of the hotel did not reside in Paris, and had not yet heard of the explosion; Fanny knew what was due to him, and had arranged with Antoinette in regard to this matter also.

The second visit Roland made (he had been half over Paris in the mean time, trying every possible and impossible means to gain any information which might guide him, and returning as ignorant as ever), the Tortoise, seated in one of the *rez-de-chaussée* rooms, arrayed for her journey, heard his voice, and told Antoinette that she wished to see him.

She looked more dazed than usual, but not frightened. She indulged in many pinches of snuff, and was rather less coherent than ordinary in her talk. She understood very little of what had happened. Fanny had come to her early in the morning, assured her there was no trouble, but that St. Simon had been obliged to leave home on important business. She was to keep calm and passive, and go with Antoinette to Montmorency; not to ask any questions or be alarmed. When the Tortoise found that she was to lose no portion of her wardrobe or jewels, she was comfortable enough, and Fanny easily invented a story which accounted for her own departure.

"How do you do?" said the Tortoise, as Roland entered. "I suppose Fanny told you; I don't much want to go to Montmorency, but she says I must. Are you going too? There isn't any thing the matter, is there?"

"Oh no, of course not," he answered, cheerfully, for Antoinette had warned him to say nothing that would terrify her. "You will find Montmorency very pleasant these bright autumn days."

"I was so comfortable here," droned the Tortoise; "and the dinners were so good. I'm sure there's a secret, but she wouldn't tell me, and Antoinette won't either. I shouldn't wonder"—here the Tortoise looked very wise—"if there was to be no wedding; Fanny's so queer! I asked her if Mr. Alleyne was going, and she said no; she knew nothing about him, and didn't want to."

"She will probably join you in a few days," Roland said, speaking in accordance with Antoinette's advice.

The Tortoise found she had left her handkerchief in her chamber, and was so very miserable that Roland departed in search of it. He went upstairs, through the *salons*, which looked deso-

late indeed in their present confusion, and passed on to the Tortoise's dressing-room. As he came back into the boudoir where he had last seen Fanny, he stopped and gazed mournfully about. He remembered more distinctly than ever how strangely she had looked and talked, and his fears rose to a more agonizing height than ever.

There was the chair where she sat; there he stood when pleading with her at least to trust and confide in him. He saw a flower lying on the carpet; it was one which had fallen from her hair. He stooped to pick up the withered, discolored thing; she had worn it; he could not bear to leave it to be trampled and swept carelessly out. As he bent to take it he saw a letter envelope lying near. He seized the paper; it had the address of an hotel written on it.

He knew the hotel and the street; they were in Fontainebleau; he had found the clue he wanted. But there was no joy in his face; he turned very pale, and fairly groaned aloud. He recognized the writing; if he had not, the crest and monogram would have told him every thing. The fears which he tried during the sleepless night to thrust aside as an insult to Fanny returned with added force. She had gone to Fontainebleau; that was not all; she had gone to meet Talbot Castlemaine there.

He put the paper in his pocket and hurried down-stairs, bade the Tortoise farewell, and drove rapidly away to the *gare de Lyon*. He was in time for a noon train; a slow train, that would consume two hours in reaching Fontainebleau. How long the journey seemed! how the train crept and halted, and the engine moaned and panted, as if conscious of the maddening haste which beset him, and enjoying a fiendish pleasure in his torture at the delay. What a journey! If Roland Spencer lives to be an old man he will never forget those two horrible hours. He might not find her; she might be already gone. No; the address meant that she was to stop there. Oh, perhaps it was only that Castlemaine knew St. Simon's hiding-place, and had helped Fanny to go to him! Useless to fix on that thought; he recalled the past weeks; he knew this man loved her; that he was utterly reckless; would stop at nothing. And Fanny; no, no—it could not be! He would not admit the idea that she could, even in her present desperation. Oh, he must think of something else! He did; of an excursion he had made a short time before to Fontainebleau; of a day spent in the forest with pleasant companions. The recollection only rendered his present suspense and feverish sensation of hurry more unendurable. All the while that black fear smote his soul and half-maddened him.

It was not love or jealousy he felt; his heart was full of tenderness and pity. He would save her; in spite of herself he would save her! But

it could not be; he belied her in his thoughts; it was base and mean; it could not be.

Fontainebleau! At last! He was out of the station; driving through the quaint, ill-paved streets; he was at the Lion D'Or. He had no need to ask a question; the sole name this morning written in the visitor's book was in Fanny's hand; not her name, though.

Roland asked if the lady was in the house. No, she had gone out; gone toward the forest. There was a smile on the face of the bland clerk which inspired Roland with a longing to knock him down. The bland functionary was accustomed to see ladies come from Paris alone, and be followed by handsome young men. But it was not the bland man's business; only Roland hurried off without a word about breakfast, and the bland man did not like that; he thought it would be very contemptible if they went to a restaurant.

It was two o'clock when Roland entered the great gates, and saw the gray front of the old palace rising in the distance. It was not a day on which strangers were admitted to the interior of the château, so there were no waifs from the troops of English and American tourists to render identification of Fanny out of the question. The lodge-keeper had seen a lady; she had gone straight along the avenue; she was going up the hill called the hill of Henri Quatre. The lodge-keeper had often seen her. Once she had spent a whole summer at Fontainebleau—a very gracious lady! She had stopped this morning and asked after the children. She used to give the children many presents: they were at the *école* now, but madame had not forgotten to leave a remembrance for them. All this the woman poured out rapidly, leaving Roland still more certain that he was on the right track. Madame had dropped her handkerchief; if monsieur was going to join her, perhaps he would take it. At this season of the year a handkerchief was a good friend; one was always *un peu enlarmé*; and the fat, jolly woman laughed at her own wit. There was F. St. S. on the filmy web, and the delicate violet odor Roland knew so well.

When Fanny St. Simon passed the park gates and stopped to speak pleasantly with the woman, there was scarcely more confusion or grave thought in her mind than if she had come, as she had been in the habit of doing the summer she and the Tortoise spent at Fontainebleau, to while away an afternoon in the forest. She drank some milk in the lodge, ate a bit of black bread and a bunch of grapes, and went on.

She had a new novel in the little sachel on her arm: she had begun reading it in the train; she meant to finish it in a secluded nook on the hill, which was a favorite haunt of hers.

She paused near the château; fed the ancient carp in the fish-pond; walked round to the ter-

race at the right, and finally set off to climb the hill. She reached the spot she was searching, among the trees, where a rustic bench offered a convenient resting-place. She might have been leagues away from the town, so still was it. She could see from her eminence the palace towers rising among the green foliage; could look far through stately avenues and leafy glades. The sunlight played about her, and turned the leaves to gold. The low breeze sighed musically past. The birds congregated in flocks among the branches of the oaks, and discussed their southward flight with as much difference of opinion as a human family could have shown in a proposed journey. The rabbits stared at her with their bright eyes, or scuttled off in sudden terror when she threw them some crumbs left from the provision she had brought for the carp.

A glorious autumn day: Fanny enjoyed the rest and quiet—read her novel—enjoyed that too. She had been determined to keep serious thoughts aloof, and she succeeded. She did not even think much about Talbot—nothing of the awful crisis which had shattered her life, and the first step she had taken along the precipice which must fling her forever out of the pale of honor and right.

The bell of the château tolled the hour; she had been a long while in the wood. Castle-maine might come soon now; he had promised to start as early as possible. They would wait together for the night express, which reached Fontainebleau at nine o'clock. Then—always together—they would hurry on; away from every association with the past; away toward the sea, where the white-sailed yacht was in readiness to bear them off to Grecian skies and Eastern climes.

Together! As she repeated this word, that expressed all the bliss she was to purchase at the cost of every thing which human or divine creeds teach us to prize, while her heart throbbed in a quick tumult of joy, a great black cloud seemed to settle between Fanny St. Simon and the sudden vision of beauty and delight which had risen before her.

Try to fix her mind as she would upon that vision, there showed between her and it, painted on this black cloud, the first real perception of what she was in truth going forth to meet. A brief season of mad delight—misery and retribution beyond! She did not shrink; at least she should have her happiness. But it would not come—not even a brief space. From the instant they met—that his eyes sought hers—that he held her in his arms—the punishment would begin. Degraded in his sight—fondly as he might love her—faithful as he might prove—degraded! She cared nothing for the world—little for what was essentially right or wrong; but to live degraded in his eyes!

Why had she not thought of this before?

Why did the idea haunt her now? It was too late; she had taken the irrevocable step—she could not go back. He loved her; only a miserable phantom of duty had kept them apart. They were brave enough to claim their happiness; what were men's cruel laws to them? She went over all the old sophistries; she called up the might of her love; she fought against the new light in which the future presented itself, but in vain.

She was a coward—a fool! She would not think! Oh, if he were only come! She did not want time; she wanted to be hurried away beyond redemption, beyond fears or remorse. If a spirit from heaven had told her that once so far decided in any purpose she could hesitate, she would not have believed it—but now! The glow of romance—the poetry—the false heroism—the rebellion against human dogmas—all which hid the loathsomeness of the sin disappeared, and she had to stare at the naked truth in its coarse details. Sophistical arguments were useless, fine names availed nothing; the bald, bare, disgusting fact confronted her. Say that men's laws had no right to break two hearts—what then? The horror and the loathsomeness remained. Say that love in its strength purified all things and actions? Still she saw the horrid reality under the pretty phrases and the bright hues. Lost—lost! Not others' good opinions—those were gone already; not heaven—there could be no heaven for her if she gave up Talbot; but the last gleam of purity, the one thing which rendered her desirable in his eyes gone forever—lost, lost!

She was out of her seat; she was rushing up and down, fighting against the angel sent to warn her as fiercely as ever saint of old fought against the devils striving to allure him.

Her love—her love—she would not give it up! That full period of promised bliss should be hers, let what might come after. But as she uttered, half aloud, the fierce resolve, the answer came as audibly as if some tangible shape had spoken it. She would find no such bliss—not the briefest! If she would save even the ghost of her murdered love, she must fly now. If she tarried, if Talbot found her, it would be no more herself; the woman she was would have perished; the lost creature striving to forget her agony on his breast and drown memory in his kisses would not be she, but another.

Of what was she thinking? Did she mean to go away now—now, with bliss ineffable in her reach? She could not mean it—she did not! Like Talbot, she had said that for one brief stay in Paradise she could accept hell through all eternity without a murmur; and she would, she would! Why, who was she to hesitate? She was not a good woman—she was a liar; she had unscrupulously done wrong to her neighbors; had deliberately wrecked two lives—what had she to

do with scruples? Could she be worse than at present? In the world's sight only one sin that a woman might commit was counted as irredeemable. Women might deceive—torture hearts; these were venial faults: in God's eyes she knew they might show worse than the sin which men did not pardon; and all these lay at her door.

She would not give up; she would have her love, her elysian dream! She did not want to be saved; she refused redemption, if that was what these torturing spirits offered at such a price. Yet saying this she fell on her knees—she who had scarcely prayed since childhood—she who had recognized God only as some grand principle, some far-off abstraction. She was on her knees, and prayers broke from her lips, try as she might to choke them back. She beat her own face—she tugged at her hair—she would have uttered curses if she could, and yet she prayed—prayed to be taken away—to be helped out of the possibility of her sin. She did not mean the words—she tried to say this; still she had to pray. Struggle as she might, the resolution to flee became each instant stronger.

She was weak and torn; she had striven and fought until she could only lie upon the ground and moan—moan for her happiness, her love! The fulfillment of both within her grasp, yet turned to such horrible shapes of shame and misery that she could not bring herself to snatch them.

Suddenly she heard her name called. She forced herself up to a sitting posture, and stared blankly at Roland Spencer. He started back as she raised her voice; she looked like the ghost of the woman he had known.

"So you have come, too," she moaned, sitting on the ground and frowning at him, while she clenched her hands among the fallen leaves, and felt a fierce hatred for him rise in her soul, because he had been sent to aid in the battle against herself. He had been sent—she recognized this—by that occult power which had beaten down her mad resolve; sent to finish the work; and she hated him, therefore. "You have come, too! What do you want?"

"In God's name, what is the matter?" he cried. "Fanny—Fanny!"

"Hush!" she said, in a softer tone: "I think Fanny is dead. Roland Spencer, you came to take me away, I know. I don't want to go—I don't want to go!"

Her voice rose now to a smothered shriek; she wrung her hands in an impotent wrath and anguish, which so shook his very soul that he could not find a word. Still she had to speak; she could not keep her confession back.

"I must go!" she groaned; "I must—it is stronger than I! Oh, my love—oh, my one hope—to leave it—oh, fool, fool!"

"Fanny!" he cried again.

"Don't speak—don't look at me!" she exclaimed, fiercely. "Help me away!—get a carriage—take me on to Melun; I can't wait here—I can't! I hate you; I shall hate you forever for doing it; but I must go—I must! Take me away, Roland—take me away!"

He lifted her from the ground in silence; he half carried her down the hill and out toward the gates; a wild thanksgiving in his heart. Whatever mad project had been in her mind, she had renounced it—not at his instance; her better self had conquered, unassisted by human strength.

He found an open carriage near the lodge; Fanny drew her veil over her face, and sunk suddenly into the seat.

They reached the inn. While Spencer was watching the trunks fastened upon the vehicle, the clerk came out with a telegram, which he put in Fanny's hands. She opened the envelope—read the brief message. Castle-maine had telegraphed the hour at which he would arrive: almost time to expect him—almost time.

She attempted to rise—to cry out that she would remain; to order Roland to leave her; it was beyond her power. Her love, her prize, her one heaven, had turned into something so loathsome and black that she could not stay to face it.

Spencer approached; she thrust the paper into her bosom.

"If you speak to me, I'll throw myself out head foremost on the stones," she said, in an awful whisper. "Get up by the man; I don't want to see your face."

He obeyed in silence, and off they dashed. On through the ill-paved streets they sped; out into the shadow of the great forest again—past a tiny hamlet nestled among the giant oaks. Then came the broad white road, bordered by poplar-trees; here and there a peasant's cot close to the highway—happy children shouting at their sports; beyond, wide stretches of woodland; towers and roofs of ancient châteaux in the distance, green fields about, the late birds singing, the blue sky overhead, the gorgeous afternoon sunshine brightening the whole; every sight and sound beautiful and full of peace.

Occasionally Spencer glanced at the figure lying huddled on the back seat. She never stirred, never looked up. A great joy and thankfulness filled Roland's soul. She was saved—from what, he refused to think. She was saved; and, sweetest thought of all, saved by her own innate purity and nobleness—saved!

On down the straight white road, up the steep hill upon whose summit stood busy Melun. Then Roland heard Fanny's voice; he looked back—she was waving her hands: he understood that the inarticulate murmur had been an order to go on. He whispered to the coachman: there was plenty of time; on to Cesson; the movement might be a sort of relief to her.

So on they went—on, on; each instant tak-

ing her farther from danger, Roland remembered with a mental thanksgiving. On—on; past the brook, the sudden curve, the long sweep of sunny highway—up another hill; on into the little wretched village, with its narrow streets, its gloomy houses, its discomfort and filth, while the bell in the old gray church tower rang out five sharp strokes through the still air.

The carriage stopped at the railway station. Spencer sprung from his seat, and motioned Fanny to descend. She did not move. He leaned forward, and laid his hand on her arm. She started up then, and flung back her veil: he saw her face again set in the rigidity of awful despair.

"Ask when that train from Paris will pass here," was all she said, as she pushed his hand aside, and stepped out on the ground.

"We have still nearly an hour to wait," he answered, thinking he had misunderstood her words.

"I tell you I want to know about a train to Fontainebleau!" she exclaimed, in her hoarse, altered voice. Then she turned angrily from him, and addressed the station-master, who had come out of his retreat. "A train has left Paris for Fontainebleau; is it telegraphed yet?"

"Yes, madame."

"How long before it will pass here?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes, madame."

"Oh, my God!" Spencer heard her mutter.

"I might have been with him so soon—so soon!"

She walked rapidly away. Roland remained to procure tickets and attend to the luggage. The *chef* explained to him that the train approaching toward Fontainebleau was not for passengers—a special train carrying a quantity of arms and munitions out of Paris.

As Roland left the station, a boy lounging near told him the lady had gone up the road. He followed; a sharp turn shut the village from view. The road ran beside the railway for some distance. He saw Fanny walking swiftly forward. He had no intention of intruding upon her; he only wanted to keep her in sight.

She crossed the track, mounted a steep ascent overhanging the rail, which here was carried along a high embankment. She sat down on the grass—her head bowed, her hands folded in her lap. Spencer comprehended that Talbot Castlemaine had secured a passage in this expected train; Fanny had come thither to see it pass; from her position she would look directly down upon it.

Five minutes perhaps elapsed. There came a rush, a whiz, the shriek of an engine; on rushed the train toward the curve. Roland, watching Fanny always, saw her start up as if to throw herself headlong upon the rails.

At the same instant there sounded an awful rumbling—a smashing of iron. The engine and two loaded wagons rounded the curve, a passenger carriage and two more laden trucks behind

lurched, swung to and fro; the couplings parted; then carriage and wagons rolled over and over down the hill, and lay a mass of ruins among the rocks below.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN THE DARK.

It is evening; a calm, beautiful evening, with a full moon up in the sky, where a few white fleecy clouds float slowly about, as if watching and waiting for something on the earth below. Now and then a low wind sighs past, and dies away in the distance, like the murmur of spirit-voices; as it surges up toward the zenith the clouds waver more quickly to and fro, as though believing that what they wait for has arrived; then the breeze is silent, and they seem to resume their watch.

There is an unusual stir and commotion visible in the little village of Cesson, and the one *café* it possesses has more than its ordinary complement of absinthe drinkers to-night. Not a man among the groups gathered about the tables has neglected to visit the spot where the accident occurred, and to make as close an examination of every thing as if expecting to be called on to give his opinion in a court of justice. The long bare room where they are now collected is a perfect Pandemonium, for they all talk and shout at once, and gesticulate so fiercely that a person not understanding their language might easily suppose each excited speaker was accusing his neighbor of being accessory to the dreadful mishap.

The functionary at the *gare* has related over and over every thing he knows or imagines in regard to the disaster to each set of visitors in turn. At present he is alone in his narrow den close to the railway, oppressed by a sense of injury, because he must remain there, and attend to his duties, instead of joining the rest of the male population of the place at the *café*, where by right he would become a kind of hero from having witnessed the catastrophe, and might reasonably expect to drink numerous glasses of absinthe free of expense. Then, too, though he has so often repeated the story—his personal share therein growing more important with each repetition—it has by no means lost its interest for him, and he feels an additional sense of injury because no fresh comers appear for whose benefit he could recommence his narrative.

It is not much of a story, even after all the practice he has had in elaborating its slightest detail. The engineers said the Englishman must have been a person of importance, for he had brought the *chef* at the Paris station a written command from some grand official ordering a carriage to be attached to the train for his con-

venience. As for the accident, that arose from the breaking of a wheel. Neither the *chef de gare* nor the absinthe drinkers are decided upon whose head the blame will fall; but they are agreed that somebody is certain to suffer severely, and that fact adds a deeper interest to the tragedy.

About the inn of Cesson are gathered groups of women and children. Waifs from the crowd in the *café* drift up occasionally to ask questions, but there is no loud talking here, and old Madame Moineau, the keeper of the *auberge*, is rather a dragon, in short blue petticoat and a marvelously ruffled cap, and will not allow loungers in the court-yard; so the crowd gains little information, as madame keeps a keen watch over her servants, lest they should rush out to gossip, instead of attending to their duties.

It is only known that the English gentleman is still alive. The surgeon from Fontainebleau has arrived. There is another gentleman in the house; a lady, too. Whether these latter were in the train, Cesson, in general, is not sure; but at least they are friends of the dying man, and are with him now.

Yes, a dying man! It is eight o'clock, and all Cesson knows that before morning, perhaps before another hour goes by, there will be only a dead body laid out in that upper room of the inn, whose window, from whence streams a faint light, is so eagerly watched by the groups in the street.

On a bed in that dark, cheerless chamber lies a mangled, mutilated shape. The sheet is drawn over the ghastly sight; the hands are spread above the counterpane; they are not injured. There is no cut about the face; but on the pillow, renew the napkins as often as they may, a little stream of blood oozes slowly from some wound at the back of the head—that glorious head crowned with golden hair.

How Roland Spencer has managed to do every thing needful he does not know, but has. By his orders the injured man was brought thither, and the doctor sent for. He has telegraphed to Helen Devereux, because he remembers that a summons must be instantly dispatched to Lady Castlemaine. He has forgotten nothing, but he has done the whole as one toils in a dreadful nightmare, only all the while he has felt a sense of unreality which the nightmare would not have possessed.

Utterly unreal, indeed! From the moment he reaches the bottom of the hill, joins the men, helps to open the carriage, to lift out the mangled shape, every thing up to the present moment is utterly unreal, though more painful than the most hideous dream. He can keep no count of time; what happened hours before, and what is happening now, are incidents mixed in hopeless confusion.

He sees Fanny by the bed, but at the same time he sees her as he saw her in the gathering twilight. They put the body on a board, and

gain the road. Fanny is there waiting for them. He perceives her face in the gray dusk, and does not recognize her—positively, he does not recognize her! She neither shrieks nor speaks; she pushes him away when he, realizing who it is, tries to support her. She follows the men carrying that motionless burden, over which Roland throws a blanket given him by the station-master's wife.

She follows, walking steadily enough, down the middle of the street; her veil is up; her awful face and dead eyes staring straight before her.

Just so she looks as she sits now in this chamber. She has not stirred from the moment when she sunk into a chair by the bed where they laid that wounded, senseless form.

How long Roland is alone with her and it (he calls the silent figure on the bed that from the first, shuddering as he does so) he can not tell. He remembers speaking to her on the surgeon's entrance. No answer; no movement.

How long since the doctor arrived he does not know; time seems no longer to exist. If it be only moments or centuries, it is all the same to Roland.

There has been no need to dress wounds, to examine the passive limbs; that hurt at the back of the head is enough. As soon as he has glanced at this, the surgeon draws Roland aside. It is useless to hunt for tender words, even if the young practitioner were the person to do it, which he is not.

The wounded man is dying! Nothing can be done; nothing.

Does he suffer? will he, before the last is over?

No; there is not the least probability that consciousness will return.

Hope? aid?

The surgeon smiles, and shrugs his shoulders in compassionate contempt of some wild proposition from Roland.

Every thing will be over long before any physician could arrive from Paris. There is a little breath left; nothing more. To all intents and purposes it is a dead man stretched yonder on the bed.

The moments pass. The two men standing aloof in the shadow are so still that Fanny does not know they are there. It would make no difference if she did; no difference, though the whole world were looking on.

Whenever the pallid hands move convulsively, she kisses them with her white lips. She brushes the damp, golden curls back from the forehead, which already feels like a bit of polished marble, and bends her head to catch if the quivering mouth frames intelligible words. Only to hear him utter her name! She can bear every thing, here and hereafter, if only he is permitted so much as to murmur her name.

The head moves; the misty eyes settle upon her face, but she knows they do not see her. The lips part; they struggle to form words. She stoops to catch them.

"Marian, Marian!" the slow-moving lips repeat. It is only a faint whisper, but it sounds loud and clear to Fanny's ears. "Marian, Marian!" This is to be part of her punishment; she realizes it through all her numbness and deadness; the hardest, the cruellest part—he is not to know her—he is to be Marian's at the last.

The surgeon has noticed the movement; he draws nearer the bed; he touches Roland's shoulder.

"It will not last much longer," his voice says in Roland's ear. "The stupor is lifting; it will soon be over now."

The surgeon is a heathen, so he does not share the horror of Madame Moineau and the household below stairs because the stranger is dying without priestly aid, like a dog. The surgeon considers mankind only a superior race of dogs that have learned to walk on their hind legs and train their fore-paws into hands. Death is as much annihilation to one species as the other, and the surgeon is never so proud of holding firm to his faith as when he sees a human being die.

Anyway, if Fanny and Roland could think enough to share madame's dread, there is nothing to be done. The village *curé* has gone up to Paris, and were he here at this moment he could not employ his priestly gifts to assist a heretic. Some dim thought does at last cross the heaviness of Roland's brain, and the death-bed seems more awful to him; then he remembers that even the voice of the First Apostle, could it sound through the chamber, would be of no avail; no tone of warning or promise of hope could reach those dead ears.

Fanny has never asked a question—has not uttered a sound; is unconscious who passes in or out. She is on her knees by the bed; her gaze is fastened upon that white face; her ears strained to catch some further utterance from the blue shrunken lips which at times quiver convulsively.

The eyes are wide open—those marvelous blue eyes; they are raised to the ceiling; there is a mist over them—no mind or intelligence left in their blank, unwandering gaze; but they are beautiful still. Now and again the hands move slightly above the counterpane; the fingers knot themselves together till the great veins show black and distended across their whiteness. For minutes together the breath is labored and difficult, then so faint that it seems to cease; the hands stop their restless movements; the blue lips part and are still.

Often for an instant Roland and the surgeon, watching at a distance, think that it is all over; but each time they perceive their error, for Fanny bends her head close to the pillow—listens,

then resumes her former attitude; so they know that the struggling breath has begun again. Each time the interval she keeps her head bent grows a little longer—almost imperceptibly so, except to the surgeon, who holds his watch in one hand and keeps count of the seconds; he knows what the lengthening space between each spasmodic effort means. But Roland does not understand when the surgeon points first to the minute-hand of his dainty time-piece, then, as he seats himself, makes a gesture toward the bed.

Indeed, Roland's attention is concentrated on Fanny; he can not think much even of the dying man; nor is his own suffering of any consequence; he can only remember hers, and share it as if his mute sympathy might somehow help her to endure. She has thrown off her hat and mantle; he stands so that he can see her profile; it is like a face which has frozen slowly, with an awful anguish upon it—whose impress can never wear out or change.

The moments pass.

Roland is dimly conscious of feeling sick and faint from the horrors he has gone through. Then, while still watching Fanny, for he watches her always and thinks of her always, he finds coming up through the slow pain of his thoughts a stupid, dull wonder where the departing soul is going; how much or how long the deeds done here must affect its progress in the far beyond. He recollects that Fanny's agony must be in God's sight a petition for mercy, and he tries to pray, too, for the spirit that is going forth into the mysterious unknown, and is aware that he only prays for her.

A sound interrupts his dull meditations; it is a moan, very low, but oh! a sound to haunt one for years. It comes from Fanny; it has brought even the lymphatic surgeon to his feet; it seems to Roland that its indescribable anguish fairly cleaves his own soul in twain. The surgeon starts to his feet; perhaps for a second, even through the coarse armor of his materialistic creeds, there pierces a sudden perception that he has heard the strange mystery whose existence he denies—a human soul—cry out in the purgatorial agony of its despair. But this time it is he who is checked by Roland; the two stand quite still among the shadows.

"Marian! Marian!" The white lips have uttered the name again—the misty eyes resting always on Fanny's face. "Marian!"

The two men can now catch the murmur of that hoarse whisper, though they can not distinguish the words; but Fanny does. The awful voice of the last trumpet would not ring more loudly in her ears.

Another pause, then the broken whispers are renewed.

"We will go up to Hymettus, and see the sun rise, Marian," the gasping voice murmurs, while the glazed eyes are still fixed upon Fanny.

"How cold it is—so dark! Never mind, dear; the sun will rise soon—Marian! Marian!"

She can not bear it. She is stunned, dead, she thinks; but she can not bear it. She must have one word—one conscious glance. Marian shall not separate her from him on the portals of the unseen: he is hers—hers—not Marian's.

She puts her lips close to his ear; as she does so she remembers his once telling her that if he were dead and buried he should hear her voice.

She calls,

"Talbot! Talbot!"

The knotted hands part; they stretch aimlessly out, but not toward her. The head moves; a ray of light crosses the cold mist which overshadows the eyes; but now they do not look at her. Eyes and hands are raised toward some fancied shape, regardless of her presence, though her appeal has struck through the torpor and roused his soul to listen, but not to her—not to her!

"I hear you, Marian—I hear you! I can't see. I must have lost you in the dark. Stand still, darling; the sun is going to rise. I shall find you then. It is cold—cold! Don't be frightened, Marian; the sun will be up soon—very soon—Marian!"

The last utterance of that name reaches Roland. He leaves the surgeon's side; he goes near Fanny, but stands where she can not see him. She groans once more. Marian—always Marian! She must try again: if she can only have a word—a single word!

"Talbot! Talbot!"

Oh, that whisper!—its agony might have brought a ghost back from beyond the stars. But Talbot's eyes are straining through the dark, up to the top of Mount Hymettus, to catch the first gleam of light which shall show him Marian's face, and Talbot's gasping voice is uttering tender words to soothe Marian's distress.

"Wife—little wife! How did I lose you?—where have I been? I thought I was never to have you by me any more. Close to me, are you not?—I shall see your face soon. No more trouble—no more wrong. I love you, Marian! I don't know where I have been since I lost you in the dark; but stand still till I come to you. A new life, Marian—when the sun rises—when the sun rises."

It seems to Fanny that hours pass during the slow, broken utterance of these words. Hours—nay, years—centuries. She will not speak again; she will crouch there dumb, since her voice turns to Marian's in his ears. She is conscious—if she can be said to be conscious of any thing but her despair—of a fierce, mad jealousy even at this moment. She would keep that struggling soul out of heaven if she could, if heaven must give him to Marian—to any but her.

The laboring breath grows fainter, the hands

drop, the eyes are turned upward so that the pupils are scarcely visible. Fanny's head is bent very long this time; Roland thinks it is all over. But the breath begins again; the hands stretch out anew. There is more intelligence in the eyes, more strength in the voice than there has been yet. The surgeon knows what it means; he moves closer to the bed.

"Marian, Marian! Is it not almost day? Where have I been? I thought I had lost you—forever, some one said—forever: who said that? and my fault. Forgive—forgive! Is the sun rising? I want to see your face. What are you saying, Marian? Pray?—I can't remember the words—I can't remember the words! Oh, if I can't say them, the sun will never rise! I shall never find you—Marian, Marian—and I can't remember."

The voice is a whisper still, but sharp and terrible. The hands writhe and twist; the head rolls about in a faint convulsion. Then a silence which seems endless; but he suffers always. Fanny knows that she must speak. Her voice must bring Marian close beside him again—her voice!

"Talbot! Talbot!"

The glazed eyes wander; the hands grope about; it is as if the dulled soul strained to listen from a great distance.

"Talbot! Talbot!"

A smile, strangely sweet, flits over the pallid lips.

"I hear, Marian; I hear! 'Our Father!'—I remember the words now. 'Our Father!'—Marian, Marian, the sun is rising—I shall see your face—the sun—"

The breath ceases; this time it does not come back any more.

When the surgeon has counted five minutes on his watch, he touches Roland Spencer's arm, and makes a gesture toward the woman kneeling by the bed. Roland motions him not to disturb her; the two men steal out of the chamber and close the door.

"Give her a quarter of an hour," Roland says.

"Did you tell me it was his wife?" the surgeon asks.

He receives for answer a look which sends him straight down-stairs. He has always believed the Anglo-Saxon race a race of madmen; he is more firm in his belief than ever.

Twenty minutes, then Roland enters the room. Fanny is yet kneeling by the bed. He bends over her, and passes his arm about her waist.

"You must come away now for a while," he says, softly. "I will bring you back again."

She does not speak—does not offer any opposition. She rises, stands motionless for a little, and looks with a strange longing at the still face: she may not even kiss it; he belonged to Marian when he died.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALL ALONE.

"He may still be alive; I must be able to tell Marian that I was there!" Miss Devereux exclaimed, as soon as she could sufficiently collect her senses after the first horror and confusion caused by Spencer's telegram to think or speak. "I must start at once."

"You will let me go with you?" returned Alleyne, almost as pale and shaken as she was herself.

"Thanks," she said, hurriedly; "you are very good. I shall be ready in a moment, if you will please ring for a carriage."

She hastened away to her dressing-room. Her mother and Miss Cordy had come home; but of course nothing could be urged against her journey. Indeed, the old maid insisted upon accompanying Helen, and Mrs. Devereux was easy in her mind since Alleyne was to go also.

The three drove to the station. It was so short a time before the evening express would leave that Alleyne could not procure a special train; they must wait for the night mail.

Then a delay which, brief as it was, seemed endless. But they were off at last. What an hour's journey they had! Alleyne had secured a compartment, so they were not annoyed by the presence of strangers. For a time Miss Cordy shivered and shook, and murmured at intervals,

"So awful! so awful!"

"Please don't," Miss Devereux at length said, almost peevishly, so fretted by the little mean that she could bear it no longer.

Then even the old maid was silent, leaning back in her seat, and weeping noiselessly behind her hideous blue veil; trying to pray, too, for the peace of the departing soul, but troubled by the thought that it might have already gone forth on its mysterious pilgrimage, and afraid that in such case she should be committing some Ritualistic or Papistical sin, yet conscious, in the midst of her distress, of wishing that she could share the faith which enables men to follow their dear ones in prayer beyond the confines of this mortal sphere.

Alleyne was thinking of many things—perhaps not so much of the dismal errand upon which they were bent, as of matters connected with himself and persons mixed up with his life. He was shocked and horror-stricken; but he and Castlemaine had never been on other terms than those of the most distant and ceremonious acquaintanceship, so naturally his mind seized and clung to some possibility of hope, as it could not have done had the sufferer been a friend.

He was thinking of Fanny St. Simon's disappearance; of Miss Devereux's denial in regard to the writing of that heartless letter which had desolated the later years of his youth. Probably in this world the mystery would never be cleared

up; even were such an event to happen, the discovery could avail nothing now. He had chosen, he had arranged his destiny. A plain duty lay before him—to find Fanny, and make her his wife without delay, and so shield her from the consequences of St. Simon's crime.

He could see Helen Devereux's pale face in the lamp-light. How he wondered if she were remembering it was strange they two should thus be journeying together; if she recollected, as he did, a pleasure jaunt they had once taken in America with a party of friends; if—

But he must not meditate about her in any way except to rejoice that she had been proved innocent; for her assertion was proof to him, though formerly he would not have believed that he could so consider it. She was neither vain, frivolous, nor false. He had a right to rejoice at this, and to repent his former harsh judgment, before they separated forever—for they must so separate—in this world; he could never run the risk of meeting her again. His duty was plain, and with Heaven's help he would fulfill it.

Then he heard Helen Devereux say aloud,

"For Marian's sake! for Marian's sake!"

He knew that she was praying for the dying man's soul, and involuntarily uttered the petition aloud. Straightway there sounded across the slow pain of his thoughts those mysterious words of Holy Writ, "*After death the judgment*;" and found himself repeating them over and over, till they hurt him, as if they had been the utterance of some unseen speaker passing sentence on that spirit, and tried to remember every kind or good thing he had ever heard of the sufferer, and to recollect that God's judgment was not like man's.

Then the engine-whistle shrieked; the train halted at last; the guard shouted "*Cosson!*" with all the might of his brazen lungs. As a rule, the express made no pause until it reached Fontainebleau; but Alleyne had found means to render the officials amenable on this occasion. They got out of the compartment—it seemed so long to all of them since they had taken their seats therein—and hurried through the station in search of a carriage.

"Ask him; he is sure to know," Miss Devereux whispered, pointing to the coachman of the one vehicle in waiting.

Alleyne understood her meaning, and asked the question her lips refused to frame. The son of Jehu, like any Gaul, could talk fast enough at most times; but he only shook his head now. He could not have answered more plainly. They entered the carriage, and were driven rapidly away.

Fanny St. Simon was still kneeling in the room where the dead man lay clad and straightened for his last sleep. Roland had kept his word; he brought her back as soon as the necessary offices were performed, let her go in alone, and closed the door behind her.

Spencer was walking up and down the long stone corridor: his tread echoed from the farther end, growing louder as he approached the centre, till the sound was like that of ghostly footsteps coming to meet him. As he moved on, they seemed to pass him and come from the direction he had left—slow, measured, solemn—till he could not rid himself of a superstitious feeling that phantoms were sharing his weary march.

He was roused by the noise of a carriage driving into the court-yard. It occurred to him that Miss Devereux might have come herself; it would be like her. As he descended the stairs he heard her voice addressing Madame Moineau; heard another voice, whose accents even at that moment woke a wild rage in his soul.

Alleyne was first to perceive him as he reached the lower step.

"Spencer!" he called, hurrying forward as he spoke.

Roland stopped short and confronted him, while a stern frown darkened the pallor of his face.

"I promised her not to quarrel with you, and I will not," he said, in a voice that rang out the more fiercely from his very efforts to render it cold and quiet. "But I did not promise to be civil, and by the Lord I won't!"

Helen Devereux was standing just behind Alleyne; both listeners knew that Roland had seen Fanny St. Simon.

"Hush!" Helen exclaimed, crossing to the young man's side, and laying her hand on his arm. "This is no time for harsh words! Roland Spencer, there was a dreadful mistake; Mr. Alleyne never meant to send back that note."

"I believe it since you tell me so," returned Spencer, sullenly.

"Do you know where Miss St. Simon is?" Alleyne asked, with an anxiety which the other could not help perceiving.

Spencer hesitated.

"If you know, tell us at once," Helen said, firmly. "Mr. Alleyne had already suffered enough for what was no fault of his; he has a right to ask the question."

There was no possibility of keeping Fanny's presence a secret; he only paused for an instant before replying, in order to search for some plausible answer to what would be the next question, but his troubled brain could invent no excuse for her presence.

"Where is Miss St. Simon?" repeated Helen.

"She is here," Roland answered.

"Thank God!" he heard Alleyne say.

"Thank God!" echoed Miss Devereux.

It did not strike either her or Alleyne as singular that Fanny should be in the house. The thought which occurred to both was that she had confided her plans to Spencer as she might have done to a brother; that he had accompanied

her so far on her journey, and by some merciful delay they had been permitted to be with Castlemaine at the last.

"I thank you," said Alleyne, holding out his hand; but Roland did not seem to notice the gesture.

Helen Devereux rapidly explained to him in a whisper how the error in regard to the letter had occurred. When she had finished, Roland took a step forward; this time it was he who offered his hand, and Alleyne understood and accepted the mute expression of amity and excuse.

"I beg you will tell Miss St. Simon I am here," he said.

"I think you had better wait till morning," the young man replied. "She is terribly shaken. I suppose you do not know—we saw the accident."

He said this, and held up his hand; they understood that he could not speak or hear a word further in reference to the awful catastrophe.

After a short silence, during which Helen Devereux was aware of thinking that the task of breaking the news to Marian must devolve upon her; thinking at the same time that the blow might in reality be a merey, though even through that under-current of thought she was recalling so much that was good and noble in Talbot, and regretting him with her whole heart, Alleyne reiterated his wish to see Fanny. The tone was so earnest that his voice rather than his words held something imperative in the pleading. But, indeed, Spencer had no further excuse to offer. The only thing he could do was himself to prepare her for the meeting, instead of allowing a servant to carry the news of the arrivals.

On entering the house Helen had confided Miss Coffy to Madame Moineau. The short-petticoated autocrat of the inn had shown the old maid to a bedroom, and was preparing to comfort her with poor tea, and a lengthy account of the accident, whose horrors they would both weep over and enjoy in a lugubrious fashion; so Miss Devereux was not obliged to occupy herself with the good little spinster at present. She followed Spencer upstairs, and Alleyne accompanied her.

They reached the gallery, and walked down the echoing floor among the shadows. The echoes sounded loud and angry now, as if a whole group of ghosts were disputing their progress. It was not only the fancy of Roland's overwrought brain; Miss Devereux and Alleyne had the same thought in their minds.

Roland opened the door of a *salon* in which Madame Moineau had ordered lights to be put.

"I wish you would stay here," he said, abruptly, standing aside for both to enter.

They obeyed in silence; he crossed the corridor, and entered the chamber where Fanny knelt by the dead man's bed. Her cheek was resting on the counterpane, and turned so that

she could gaze at the face, which had settled into an expression of peace—a face, Roland thought, that looked less like the countenance of a corpse than her own.

She did not stir on his entrance; was evidently unconscious of his presence. Roland bent over her, and whispered,

"Come away for a minute; come, Fanny."

At first she did not appear to understand, and turned impatiently from him with a gesture half of annoyance, half of pain. He moved aside without a word. Presently she glanced mechanically toward him. He had gone to the other end of the room, and was standing by the window gazing out into the peaceful night. The yellow moonbeams floated in, through the parting he had made in the sombre curtains, and traced weird characters on the polished floor, like hieroglyphics of some higher language than mortal sense could decipher. Slowly she traversed the chamber—in the same mechanical fashion—and stood beside him, staring out at the soft radiance; but he could see that the glazed eyes distinguished nothing.

He told her who had arrived; repeated the message which he had found it impossible to give at the bedside.

She looked full in his face with an awful smile.

"Both here—both!" she said, and had he heard the voice without seeing her he should not have recognized it. "Both here! Yes; I will go if they want me; I will go."

"Wait till to-morrow," he urged, partly from a desire to spare her, partly because a vague dread which he could not comprehend started up in his soul at the sight of her smile, at the tone of her voice. "Let me say you are worn out; that you will see them in the morning—"

"Come with me; I want you," she interrupted, not heeding his appeal. "Come, I say!"

She moved past Roland, opened the door, traversed the gallery, and entered the opposite chamber; he followed. She went in so noiselessly that she was close beside Miss Devereux and Alleyne before either perceived her. For an instant they could not have been much more startled had the dead man appeared in his winding-sheet than they were at the sight of that rigid, ashen face, the glare of those wide-open eyes which had no life left in them, that form swaying uncertainly to and fro like a person walking in deep sleep. She spoke before either could move or utter a word, and her voice sounded as dead as her eyes looked.

"What do you want, Gregory Alleyne?" she asked. "You have nothing to do with me! What brought you here?"

Helen Devereux hurried forward; Fanny cast one glance at her which riveted her where she stood—a glance so terrible that it held Roland, who caught it, motionless too.

"Fanny," Alleyne said, as soon as he could find words, too much agitated to notice the look which had appalled the others; "Fanny, listen a moment."

"Do you listen," returned she in the same hard, pitiless tone, like the voice of a ghost that was past sympathy for him or herself.

"Yes, but let me tell you," he pleaded.

"This is no time for explanations."

"It is a good time," she interrupted; then paused, gazing about as if trying to remember something she wished to add.

He went on.

"I sent back your note by mistake—Miss Devereux and Spencer know. I was very ill. I did not know what had happened."

He stopped abruptly; he was looking at her now; her face fairly froze any further power of speech.

"Yes, he is dead," she answered.

As she spoke she looked away from him—looked at Helen Devereux. Once beyond the spell of those terrible eyes, he found voice again.

"Not that—oh, so dreadful!—but I did not mean that," he said. "I meant about your uncle."

"I had forgotten," she muttered: now her gaze wandered from Helen; she stood staring straight before her.

"I have been searching for you all day; Miss Devereux will tell you," he continued. "Nothing is changed between us; remember that—nothing."

She seemed to listen now. If they had thought her face awful before, they forgot their dread in the new horror which rose in their minds as they watched her. But Alleyne said,

"I can not wait; I can not have you think me base and mean, though it is a sad moment to speak of such things, with our poor friend lying yonder—"

"Your friend!" she gasped. "Why, he hated you! oh, how he hated you!"

Roland moved toward her; he knew now what she meant to tell. Even at this time he could not bear that she should humiliate herself before Gregory Alleyne.

"There can be no more talk to-night," he said, hurriedly. "Miss St. Simon must go to bed at once."

"At once!" repeated Helen Devereux, in a frightened tone, for though she could not have told how, she comprehended what the woman's revelation was to be.

The sound of her voice roused Fanny into more signs of vitality than she had yet shown. She shivered, and turned her back on the speaker.

"Come, Fanny!" urged Spencer.

Fanny looked at him; her features relaxed—worked slightly.

"My good Roland!" she said, in a hoarse whisper.

He hastened to place her in a chair, for her whole frame had begun to totter like a statue smitten at its base, and just ready to fall.

"Go with me; let me take you away," he pleaded.

She waved him off; sat for an instant glancing from him to Alleyne and back again; then slowly, reluctantly, as if obeying some power which her will was unable to combat, her dead eyes settled on Helen Devereux's face, and remained there.

"You are all three here," she said, in that slow, difficult voice, scarcely louder than a whisper, yet more distinct and fuller of agony than a shriek could have been; "all three here, and he lies yonder. Yes; I must tell—I must!"

"Nothing to-night. Come away, Fanny!" cried Spencer.

She did not hear. Her eyes were fastened on Helen Devereux's face, and never left it, though she addressed only her betrothed husband.

"Gregory Alleyne," she said, "did you not tell me you had come here to say that nothing was changed?"

"Nothing, Fanny," he answered; "nothing. See, this is the note I wrote; I put your own in the envelope by mistake."

She took the paper which he held out, and glanced over it. For an instant some strange struggle was apparent in her countenance, then she let the letter drop on the floor, and cried,

"I don't want to tell the truth, but I must! This is the second time to-day that I have been beaten."

"Fanny!" Roland called again; but she was deaf to his appeal.

"I wish I could marry you," she continued; "I'd like to keep you away from her yet; but I can not."

Now even Roland thought her senses wandering. The three gathered about her, each uttering incoherent words. She put out her hands toward Helen with a gesture of repulsion; once more enough of life flamed into her face to express loathing and hatred. She spoke again, and again her voice silenced them. Still she addressed Alleyne; still with her eyes fixed on Miss Devereux. Roland wanted yet to stop her confession; he could no more speak than if he had been stricken dumb by the cold frenzy of her eyes.

"I've not much time," she said; "I want to get back to him—to my dead! oh, my God, not mine—Marian's! He did not know me—he did not know me!"

The words died in a groan; she swayed to and fro in mortal agony. Pain kept Helen Devereux and Spencer silent; a vague, unutterable dread seared Alleyne's lips. The spasm passed; she was speaking again.

"I was to have gone with him—my love, my love! I was at Fontainebleau; he was to meet

me there. I wanted to wait; I could not! I had to hurry away—oh, the cowardliness of me! oh, my love, my love! Roland brought me; I don't remember if he knew."

She stopped for a second, as if trying to collect her thoughts, then cried, angrily,

"What do you all look at me so for? I am not ashamed! Oh, if I had not turned back, may be the rest would not have happened; he might be with me; and he's gone—forever—forever!"

Once more she paused; her head drooped; they could hear her breathe in a labored and irregular way; neither had any strength to address her. Again she went on. Still she addressed Alleyne, still she looked at Helen Devereux.

"Gregory Alleyne," she said, "let her tell Marian he was all hers at the last—Marian, always Marian!" (There came a wild impatience into her voice now. "She kept between us; he never knew me—he never knew me! Let her tell Marian that—Marian's at the last. It is no good to claim what was not mine. I have nothing left—nothing!")

Gregory flung himself into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Miss Devereux sobbed like a child, though unconscious that she was weeping.

"What is that Helen Devereux crying for?" asked Fanny, in the same tone of impatient complaint. "She was always a faint-hearted thing, in spite of her pride. Where's Roland?"

Spencer came forward, dropped on his knees by her, and put both arms about her. Through all his pain and suffering on her account he had endured nothing like this: to see her humiliated in the eyes of that man whom he could not pity yet, well as he knew the wrong was on Fanny's side.

"Here I am," he said, "close by you; you have me always—remember that."

Then his voice choked, and he was obliged to pause. Fanny looked at him with a sort of dull wonder in her eyes, but did not attempt to free herself from his embrace.

"Oh yes," she said; "here—I might be sure he would keep by me; my good Roland. I don't care what you and she think, Gregory Alleyne; it makes no difference; but it's hard to tell before my Roland, for there's more—but he ought to hear."

"Not to-night, Fanny," groaned Spencer; "not to-night!"

"Let me alone!" she cried, with the same piteous fretfulness in her voice. "I want to go back to him; I haven't kissed him even—I did not dare. Oh, my love, my love!"

"Come away, Fanny; come!" urged Spencer.

"Be still, Roland!" she answered. "If I did not tell, the very dead would rise to do it! What was it more? I forget—I'm stupid. You think I am mad, Gregory Alleyne; but I am not! Is

she daring to pity me? Oh, I'll not bear that; I'll not bear that!"

Still she looked at Helen, but never once addressed her.

"I don't want to tell, Gregory Alleyne! I'm not repenting—you need not think it; don't even dare to! If it were all to do over, I'd do it—I would! I'm glad; I'm glad! She loved you—that Helen Devereux loved you; ask her, if you don't believe me; look at her—she can't deny it!"

Her voice came in broken gasps, sharp and discordant; one instant her eyes blazed, then looked dead again. She supported herself by grasping Roland's shoulder with her right hand, and clutching the arm of her chair in the other. Once more Roland called her name in an agony of supplication, but she went on, unheeding.

"If it had not been for her money, I might have had my dream longer! She lost me Talbot—it was her doing. She would not take him, after all; she gave him away to that doll. I never hated Marian; I could be sorry for her this minute if I could feel any thing; but oh, that Helen Devereux!"

Even Roland for a moment turned his eyes away from the madness of her face; even his courage faltered. A pause which neither of her listeners could break, then her awful voice again.

"So I kept your letter back, Gregory Alleyne; that was long before I knew you, I think; but no matter, I did it. I wrote the letter you got from that Helen—I did it. I never was sorry—I am not now; I didn't hurt her half enough—not half; she stole Talbot, and then wouldn't have him. I'm sorry for Roland, but for nobody else. I wanted his esteem—I'm very fond of Roland, but I've lost even that now."

"Fanny!" moaned Spencer; "Fanny!"

She did not hear; her tones rose gradually to a dismal wail.

"Well, well, it does not matter; nothing matters any more; Talbot is dead! He died with Marian's voice in his ears—always Marian's! He prayed, so she will have him in the next world, for I can't pray; I shall be alone there too—all alone."

"Nobody is angry—nobody!" cried Miss Devereux, through her sobs. "See—look at us—try to understand."

"Oh, that Helen Devereux!" she shivered. "I never would have forgiveness—I will not now! Do you hear me, Gregory Alleyne—do you hear?" she added, angrily. "Tell her so—tell her so!"

She put her hands to her head, as if conscious that her mind was wandering, and trying to steady her thoughts. Roland rose, holding her closer in his arms, again praying her to come away.

"I know what it was," she said, pushing him off. "About St. Simon. It was nearly all my

scheme; he was not half so shrewd as I. A good scheme; it looks clumsy because it failed, but it was a good one. And now he has that old power of attorney from Helen Devereux. I kept it—I gave it to him. He will sell her lands and her stocks, so you must stop that; I wish I need not tell! Only promise to let him go; I'll believe you if you promise, Gregory Alleyne."

"He does; I promise for him," exclaimed Helen.

Fanny moved her head wearily to and fro, put up her hands again, as if the sound of the other's voice hurt her brain through all its numbness.

"Oh, that Helen Devereux!" she sighed anew.

"Every thing shall be arranged as you could wish," Alleyne said, speaking for the first time: "you may trust me."

"Yes, I know; you're a good man enough," she muttered. "Roland, you will go after St. Simon. I have the address; you can find him."

"I'll go, Fanny; I'll go."

She looked slowly about, apparently trying to recollect if there was any thing more to tell. Her features changed and worked till they feared that some burst of utter insanity would follow, but gradually the frenzy died out of her eyes, and something like a smile softened the drawn mouth.

"I think that is all," she said. "I'm very tired. I want to go back to Talbot; he might miss me, though he is dead. Let me go back."

She moved toward the door; even Roland did not follow; he felt that the sole hope of preserving her troubled reason was to leave her to herself. She passed out of the room. They heard her enter the chamber where the dead man lay; no one intruded on her any more. And as she went, Helen Devereux and Alleyne knew that they had seen her face for the last time in this world.

CHAPTER XL.

AFTER TWO YEARS.

MORE than two years had elapsed since the events recorded in the preceding chapter.

It is late in the autumn again. Gregory Alleyne and his wife have come over from America, and are visiting Lady Castlemaine. Marian lives in the picturesque old cottage where so much of her peaceful girlhood was spent. Mrs. Payne is still with her, and the two lead a quiet existence, whose monotony is as welcome and soothing to Marian as if she had attained the years of her relative, still in the bloom of youth though she is.

Lady Castlemaine's jointure is a very comfortable one; to her modest tastes it seems great wealth. The baronetcy had passed into the keeping of another branch of the family; the claimant

is only a mere child. Let us hope that wise guardians may be able to train the developing mind into a career far different from that of poor Talbot.

It was Helen Devereux herself who carried to Marian the news of her husband's death. The tender soul was borne down for a time by the shock; yet even at first it was evident to her friend that Marian was prepared for some still more terrible blow. At least Miss Devereux could tell of a peaceful death-bed—of broken prayers—loving repetitions of Marian's name—a belief up to the last that Marian was beside him.

Helen Devereux and Alleyne were married the following spring. It was a very quiet wedding, and they sailed almost immediately for America. Some affairs of Alleyne have brought them again to Europe, and at the first leisure moment they invaded Marian's seclusion.

They are two very happy people. Of course, these are rather early times; but I think the sunshine which gladdens their hearts will be lasting. Each has learned patience and faith by a discipline too hard to be forgotten.

The soft November days pass pleasantly enough to them all. Marian is happy in the sight of her friend's happiness—cheerful and hopeful always. She is more lovely than ever; the bloom and radiance of girlhood are gone, but she has gained a higher beauty which often makes Helen marvel; there is so little trace of earthliness in it that she feels almost as if standing face to face with the unveiled soul.

Alleyne and his wife are sitting on the veranda at the close of a beautiful day. As they look across the shrubberies they can see Marian and Roland Spencer walking about the garden, where the flowers still linger under the soft Devonshire skies.

Roland arrived only last night. These two years have greatly changed him; there is no trace of the boy left; he looks rather old for his age; but he is the same generous, true-hearted Roland as ever, and he retains that dash of chivalrous enthusiasm which will cling to him always, and keep him different from most men in this prosaic century.

Spencer brought them news of Fanny St. Simon, whom he has lately seen. Fanny was very ill for a long time after the horrible catastrophe which overwhelmed the last of her erring youth. During many weeks, even beyond her recovery,

the past was almost a blank to her. When memory and strength did come back, it was as if she had been dead and buried, and her soul had begun a new existence in another world.

She lives in the South of France; the Tortoise and Antoinette are with her. Not long after her illness a large fortune was left Fanny by some relative in California whom she had scarcely thought of for years. The greater portion of that wealth was employed to make good the losses St. Simon's dishonesty had caused innocent people. St. Simon could return to Europe, if he chose, without fear, but he prefers to remain in Brazil.

"She is very cheerful, very well," Roland said when he had ended his narrative. "Not like the Fanny we knew; I could scarcely feel that it was the same woman; but ah, a noble creature! She showed me how gray her hair had grown. She does so much good; she is a providence to all the needy near her. But she would not let me praise her; she says it is only to make time pass; that she deserves no credit."

When Marian was out of hearing, Roland added,

"Her villa looks out over the sea; she told me that she could never visit Italy again, but she likes to look across the bright sweep of waves that roll between her and it, and think of the time when she may cross brighter waters into a more beautiful land; for the old hardness and unbelief are gone forever."

"Poor Fanny!" murmured Helen.

"Happy Fanny!" Roland answered, smiling, though his eyes were dim with tears he did not seek to hide. "The waiting and suspense will end. God's mercy is infinite; she will find her happiness beyond; she will find the love she yearned for here purified into something worthy of heaven."

And Roland rose and walked away. Fanny St. Simon's name will not be any more mentioned between them, but they will not forget her; they will be glad to think of her, patient, purified, doing faithfully whatever her hand finds to do, looking hopefully out across the radiant waters toward the unseen clime where expiation and atonement end and the golden fruition begins.

Helen and Alleyne know Roland carries a sore heart still, but they believe that he and Marian will yet find happiness and a new life together; I believe so too.

THE END.

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