

THE  
CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.

BY

MISS ELIZA A. DUPUY.

AUTHOR OF "THE DISCARDED WIFE; OR, WILL SHE SUCCEED," "THE DETHRONED HEIRESS,"  
"THE HIDDEN SIN," "THE GIPSY'S WARNING," "A NEW WAY TO WIN A FORTUNE,"  
"THE CANCELLED WILL," "WAS HE GUILTY," "THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST,"  
"ALL FOR LOVE," "WHO SHALL BE VICTOR," "MICHAEL RUDOLPH,"  
"WHY DID HE MARRY HER," "THE PLANTER'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

*"Take thus much of my counsel. Marry not  
In haste; for she that takes the best of husbands,  
Puts on a golden fetter: for husbands  
Are like to painted fruit, which promise much,  
But still deceive us, when we come to touch them."*

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## THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

A TRAVELLER on foot was passing through a wild mountain gorge in which he had ventured in search of the picturesque. He had been many weeks wandering through the grand scenery of the Blue Ridge, sketch-book in hand, and his portfolio contained many studies that would have been valuable to one who really belonged to the craft this spoiled child of fortune had chosen, for the time, to adopt as his own to give piquancy to his summer rambles.

His lithe and active figure, his debonair air, and finely cut features, might have rendered him the beau ideal of a young artist to the romantic fancy of an inexperienced girl, but to those who could read character, those smiling lips and sparkling eyes betrayed something more than the gay carelessness of youth. The dark silky moustache that curled above the former, did not conceal the sensuous fulness of the mouth, nor could the smile that lurked in the vivid black eyes veil the hard expression that at moments shone from them.

He carried his portfolio and portable stool strapped upon his back, but his step was as buoyant as if no such burden rested upon him. He sang as he went, in a deep musical voice, which was echoed back from the sides of the narrow cañon through which he was making his way. The rocky walls arose sheer and smooth above his head, with patches of parasitic plants clinging to them, and beneath his feet was the narrow rocky bed of a stream, that sometimes swelled suddenly into a torrent. Now, it was but a shallow thread of water, and it was difficult to imagine that a heavy shower would in a few moments render the desolate gorge a most dangerous trap to be caught in.

Our pedestrian was willing to risk much to obtain a striking study from nature, and he had received more than one assurance that the valley into which this rocky gorge led, was as magnificent a view, as the mountains of Virginia afforded.

Suddenly the music of his voice was drowned by a loud, sharp peal of thunder, that reverberated through the defile with almost deafening power. He paused abruptly, and muttered:

"This is bad—bad—a storm sweeping through this narrow gulch, will take me from my feet, perhaps drown me in the torrent that may pour through it before I can effect my escape," and he glanced ruefully at the limestone walls that enclosed him, and with dismay saw that the high water mark was far above his head.

Walter Thorne had been warned when he spoke of venturing through this narrow pass, that the slender stream which flowed over its rocky bed, might swell into a miniature torrent if a storm arose, but he had not heeded the words of his host of the previous night.

The gorge afforded a short cut to the point he wished to reach, and with characteristic recklessness he had chosen to risk his chances, though assured that sudden and violent storms were frequent at that sultry season of the year.

Now, it was too late to return; he knew that he was more than half way through the pass, and his only chance of safety lay in accomplishing the remainder of the distance before the storm burst over him, and the stream could rise to a height to endanger him.

He pressed forward as rapidly as the roughness of the road permitted, but very soon the rain came down so heavily as to resemble the fall of a cataract, more than a summer shower; the thunder crashed incessantly above him, and the lightning darted down the narrow defile with such vivid power as almost to blind him.

The wanderer looked around for some spot in which to shelter himself, but he could descry none, for the rocky strata in their upheaval, seemed to have been rent asunder by some mighty convulsion of nature, leaving the sides of the gorge a smooth wall of limestone, towering a hundred feet above him.

But Walter Thorne battled with the rapidly increasing dangers that surrounded him, with a tenacity and bravery which proved that he had not lost his self-command, and did not intend to lose his life if coolness, and presence of mind could save it. The water was rising above the narrow path on which he walked, each moment increasing its momentum, and he knew that in a little while he would be unable to resist its violent sweep. He had yet more than a mile to traverse before he could gain the point from which he was aware the gathering waters would fall over beetling crags into a



subterranean reservoir many feet below ; from this tarn he had been assured, nothing ever arose that was once swallowed in its remorseless depths.

His blood turned to ice as he remembered this, but hope came back as he thought that one chance of safety remained to him. He had in his portfolio, an accurate drawing of the point of debouchement, which had been given to him by one of his brother artists who had visited this wild spot the previous year. He knew that a large boulder arose at the extremity of the pass, dividing the water that rushed through it in two streams before they fell in the tarn below, and into one of these jutted a narrow tongue of land on which grew stunted hemlocks and pines. Thorne trusted to his strength and activity to grasp at these as he was whirled along, and again make good his footing on *terra firma*.

He was a strong swimmer, and as the water gained on him, increasing each moment in force, he unstrapped his burden, and with a sigh, saw the fruit of his labors swept past him, and whirled out of sight in a moment of time.

His next movement was to catch dextrously at a floating log which was dashed madly towards him, threatening to crush him against the rocky sides of his prison. In another moment he was astride of it, with a broken bough in his hands, which was also a waif from the angry waters. With this he was to battle his way to safety, and as far as possible, shield himself from the dangers that encompassed him ; for heavy drift wood came rushing down on the mad tide, which increased in depth and velocity with every moment, and it required all the dexterity and skill at his command, to save himself from a fatal collision with them.

But his self-possession and courage did not for a moment desert him ; for on these he knew the preservation of his life depended. With coolness and precision he steered the broad log on which he sat, and luckily for him a few gnarled and withered branches still jutted from its sides, affording some protection to his limbs from the drift-wood that surged upon the turbid tide.

Thorne knew that the struggle could not be long continued, for the velocity with which he was hurried onward must soon bring him to the outlet where the greatest danger must be met and baffled, or the deep waters would close over him, leaving no record behind them, and his fate remain a mystery to the end of time.

He set his teeth firmly together, fixed his eyes upon the seething flood, warding off every threatened danger, yet reserving his strength as much as possible for the crowning effort that he knew must task all the powers he possessed. In spite of the imminent danger in which he was, to this man there was a wild sense of power and enjoyment in this mad struggle for existence. He would yet baffle the might of the elements, and conquer the seething torrent that seemed to roar in his ears :

"You are mine—you cannot escape me. Down—down with the whelming tide shall you go, and be seen no more among men."

Reckless of its power, he could have shouted back defiance, had he dared to exhaust his breath in such vain mockery of nature's might. He knew that he must reserve every atom of strength for that last supreme effort to escape the doom that menaced him ; so he sternly closed his lips, raised his eyes to the widening gleam of light which assured him that the

supreme moment approached, and prepared himself for the awful crisis in his destiny.

Never once did he invoke the aid of a higher power amid the perils that surrounded him, for the name of God was unfamiliar to his lips, as were His precepts to his heart. Of "the earth, earthy," had he gone down to destruction amid that turmoil of the elements, it had been better for others, perhaps as well for himself.

As the frail support on which he sat drew near the verge of the fall, the velocity of the swelling flood increased; and, for an instant, the despairing thought came to him that his fate was beyond his own control; another moment, and he would be crushed upon the ruthless rocks and dashed, shapeless and senseless, into the abyss below.

But the very imminence of the danger restored his courage. He steadied his position upon his frail support, and made herculean efforts to guide it toward the tuft of hemlocks which grew upon the scanty soil which had collected on the rocky surface in the progress of ages.

All his efforts would have been unavailing but for a sudden curve made by the torrent in the direction he wished to take. The immense rock imbedded near the edge of the fall divided the waters and, as they struck against it, an eddy was formed which, luckily for him, dashed him within reach of the scrubby trees which were partially submerged.

With an effort of almost supernatural strength Thorne sprang toward them, grasped the branches with all his force and, in spite of the wild waves that seethed around him, succeeded in retaining his hold till

he had extricated himself from the log which, the next instant, was dashed over the brow of the precipice.

In another moment he lay panting and breathless on a small mound of earth lifted above the leaping waters with boulders of rock heaped up behind it. He grew faint and sick as he watched the log that had borne him to safety, crash through the narrow pass and disappear in the depths below; and for once he cried, "Thank God!" for the imminent danger he had escaped.

Bruised and exhausted by his late efforts Thorne had barely strength left to draw himself gradually upward and sit down upon the damp grass at the foot of the rocks. His right arm pained him severely and he felt certain that he had seriously injured it; but whither to go for assistance or what to do next he could not yet determine. He was a stranger in the country—a mere sojourner—and the thought of being ill among the rude people who, he supposed, inhabited the secluded valley he had sought, with no intention of remaining in it more than a few hours, was extremely annoying to him.

He began to shiver in his wet clothes, and a few imprecations escaped his lips against his own willfulness in venturing through this dangerous gorge in defiance of all that had been told him of the perils he might encounter.

With bitter philosophy Thorne, at length, muttered:

"What can't be cured must be endured," as my old nurse used to say to me. I am fond of adventure, but this is more than I bargained for. Wet as a drowned rat, hungry as a wolf, and—to cap the climax—with a disabled arm! Ugh, what a twinge that was! It pains confoundedly, and where or how I am to get it

attended to the d——l only knows. I wish the rain would cease and allow me, at least, a glimpse of the scenery I have risked so much to behold."

Almost as he spoke the rain began to slacken, and in a few more moments, the clouds parted, letting through a glimpse of sunlight that lit up the whole panorama with sudden glory. The thunder rolled away in the distance, the lightning flashed at longer intervals, and gradually the turmoil of the elements ceased.

The mist that shrouded the valley below him rolled away; and, suffering as he was, the young traveller acknowledged that the scene before him was almost worth what he had encountered in his pilgrimage toward it.

His vision extended over miles of broken country girdled in by mountains veiled in bluish mist, which rose above each other till they seemed almost to reach the clouds. A narrow thread of gleaming water wound its way through the deepest portion of the vale, and on its banks stood the ruins of what seemed once to have been a stately mansion which had been partially destroyed by fire.

But one wing of it still remained, and with extreme satisfaction the drenched traveller saw that smoke was issuing from one of the chimneys. Several miles away he could distinguish the buildings of a large plantation; but those were the only evidences of habitation discovered by him in the solitary glen that lay stretched out below him.

With an appreciative glance at the scene, Thorne arose and muttered:

"It is as fine as Vernon said, but it seems to me that

I shall pay too heavy a price for a sight of it. I must not stay here admiring the beauties of nature while a chill like death is penetrating to my very marrow. It's a lucky thing for me that a shelter is near. It does not look very prepossessing, but, such as it is, I must try my luck with its owners."

While speaking thus, he looked around for some means of descending into the valley, and he soon discovered a narrow pathway leading around the edge of the stone wall, which ended abruptly there. A few paces brought him to a flight of steps cut in the soft limestone, which wound gradually downward till they reached the verdant turf below.

Walter Thorne cautiously descended the rough way; for, more than once, his usually clear head became giddy from fatigue and over exertion. On reaching the earth below, he leaned for a few moments against a tree and surveyed the peaceful spot so lately the scene of the fierce turmoil of the elements, now as serene as if no storm had ever swept over it.

The clouds had swept aside, and the evening sun poured through the rifts in a flood of golden glory; a magnificent rainbow spanned the valley, its gorgeous tints harmonizing with the emerald turf which arose in great billows like natural terraces, till they met the mountains that girdled them in, bathed in the blue mist which has given its name to a range of the Alleghanies.

From the precipitous cliff above him poured the stream in which he had so nearly lost his life, leaping over a second ledge of rock and burying itself in a black sullen-looking pool at its base, the depth of which had never been sounded. Whither the water

was carried that fell into it no one knew, though it was believed that, after making its way for miles under ground, it debouched at a point below into the narrow stream that meandered through the valley which, at that point, suddenly swelled into a small river.

Walter Thorne shuddered as he gazed into the dark tarn, and thought how nearly it had proved his grave, but he aroused himself from his reverie and moved slowly forward upon a faintly defined pathway till he came to a rustic bridge formed by two large logs fastened together by withes of grape-vine, and secured by a stick driven into the ground at either end.

To this primitive structure there was no railing, and Thorne began to feel so much exhausted that he was glad to find a stick to steady his steps over it. He gained the opposite bank in safety, and with some effort ascended the rugged eminence on which stood the half-ruined building he had first noticed.

There were evident signs of habitation about the western wing, and Walter moved at once towards a gate which opened into a green yard shaded by a group of forest trees. The brick walls were covered with ivy which had encroached even upon the roof, making a nest of verdure that was most pleasing to the eye, and the pillars of the portico were draped with long wreaths of the multiflora rose mingled with honeysuckle.

"Really, these people must have some ideas of civilization," was the thought that came to the intruder's mind. "I am glad that I have not fallen among barbarians, after all."

As he drew nearer he saw that a wooden cage hung outside one of the windows, in which was a mocking-

bird; and he noticed that a bouquet of flowers rather artistically arranged, had lately been placed in a small vase within it.

"A touch of feminine taste there," he said to himself with half a smile. "I hope the owner of the bird is young and pretty. My adventure, after all, may lead to something pleasant. By Jove! there should be some compensation, for I feel as if I am half battered to pieces. Ugh! how my arm tingles with pain. No more sketching for me, for some time to come, I am afraid."

He ascended the flight of steps, and the approach caused a sudden flutter of drapery near the open door. A white muslin curtain was put back from the window nearest to it, and the face of a very young girl looked out, wearing an expression of doubt and alarm.

The forlorn and muddy figure that greeted her eyes did not reassure her, for she uttered a little cry, and rushed towards an inner room, calling out:

"Father, *mon pere*, come hither—come quickly—there is a stranger here."

The clear ringing tones of Walter Thorne's voice arose to reassure her.

"I entreat that you will not be alarmed, young lady, I have met with an accident, and nearly lost my life. I was compelled to apply at the nearest house for assistance, for I am in a sad plight. I am wet through, as you can see, and I fear that my right arm is broken."

Arrested in her flight, struck by the refined and gentlemanly tone of the speaker, the girl turned and looked at the handsome face, the well-knit figure, that by this time stood in the doorway, and she impulsively drew nearer to him as he spoke of the injury he had received.

She was very young—at that point of life in which childhood and maidenhood meet, for she could scarcely have been fifteen years of age. Her figure was light and symmetrical, promising in full development extreme elegance. The complexion was of that pale creamy tint which needs no embellishment from the roses of youth. The hair, of the darkest shade of brown, with a gleam of gold running through it, waved in short curls around a well-formed and haughtily set head.

The face was of a clear oval, with beautifully moulded features. The eyes matched the color of her hair, for they were hazel, and so soft, lustrous and expressive, that the black orbs which looked into them, were at once charmed with their expression.

The manner and language of the stranger had reassured her, for young and inexperienced as she was, she knew that the graceful courtesy with which he had addressed her, could belong only to one who had received the culture of a gentleman.

Seeing that he was pale, and scarcely able to sustain himself, her tender heart prompted her to succor him at once. A large leather-covered chair stood near the door, and pointing to it, she simply said:

“My father never refuses aid and shelter to those who need it. Enter, and be seated till I can summon him to speak with you.”

Walter Thorne sank into its depths with a weary sigh, and said:

“Thank you. I am very faint—will you give me some water, if you please?”

The girl silently filled a gourd from a cedar bucket that was placed on a shelf outside of one of the win-

dows, and offered it to him. After quaffing it he looked gratefully into the bewildering eyes bent so seriously upon him, and said:

“Beautiful Hebe, I thank you for this nectar. The housemaid of the gods could scarcely have been so enchanting as I find you.”

With a demure smile, in which there was much mischief, she replied; “My name is not Hebe, sir. It is Claire—Claire Rosine Lapierre. I am not used to hearing compliments, and my father will be apt to send you away if he finds that you are trying to turn my head, as he would call it.”

“What, would he be savage enough to turn me out in my present wretched condition for so venial an offence as that? It would be too barbarous a proceeding, and I must believe that you are slandering your respectable paternal progenitor. When the sun shines we say the day is charming, then why, when one meets with that *rara avis*, a perfectly beautiful girl, shall he not express the rapture her presence inspires? Enchanting creature, I bless the accident that brought me hither, for never have I seen aught so fair as your peerless self.”

The cottage maiden drew back with an air of offended pride that surprised him from one in her apparent condition.

Thorne glanced around the large room; its appointments were extremely humble. No carpet covered the floor; the chairs, with the exception of the one he was sitting on, were of unpainted wood; a pine table stood between the two windows, on which was placed a china mug, filled with flowers, the only evidence of refine-

ment to be seen, and the windows were draped with muslin curtains of a rather scanty pattern.

But the dress of the young girl was of better material, and more fashionably made than might have been expected from her surroundings. It was a light summer muslin, which floated in soft folds around her, and was finished at the throat by a narrow crimped frill, fastened with a small pearl pin. The hands were small and shapely, and Walter Thorne had enough penetration to see that she did not belong to the class of ignorant poor in which he had at first placed her.

He hastened to atone for his flippancy by saying :

"Pardon me my fair Egeria; I am very faint and weak, and my poor brain is whirling to that degree, that I scarcely know what I am saying. Attribute any eccentricities on my part to that cause, I entreat."

He sunk back looking so pale, that the kind heart of Claire was moved to deeper sympathy than before, and she hastily said :

"I will summon assistance, sir, for you greatly need it. My father was not within hearing when I called him, but our old servant will know what to do for you."

She flitted away, though he would have made an effort to detain her, if his voice had not suddenly failed him and darkness swept over his vision. In a few moments an old negress entered the room, and to her dismay found that the strange guest had fallen back in his chair, partly insensible.

The woman hastened to bathe his face, and use other efforts to restore him, but while thus employed, she muttered :

"Hi! what debbil's luck have brung sich a young

gallant as dis to *dis* house? My rosebud's too pretty 'an too sweet to hab all de dew brushed from her heart while she's yet a chile. I jes' wish he hadn't a come here to-day, anyhow, for de lightenin' struck de horse-shoe I nailed on de old oak tree down by de spring, for luck, and split de wood right through de heart. It were Miss Rose's tree, too—de one she planted when she was a tiny creatur, an' I thought I'd save it from harm by puttin' a spell on it. See what de 'sult is—de bery ting I meant as a pertection has been de cause of its 'struction, de master says.

"Hi! what's I maunderin' on so for, I wonder. I won't b'lieve dat anything bad can come to my pet, even if de tree is all smashed to flinders. I'll keep de chile away from dis han'some young feller, an' nuss him myself. Den he can go as soon as he pleases, but de poor critter seems to be in a bad way now."

"Yes, I am rather under the weather at present, that's a fact," said Thorne, unclosing his eyes and smiling faintly; "but I shall be better presently, old lady. Pray tell me where I am, and to whose hospitality I am indebted for shelter."

The woman recovered from the confusion and astonishment into which his sudden revival had thrown her, and hastened to give him more particulars of his host than he had expected to hear at so early a stage of their acquaintance.

"Well, mister, you am in de Happy Valley, as my Rosebud calls it, 'case she says it's the most peaceful place on de face o' de yeth. De ole gemplin, her fader I mean, is a mincing, pincing, hoity-toity ole creetur from furrin parts, what makes his livin' by teachin' de queer lingo dat's *his* nat'ral speech, 'sides

music an' dancin' to my misseses childer, Mrs. Courtenay, ob de Grange. Leastways dey aint but one of dem lef' at home now, an' she aint much more'n a piccaninny, but de Mistis lets Monsher Lapeer live in dis here place rent free, an' 'lows me to stay wi' him an' his darter to do dere work. I couldn't be o' much use on de plantation no how, an' I likes to stay."

"Mr. Lapierre is a music and dancing master, then?"

"Dancing master! hi! what you call him dat for?" asked the woman, in an offended tone. "De Madame is a grand lady, and *she* calls him Miss Julia's teacher; 'sides he teaches her many things 'sides dancin', tho' he do beat all in dat—you'd say so, too, ef you saw him spinnin' around dis room wid Miss Claire, a singin' tra la la, an' sometimes a playin' on his ole fiddle till you'd think he'd bring de soul out'n it. It would make yer head spin to see 'em."

"I hope I shall yet have that pleasure, but just now my head spins enough from weakness. If you can give me a bed to lie down on, and bring me a doctor to look after my arm, I shall be very glad. I am afraid it is badly dislocated, even if some of the small bones are not broken."

"Good Lor'! ef dat's so, I don' know what's to be did, for dere aint nobody here to go arter a doctor, an' we aint got no horse to ride if dere was. But the ole gemplin will be long directly, I reckon, an' he'll know what's best to be done. Miss Claire went to meet him, for it's past his time to come home from Grange, and dere! I hear de soun' o' his fiddle now. He allers plays when he comes down de holler. If you'll try to git up, sir, I'll help you in de bed-room, as my Rosebud tole me to do afore she got back here."

She opened a door in the opposite wall which gave entrance into a smaller apartment, in which was a bed with a white dimity coverlet, a small table on which was a basin and ewer, and a large arm-chair cushioned and covered with chintz.

As the negress assisted the young stranger into this neat looking chamber, the tones of a violin became more distinct. The strain was wild and spirit-stirring, and it was played with a power and passionate fervor that surprised Walter Thorne, for he had heard much good music, and with delight he recognized the touch of a master on the instrument he most highly prized.

Suddenly the music ceased, only a few long drawn chords reached his ear, and he correctly supposed that the musician had encountered his daughter and had ceased playing to listen to the news of his own advent at the cottage and the great need of assistance in which he stood.

By the time he heard their approaching footsteps in the outer room, Walter Thorne was lying back in the large chair beside the bed, pallid and suffering, scarcely conscious of the efforts of the old woman to place him in a more comfortable position than he had thrown himself in.

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## CHAPTER II.

### FAMILY HISTORY, AND PRESENTMENTS.

A SMALL, dark man approached the doorway and stood an instant contemplating the waif the storm



had sent him. Apparently he was not well pleased with the chance that threw this haughty looking young stranger on his hospitality, but the expression of annoyance passed from his face when he saw that Thorne was really suffering.

M. Lapierre was a slender, wiry looking man, with eyes of vivid blackness, and a wild elvish looking shock of hair thickly sprinkled with grey. He had a low, broad forehead, and thin firmly-set lips which showed that a resolution once arrived at was seldom departed from. He wore a full suit of white linen, and his nationality was betrayed by the care with which the ribbon that confined his shirt collar was arranged.

He had deposited his violin on the table in the outer room, and he now drew near the bed and spoke, with a strong foreign accent, but with perfect propriety of expression:

"Ah! ah! Monsieur—caught in the storm, I perceive, and pretty well drenched. It was well that my house was near enough to afford you shelter, for you seem to be in a bad plight. I have not much to offer, but such as our humble fare is, you are welcome to share it. Be quick, Betty, and get some dry garments for the gentleman, and put on the kettle to make a cup of tea for him. I think that I can manage his case without much difficulty."

"I don' think you kin," bluntly replied Betty, "for he says his arm's broke, an' he wants a doctor sent for right away; but de good Lor' knows I don' know who's to go arter him."

M. Lapierre made a step forward looking less alarmed than the negro had expected. He coolly said:

"It may not be quite so bad as that, but I shall soon be able to judge. Even if there should be a trifling fracture, I understand what is to be done, and it is lucky that I do, for the nearest physician is ten miles away. Permit me to help you off with your coat, sir, that I may form my own judgment of the injury your arm has sustained. Go at once, Betty, and find some dry clothes."

The negro interrupted the faint thanks of the patient by saying:

"I don' 'no whar I kin git anything big enough for him 'bout dis house. Your close aint agwine to be o' much use to him I reckon, an' he can't wear mine or Miss Claire's."

For a moment Lapierre seemed to hesitate about the order he finally gave, and a strange spasm passed over his face as he said:

"Open the carved chest in the closet in my chamber, and you will find linen in that which this young man can wear. A dressing-gown will also be found among the things, which will answer our purpose. Yet no; I do not wish you to open it. Tell Claire to look for the key of the chest in my writing-desk, open it herself, and give you what I have named."

Claire, who lingered in the outer room, heard this order given with extreme surprise, for that chest had been a mystery to her from her childhood. It had always been kept carefully locked, and her father had evaded her questions as to what it contained. Of course she was glad to explore it for herself, and she went at once on the errand assigned her. After some time had elapsed, Betty came back bearing a brocaded dressing robe of gay colors, and several garments of fine linen, yellowed by time.



The old man sighed heavily as he glanced at them, but he seemed to smother the painful feeling, and briskly said:

"Now, sir, we can make you comfortable. You have already been too long in your wet clothes. I will assist you to change them, and look more carefully into your condition. Your arm hangs almost useless, but I think I can remedy the injury it has received. A surgeon is out of the question in this retired place, and you will have to put up with my skill, such as it is."

"But, my dear sir," remonstrated the patient, "I am afraid that my arm is broken, and if it is not properly attended to, it may be made stiff for the rest of my life. I have money, the expense of a surgeon will be no object to me, and if it is possible to obtain one, I entreat that he may be summoned to my assistance."

"He would come too late to be of any service to you," said M. Lapierre, drily. "By the time he could get here, your arm would be so swollen that he would find it impossible to reduce the fracture properly, if fracture there be. I possess some trifling skill in surgery, and I can soon judge if the case is beyond my management. Allow me to examine your condition, if you please."

His tone and manner were so decided that the younger man thought it best to submit, and with the dextrous assistance of the Frenchman, he was soon endued in the dry garments that had been provided. M. Lapierre's quick eyes soon ascertained the extent of his injuries. He laid bare the shoulder, and said:

"You have dislocated your collar-bone and sprained your arm severely, but that is all. With Betty's assistance, I can bring the first in place again, and with a

few days care you will do well enough. I am glad it's no worse, for Dr. Blesdoe may be fifty miles away for aught I know, even if we had any one to send after him. You can stand a sharp pang, I think, and then the worst will be over."

"I must stand it, of course," was the rather ungracious reply; "but are you sure that your skill will suffice?"

"Sure? Oh yes. You shall soon see that I am quite equal to the occasion. Here, Betty, I want you."

The old woman came at his call, and with prompt decision M. Lapierre gave her such directions as were necessary. Claire, who stood in the outer room listening in trembling silence, heard a faint cry as the dislocated part was pulled in place, and she hastened to bring camphor and lavender for the use of the suffering patient. By the time she returned with them the shoulder had been carefully bandaged, the patient put in bed and lightly covered, while his bare arm was laid out on the coverlet to be rubbed and swathed in linen in its turn.

As Claire appeared with the restoratives, M. Lapierre said:

"Well, my young friend, that was neatly done, I flatter myself; and I must say that you bore it well—very well. It is no trifle to have one's bones wrenched back to the right place, and you are faint and pale as a natural consequence of such an operation. Here, *ma fille*, bathe his face with the lavender, while I foment the bruised arm with camphor, and tie it up. No bones are broken at all, sir; all right enough here, and we shall have you about in a few days."

"I hope so," was the faint reply, "and I am sure I am extremely obliged to you, sir, for your ready assistance."

"By no means; you need not trouble yourself to express gratitude, for I haven't much faith in it. I would help a dog that had received any bodily injury that could be remedied by my skill."

After this brusque declaration young Thorne said no more; and Claire came to his side with a simple grace in which there was no appearance of shyness. She was still too much a child to become embarrassed by the performance of the duty assigned her, even if the patient was a young and singularly handsome man.

Her soft, cool hands passed soothingly over his brow, occasionally resting a brief moment upon it with a touch that thrilled to the heart of the eager and impressionable youth to whom she so deftly ministered. His half closed eyes dwelt upon the lineaments of her lovely face, and Walter Thorne thought that never before had he seen any creature half so entrancing as this simple cottage maiden.

A passionate adorer of beauty in any form, it was not wonderful that his eyes should revel in the contemplation of so charming a face as the one that bent above him, its owner pitifully regarding him, and thinking no more of his youth and good looks than she did of her own efforts to succor him. The arm was at length bound up, and her father briskly said:

"It's all right now, sir. That will do, my daughter; leave him alone, and see that Betty brings him some toast and tea as soon as may be. Your walk has given you an appetite I dare say, sir, in spite of your accident; but I cannot suffer you to take anything more

substantial than tea and toast just at present. All in good time, though. To-morrow perhaps you may venture to taste a broiled bird."

With a faint smile Thorne replied:

"Thanks for all your kindness. I do not feel hungry just now, and it is so soothing to have my aching head bathed, that I think I shall prefer that to food."

"Ah! did you strike it against anything when the accident happened that dislocated your shoulder? You have had a bad wrench, and really I am curious to know how you dropped into our valley so suddenly. There is but one entrance on this side, and that was rendered impassable by the rain that came down almost without warning."

"You may well say that," replied Thorne with a slight laugh.

"I came near being dashed over the rocks, and only escaped by desperately exerting my unusual physical strength. I feel as weak as a child now, but an hour ago I battled for my life, and won it at the expense of nearly wrenching my good right arm from its socket."

"*Bon Dieu!* you were never in the Devil's Gorge when the storm swept down!" exclaimed Lapierre.

"Yes, I was caught by the rain when half way through, so I had no alternative but to hurry on as fast as possible. I had a hard fight for life, but you see me here in this battered and bruised condition, that is all."

"*All!* Really, my young Hercules, you have performed as miraculous a feat as any ever attributed to that fabulous heathen. Nothing swept down that pass when a flood rushes through it has ever been known to escape before. Do you know that if the torrent had

taken you over the brow of the cliff no further vestige of you would ever have been found! Nobody about here can tell what becomes of the waifs that reach the Lady's Tarn, as my daughter has named it."

"Yes, I knew all that. I was warned by the landlord of the tavern in the little town ten miles hence. He painted all the dangers in the path, but I was foolhardy enough to persist in braving them. But in spite of my present position I do not regret it now, for what I have seen has amply repaid me. I am an artist, Monsieur, in search of the picturesque and beautiful, and I have found both in perfection in your secluded valley."

"You are a philosopher, at all events," replied Lapierre drily. "There, that will do, Rosebud. Go, and look after Betty. I will take your place here. The gentleman can put up with my ministrations while you have his tea made ready. He must take something, whether he wishes it or not."

The young girl resigned her place, and noiselessly left the room. Lapierre's touch was very gentle, but after a few moments the patient said:

"Thank you, that will do, sir. My head feels better now. I will not trouble you to bathe it any longer."

"Ah! so much the better, my young friend. And now, as it is rather awkward not to know by what name to address each other, I will tell you that mine is Armand Lapierre, at your service, and I shall be glad to hear yours in return."

The stranger hesitated a moment, and then gave his true name, which for an instant he had been tempted to withhold; why, or for what purpose, he could not have explained.

"My name is Walter Thorne, and I am an artist making a pedestrian tour in search of the picturesque. I lost my portfolio and camp stool in the wrestle for my life, and I suppose the Lady's Tarn has swallowed them up long ago."

"Very likely; and you may be thankful that you did not go over with them. Well, Mr. Thorne, we will do the best we can for you, and I hope to see you well enough in a few days to prosecute your tour! We are plain people, and lack many things the outside world considers essential to comfort; but such as we have, you are heartily welcome to, while you sojourn among us."

"I cannot find words to thank you, Monsieur. You have proved yourself a good Samaritan, and I must say I am most grateful for what you have done for me."

"Pooh! this is the second time you have spoken of gratitude. It's a thing that ought not to be talked about, but felt. We are put in this world to help each other, and it's not often that I am called upon to exercise the golden rule. Your pulse is quickening, and I am afraid that your adventure this afternoon will be followed by a little fever; but I can deal with that, too, without a doctor's assistance. Before you sleep, I will administer some drops that will have a cooling effect, and by morning I think you will be in a fair way of recovery. When you have taken your tea, you must be left quiet the remainder of the evening."

With a smile Thorne said:

"I submit myself to your authority, sir. I have found you so skillful a surgeon, that I am inclined to trust implicitly to you as a physician."

"That is well, for you might fare worse. I know something of both medicine and surgery; a mere smattering, it is true; but such as it is, it will suffice in your case. Ah! here comes the tea. Drink it, and take a few morsels of the toast, they will do you good."

Thorne looked eagerly toward the door, hoping that Claire would appear, and his expressive face showed his disappointment when Betty entered bearing a waiter, on which rested a porcelain cup and saucer sprinkled over with small bouquets of roses. The plate on which the bread lay matched them, and the guest wondered how this impoverished man came in possession of such articles of luxury.

He soon dispatched the light supper, declared himself better, and M. Lapierre withdrew, followed by the servant.

Left alone, Thorne turned restlessly on his couch, and tried to reconcile himself to the necessity of being quiet for a season. He had never been ill since he could remember, and he feared that he would prove rather a refractory patient to these kind people. The sense of helplessness and suffering was so new to him that he writhed under it, and almost felt as if he had lost half his manhood in being compelled to lie on his bed, and suffer others to minister to his wants.

When he thought of the sweet face that had bent above him, he confessed to himself that it was worth being sick to have so fair a nurse, and he speculated as to whether the pretty Claire would be permitted to enter his room again.

If she did not, he would not remain in it, that was certain. Nothing save the sight of her enchanting face

would reconcile him to the inactivity to which he was condemned for the next few days.

All his summer labors were gone too; he acknowledged to himself that the loss did not signify much to the world of art; but they were not the less precious to him on that account. He had encountered fatigue, sometimes danger, in seeking the places he had sketched, and each drawing had some little history attached to it which gave it an interest to him. Besides, he really believed that some of them possessed intrinsic value, and he prided himself on the care with which his subjects had been elaborated. Although only an amateur artist, Walter Thorne believed that the contents of his lost portfolio would have given him a fair position among those with whom he was ambitious to obtain a footing.

With a weary sigh, he resigned himself to his loss as well as he could, and again the fair face of the young girl arose before him, consoling him for the accident from which he was suffering, and awakening romantic visions of the future, for he had fallen in love at first sight with the beautiful maiden of the valley, and Walter Thorne was not one to deny himself the gratification of the most vagrant whim from consideration for another. He thought:

"I will make the first impression on her virgin heart, and then—well, what then? I won't think of results. Let me bask in the sunshine of that heavenly smile; let me awaken in that gentle heart the first emotions of love; let me win a return to the passion that has already sprung to life in my heart, and the future may take care of itself. Men of my craft rave of the Venus de Medici; but she, with her faded smile, is not to be

compared to this living, breathing incarnation of loveliness. Such lips! such eyes—so fathomless, so bright! And then those dainty hands that touched my brow so softly. I feel them thrilling through me now. Ah! I am fathoms gone already. Falling in love is the conventional phrase, and, by Jove, I've gone and done it, sure enough. I have mocked at others, and called them spoony for doing the same thing, and now my own fate has come upon me. It is my fate, or I should have had a harder fall over the rocks into that black pool; since I was saved to come hither, and be nursed back to health by these people, something is to come of it. But what? Ah, the Lord only knows; so what is the use of speculating about it. I shall only give myself a fever if I trouble myself about results. Let the future take care of itself. That is the best plan for every one, especially for me just now; so for once I'll follow the precept of the holy book, as my nurse used to call the Bible. It says, 'take no thought for the morrow.' Very good; for once I will be pious, and obey the command."

His restless and wandering thoughts were interrupted by Lapierre, who came in carrying a cup in his hand in which his drops were mixed. Thorne drank them without opposition, and said he thought he could sleep; so he was again left alone to indulge his vagrant and wayward fancies.

As the evening closed in, the tones of a violin which seemed to come from a distance, floated through the open windows, soothing and quieting him in a manner that was marvellous to the invalid: the soft evening breeze was wafted through his room, laden with the breath of roses; and with a delicious feeling of repose,

Walter Thorne at length sank to sleep, to dream of the sweet face which had that evening so pitiably looked down upon him.

In the meantime, the inmates of the ruined dwelling took their supper in a large, dilapidated looking room which was almost destitute of furniture. In summer they usually enjoyed this meal beneath the shade of the forest trees in the yard; but the rain that had so lately fallen forbade that on this evening.

M. Lapierre looked thoughtful, and his daughter was also more pre-occupied than usual; so, contrary to their usual custom, few words passed between them, while at table. As the father arose, he asked:

"Did you replace the key of the chest where you found it, Claire?"

"Yes, sir; you will find it in the same place in the desk. Oh, papa where did all those nice things come from? The clothing is finer than any I have ever seen before. Why have you never worn any of it since I can remember?"

He almost sternly replied:

"I have not worn those garments because they were not made for me, and they would not fit me. Besides, they are not suited to my present station in life."

"Who, then, were they made for? Yes, they must be too large for you, since they fit our guest, for you are a small man beside him."

M. Lapierre frowned, bit his lips; and after a pause, replied:

"It is of no consequence to you to whom they belonged. The person that owned them is never likely to darken our doors. I am sorry you saw them; I should have gone for the change of garments myself; but if I

had, you would have been curious to know where I have kept brocade and fine linen hidden through all these years. Those clothes were left in my care, and never reclaimed; there is no likelihood that they will be sought after now, for it is many years since I heard from their owner. He is either dead or has forgotten all about me. The last I think, and I am glad it is so, for a renewal of intercourse between us could only be painful to us both.

"It is well that those garments can be useful to some one at last, for they have long molded away in the chest. Although it is painful to me to see them flaunting in the day again, I could do no better for the guest fate has sent us, than suffer him to use a few of them till his own things are put in order."

M. Lapierre spoke more as if communing with himself than addressing his daughter, but she replied:

"Betty will have the stranger's clothes ready for him when he rises in the morning. She has taken them to the kitchen to be renovated. Oh, papa, how courageous, how stout of heart he must be to escape such dangers as he battled through in the Devil's Gorge. If he had been dashed on the rocks, think where he might be now." And the speaker shuddered, and covered her face with her hands.

"Pooh! child! Don't exaggerate his bravery. The weakest of creatures will struggle for life, and this youngster is as strong as a young lion. Don't suffer your imagination to make a hero of him, Claire; and I do not wish you to go near him again. It is my desire that Betty shall exclusively attend to him. You are but a child yet, it is true, but you are very well grown for your years and this good looking stranger

may take it into his head to talk nonsense to you. I will not have your young life tarnished by his flattery. I will keep you pure, and sweet, and passionless as you now are, till you are a fully developed woman. Then, perhaps, some man good enough to win my Rosebud's affections may seek them; but there are very few worthy of the love of a good woman—very few, more's the pity."

"Dearest father, I never intend to leave you for any one," said the young girl, blushing. "I know that *you* are a good man, and I shall do as you so often tell me—'let well enough alone.' We are so happy here together, that I would not have any change for the world."

"Poor little wayside flower," said her father fondly caressing her hair. "What will be its fate when it is torn from its parent stem, I wonder? Will it be trampled in the dust of the highway, or taken up to bloom in some sheltered spot. Oh, my Rosebud, you are the one treasure of my life, yet I can do so little for you, and in the days to come, God alone knows what is to be your fate."

Claire nestled to his breast, and breathlessly asked:

"Why do you talk so, father? Why should you anticipate trouble when everything is so pleasant around us? We have enough: Mrs. Courtney will not turn us out of our home—I know she is far too kind for that. What has come over you, *mon pere*?"

"Nothing, nothing, child; only a presentiment that—that—but why should I darken your sunshine with my croaking? Yet, my darling, you know that I am many years older than you. I was forty-five when you were born, and that makes me sixty on my next birth-



day. When a man gets that far along on the road to the grave, it is time to think of the great change that cannot be very far distant. Somehow I have thought a great deal about it of late, and I naturally speculate on what is to become of my portionless and nearly friendless little girl when I am no longer with her."

Claire paled slightly, but rallying, she tenderly patted him upon the cheek, and said:

"You dear, old, naughty papa, why should you indulge such gloomy fancies? You don't look a day over fifty; and besides, what are sixty years of life, when so many go on to eighty, ninety, or even a hundred years? You shall take rank with the patriarchs—I am determined on that; so don't talk any more in this depressing strain. It takes all the sunshine of my life to have you even hint at leaving me all alone in the world. What should I do—what *could* I do without you?"

"Not much, I am afraid; so I trust that God will spare me at least till my Rosebud is fully blown. Then, when she is developed into noble and perfect womanhood, she can win her way to the respect and good will of all with whom she may be thrown. When I am called away, Claire, I shall have little beside my blessing to leave you, but I shall bequeath you to one on whom you have the strongest claim for protection and assistance."

"Who is that, papa?" was the eager question that followed.

After a long pause, Lapierre reluctantly said:

"I must send you to one allied by blood, but not by nature. Armand is of the 'earth, earthy,' and you are my bright and sinless Peri, unfit to soil your wings

by coming in contract with such as he. Yet my hard fate has left you no other alternative than beggary, or an appeal to him."

"But who is this Armand, father? Till this moment I did not know that I had a claim on any human creature except myself."

With a heavy sigh, M. Lapierre said:

"I wish that I had not referred to him, Claire, I once thought that I would never speak of him to you; never reveal the tie that exists between you; and I cannot tell what impelled me to do so this evening. I believe I would do better to trust you to fight the battle of life alone, than to ask Armand's protection for you, but I am weak where you are concerned, and I cannot bear to leave you to poverty and struggle, when the way can be made smooth before you by the sacrifice of my pride. Oh, that I should have come to speak thus of him who was in other days the pride of my life—my only, and once idolized son."

The speaker covered his face in a paroxysm of strong emotion, but the girl caught the meaning of the last muttered words, and with widely opened eyes she asked in a whisper:

"Have I then a brother? Is it he that you refer to? Oh, papa, what can he have done to separate you forever—to cause you to speak of him thus. Tell me why you have never before hinted his existence to me."

With bitter emphasis, Lapierre replied:

"Because he is unfit to be named in your presence; and I am sorry that I have been weak enough to speak of him now. It can do no good to open up that past; yet the sight of the clothes, so long hidden away, has

brought back those cruel memories with such vividness that I forgot my usual prudence. Forget that I have spoken of Armand, my child, for he is nothing to you, can be nothing to you as long as I live."

"But, *cher* papa, now I know that such a relation is somewhere in the world, I naturally wish to hear all that you can tell me about him. Oh, my father, I entreat that you will tell me something of your former life. If you were to be taken from me, I should know nothing of my family history."

Lapierre gazed at her a few moments in silence, as if not certain whether it would be best to gratify her natural curiosity to learn something more of his antecedents than he had hitherto thought proper to reveal. With a profound sigh, he finally said:

"Perhaps you are right, my daughter. I had better tell you something of myself before the time comes when I can speak no more on this or any other subject. You may think it strange that I augur thus gloomily of myself; but something tells me that I shall not much longer be permitted to remain with you. There are moments in which I feel as if the earth is receding beneath my footsteps; as if the wide realms of eternity are ready to unclothe their portals to me. When the fiat is uttered, 'Mortal, come,' I must obey, however tender and clinging may be the tie that binds me here."

Claire threw her arms around his neck and clung to him with passionate fervor, as she tearfully said:

"You must not; you cannot leave me: don't talk so, papa, or my heart will break."

"So you think now, my child; but the heart is tough—tough in healthy organizations; and you are

young and strong; you can bear heavy burdens, and rise above them; you possess the elastic temperament of the race from which you sprang, and my countrymen are the most buoyant and happily-constituted nation under the sun. No adversity crushes a Frenchman; no calamity utterly disheartens him. See, am I not a living evidence of the truth of the assertion? After all I have borne, all I have lost, I have made myself contented in this obscure valley, earning my bread by using the accomplishments which were bestowed on me for a very different purpose."

"Then you were not always a teacher, papa? You have been rich, and grand as the family at the Grange? Is it not so?"

Lapierre sighed wearily:

"It matters very little what I have been, Claire. I am now only music, language, and dancing-master to a little girl; and through the liberality of her mother I am able to make a bare support. I am thankful even for that, and acknowledge that, amid all my afflictions, God has been good to me to enable me to gain so peaceful a haven for my old age; so secure a shelter for my little girl."

Claire caressingly said:

"But, dearest papa, you will not refuse to tell me something of what happened to you before you came to the Happy Valley. What exiled you so far from your native land, and threw so dark a shadow over your life?"

"That is easily told, *pétite*. Loss of fortune, of station, of all that men hold precious in the busy, outside world save honor, expatriated me. I left my son behind me, never wishing to look upon his face again,



for he—he was the cause of my ruin—of my exile. I trusted too much to him, and through him my downfall came.

“Armand saved something from the wreck, but I could not share it, for I considered it unfairly withheld from those who had trusted us. I was a banker—a great financier, and I prided myself on my reputation for probity and sagacity. I had wealth at my command, and all went well with me till I associated my son with me in my business. After that, things went wrong; I trusted to him; he trusted to others; he became infatuated with a heartless woman, neglected our affairs at an important crisis when I was absent, and—we were ruined.

“The world always harshly judges a man who fails in business, leaving those who have trusted him to suffer through him. I did not escape the common lot—and—and—I think for a season, I must have been mad. I will not describe the scenes that passed between my son and myself. He would not give up the woman who had infatuated him, though he saw how it cut me to the soul to see him so enslaved.

“I cannot tell how or where we parted. I can only say that in a paroxysm of anguish that I cannot even now recall with calmness, I shook the dust of my native land from my feet, and came to this far distant land to bury myself in obscurity; to seek a refuge so lonely and obscure, that no one who had known me should ever be able to trace me; where the history of my misfortunes could never follow me.”

“And my mother? What of her?” asked Claire. “Did she not accompany you from France?”

“No; I found her in this country; and through her

you claim a distant tie of kindred with the Courtney family. You are the half sister of Armand, for I have been married twice. His mother was the daughter of a nobleman; yours was a young girl I met with shortly after I came to this country. We boarded in the same house in Philadelphia, where I remained several months trying to obtain employment in some mercantile house. I failed, because I had no recommendations, and I resorted to teaching to win the means of living. Clara Courtney was alone in the world, and she managed to make a scanty living by coloring fashion-plates for magazines.

“Our mutual isolation drew us together, and we married. Through her connection with the family at the Grange, I obtained this humble home, and the employment that has enabled me to live. I prepared the son for college; and now Julia’s education affords Mrs. Courtney the pretext for paying me the same sum she allowed for that of Andrew. I appreciate her liberality, and for her goodness to you I can never be sufficiently grateful. She is only your godmother; but in many respects she has been a true mother to you.”

“Yes, she is very good to me, and I love her very dearly. But my own mother—what of her? for I have no recollection of her.”

“She died a few days after your birth; and I have since cared for little beyond the narrow sphere of my daily duties, and the love of my one ewe lamb. You are everything to me, Claire; the rest of the world nothing.”

“Dearest father, have you no love for my brother? Has your affection for him so utterly died out that he can claim no place in your heart?”

"How can I love him in whom I have lost all faith? Armand has injured me beyond forgiveness. If I had heard from him through all these dreary years, my heart might have yearned to him again, but he has not communicated with me. We have long been dead to each other—it is best so. 'Let the dead past bury its dead;' never speak of him to me again, my child, for it is bitterly painful to me to recal the last days we spent near each other. Come, my pet, let us have some music; that will exorcise the demon of regret that has entered my heart; yet I was not to blame for what occurred—no—I am sure I was not. We cannot sit on the portico to-night, for we should be too near our guest. I wish him to sleep well, that he may be sufficiently recovered in the morning to go upon his way. I cannot help feeling that his presence is an inopportune intrusion in our quiet, and happy home."

"Come then to my retreat," said Claire, "since it is on the opposite side of the house, the strains of your violin will only reach him from there as a soothing lullaby."

"So be it, then," was the reply, and the two left the desolate looking eating room.

After crossing a wide hall which had fallen partially to ruin, Claire opened the door of a small apartment with a wide window at the further end placed in a recess several feet deep. This window was so completely embowered in roses and jasmine, as to need no drapery within, and the summer atmosphere was filled with the fragrance of the flowers.

A striped carpet of gay colors covered the floor, and old-fashioned, quaintly carved furniture stood against the walls. There was a writing-table, and music-stand

near the recess, a cabinet of dark wood, and on the opposite side of the room, a spindle-legged piano which had been in use for at least sixty years. There was also a small rocking-chair, and the heavier ones covered with faded green morocco.

Claire called this her retreat, and she had lavished on its adornment all the resources at her command. The walls were covered with engravings framed with bright-colored autumn leaves, the tints of which were brought out and preserved by a coat of varnish. Baskets made of wire, and ingeniously covered with moss, were suspended in each corner; these were filled with ferns, mingled with roses, and other common flowers that were still in bloom, arranged with such skill as proved that this secluded little girl had the eye of an artiste for effect; and the heart of a poet beating in her breast.

Claire drew forward one of the large chairs, and Lapierre threw himself upon it with an air of languor that was unusual with him, for he was ordinarily a bright, and active little man, in spite of the sixty years that had passed over his head.

The young girl placed herself before the open piano, and struck a few chords; the instrument was in better tune than might have been expected from its antique appearance, but the old Frenchman had a correct ear, and possessed some skill in mechanics, and his efforts had nearly restored its original sweetness of tone.

Lapierre mechanically took up his violin, struck into a weird strain of German music, and the accompaniment played by his daughter was soon almost lost in the volume of wild melody which filled the room and was wafted on the air to the distant apartment of his guest.

As he played he forgot his troubles—his presentiments of approaching evil—for he was a genuine musical enthusiast, and his soul revelled in the sounds his own skill evoked.

At length, exhausted by the fervor which he had thrown into his performance, he suffered the violin to glide from his grasp, and leaned back a few moments without speaking.

His daughter also ceased to play, but she sat waiting for him to break the silence that fell upon them.

After a long silence, he vaguely said :

"I wonder if it is true that in Heaven we shall have music forever floating around us. I hope it is, for that alone can express to me the glory and the beatitude of the hereafter."

"What is best for our happiness we shall doubtless have there, papa," said the soft voice of Claire. "But do not speak of going to Heaven now ; I need you too much here on earth."

"And I *must* stay with you to guard you and guide you through the most critical years of your life," he replied in a tone of passionate regret and doubt which made her shiver and draw nearer to his side.

He felt the soft touch of her hand upon his brow, and, clasping her suddenly to his heart, he went on :

"God is merciful, and I will pray to Him for the boon I so earnestly crave. I will ask Him to spare me to watch over the fate of my precious darling till she is capable of going alone upon the thorny path she may have to tread in this dark and weary world. Good night, love ! I must go now and look after my patient ; he has already been left too long alone. You should seek your couch at once, for it is past our usual hour for retiring."

Claire kissed him tenderly, and he left the room.

The moon had risen and was pouring a flood of light through the uncurtained window : the two often sat thus on summer nights without the glare of a lamp to break the spell of the weird music Lapierre was so fond of playing ; and, when she was left alone, the girl did not light one.

She opened a door which gave into a smaller room fitted up as a sleeping apartment. A priedieu was placed beside the bed, above which hung a crucifix of carved ivory : Claire knelt upon the cushion and, after praying long and fervently, she arose and prepared herself for repose.

In the meantime, Lapierre visited the apartment in which Walter Thorne was tossing in restless sleep. Without disturbing him, he made as careful an examination of his condition as was possible, and left the room with a troubled expression.

He muttered :

"This young stranger may be sick on my hands—he may be long recovering ; and then, God knows what may come of his unfortunate detention here. Yet, he must stay—there is no help for it, though something tells me that evil will come from him to me and mine."

Poor father ! if he could only have lifted the veil from the future and seen what was to be the result of that young man's advent beneath his roof, I am afraid that he would very reluctantly have used such skill as he possessed to save the life of the stranger he had taken in.

## CHAPTER III.

## GOOD RESOLUTIONS VS. TEMPTATION.

ON the following morning the fears of M. Lapierre were amply confirmed. On visiting his guest he found him tossing from side to side, flushed with fever, and at moments slightly delirious.

He carefully examined the symptoms, and then had recourse to a small medicine-chest filled with tiny bottles, from which he selected two remedies, and prepared them in separate cups. Homeopathy was at that day little known in the United States, but Lapierre had seen and been treated in sickness by Hahnemann himself, and he had unbounded faith in his system.

In his exile he had brought with him some of the learned German's books, and for many years the use of the subtle remedies they prescribed had given him confidence in their efficacy. He now offered one of them to the sick man, but after tasting it he scornfully said :

"Do you expect me to be benefitted by taking a spoonful of water occasionally? I am seriously ill, and I wish a regular physician sent for. I am able to pay for every attention I receive, let them cost what they may."

"But my dear young friend," remonstrated the old man, "this will produce a better result than more nauseous compounds; I assure you it will, upon my honor. If you implicitly follow my directions, I will guarantee that in a short time your fever shall be broken, and yourself in a fair way of recovery. I en-

treat that you will not obstinately reject my ministrations, for I have successfully dealt with worse cases than this threatens to be."

"Then you must be a *faith* doctor, for I can taste nothing but water in what you have offered me. My imagination will not suffice to perform a cure, so I insist that a physician who understands his business shall be sent for."

"But some hours must elapse before Bledsoe can be got here, and by that time you may be extremely ill. The drenching you got last evening has given you an inflammatory fever which must be dealt with at once. I can cure you without much loss of strength, but if *he* comes, he will soon reduce you to the condition of an infant. There—do be reasonable now, and take my remedies; you may at least try them till old Bledsoe can be found, and brought hither."

The patient rolled his wild eyes around the room, and with a faint smile, said :

"I will consent to swallow them on one condition, for I know they cannot hurt me."

"Well, what condition is that? I am so anxious to cure you, that if it is not very unreasonable, I will grant it."

"Let that pretty daughter of yours administer them. From a hand of such an angel I believe I would consent to take poison."

Lapierre's eyes flashed, but he controlled himself and said :

"What nonsense. It is not fitting that a young girl should come into a sick man's room. You understand that yourself, for you are a gentleman."

Thorne laughed wildly.

"Yes, I am what the world calls such, for I am the son of a rich man, and I have had the advantage of a good education. If that makes a gentleman, I can style myself one; but gentle or simple, if you want me to take that tasteless mess, I tell you I won't touch it unless it is offered to me by the fair hands of that lovely enchantress who gave me shelter when I came to her, bruised and forlorn.

No; by my hopes of life I swear,  
And by those lips, so ripe and rare,  
And by those eyes of softest sheen,  
The brightest far I e'er have seen."

I'll burn with fever, shake with cold; nay, I'll die, and let the green turf rest upon my breast, if you refuse me the ministrations of that lovely fairy."

"But my dear sir, that is impossible—out of all rule you know."

"No, I don't know it, and I *won't* know it. *She* may be able to work a miracle with your watery prescriptions, but *you* can't. Ha! ha! I am master of the situation. You pride yourself on such skill as you possess, I clearly see, and sooner than lose the chance to experiment on me, you'll give in, and grant the boon I ask."

Lapierre gravely said:

"I have only to leave you to your own obstinacy for a few hours, and you will be in no condition to dictate terms. You will not then know what I administer to you, or by whom it is given. Come, be reasonable now, and consent to swallow a spoonful of these remedies every fifteen minutes. They will cool your fever, and clear your mind. You are not perfectly sane, or you would not talk as you did just now."

"Sane—who is perfectly sane, I wonder? Some philosopher has asserted that every man has some favorite madness. Mine has just developed itself, and it manifests itself in admiration for your charming daughter. Let her give me your slops, and the effect will be magical. I adore beauty, and the contemplation of her angelic face will act as a sedative upon me. Oh! I know you will yield, for a quack is always anxious to have his nostrums tried."

Lapierre shook his head and firmly said:

"You are mistaken there, young man. My daughter cannot be permitted to act as your nurse, even if you refuse what will save you from severe attack of illness."

"Ah, stuff! *you* are not in earnest, though I am, and——"

The contest might have continued much longer, had it not been ended by the entrance of Claire herself; she took the cup and spoon from her father's hand, and softly said:

"I heard something of what he said, father, and as so much depends on the prompt administration of the medicine, I cannot refuse to give it to him myself. I will sit in the next room, and come in at regular intervals, while you watch beside him. A delirious man must not be held accountable for his fancies."

Lapierre frowned and bit his lips, but he made room for her by the bedside, and the sick youth took the potion from her with a lingering look of thanks and admiration.

He sank back upon his pillow, faintly saying:

"Thank you. I knew that you were my good angel."

There is no need of sending for another physician now. I feel that I shall do very well."

"Umph!" muttered the vexed father. "If I had a horse here, I believe I should go for old Bledsoe without delay, and allow him to dose you into your grave as speedily as might be. I begin to fear that such a denouement will be best for all concerned."

"Don't mutter, Mr. Stone, for that is your name in English. It is ill manners to mutter," said Thorne, in a jeering tone. "I feel better already, thanks to Mademoiselle. I'll shut my eyes now, and dream of that bright vision till it shines on me again. Don't speak a word, if you please; I am going into the seventh heaven of beatitude; the one in which all glories culminate; where lovely forms and angel faces are found in greatest perfection. Those Mahometan fellows talk of Houris, but what are they to the peerless creature I have found in this old ruin?"

He folded his hands upon his breast and closed his eyes; the Frenchman looked at him and thought:

"Why should I take umbrage at his vagaries? He is so flighty that he scarcely knows what he is saying; but a few hours hence he will be calmer, and then he will acknowledge the efficacy of my medicines. Yes—yes—he shall confess that I have skill. I've managed worse cases than this, and I'll soon have him on his feet again. Then he may go from my dove-cote and leave my birdling safe in her nest with her fond old father."

For the next two hours the deep silence that reigned in the apartment was only broken by the appearance of the young nurse and the murmured thanks of the sick man as he took from her hand the medicine on which her father declared so much depended.

At the end of that time Thorne fell into a deep slumber, and soon afterward the moisture that appeared on his forehead assured Lapierre that the worst symptoms had passed away and his patient probably saved from the severe illness he had dreaded.

To cure him speedily and rid himself of his presence beneath his roof, was now the strongest wish of Lapierre's heart. The young stranger's openly expressed admiration of his daughter was extremely displeasing to him; he regarded her still as a child, but it was evident that his guest looked on her in a very different light, and how he should save his darling from the glamour this handsome and cultivated man might endeavor to throw over her young and inexperienced heart, became his one thought.

For two days Thorne was unable to leave his bed, and M. Lapierre rejoiced that they were the two on which he could absent himself from the Grange. Saturday and Sunday passed away in the ceaseless care of the invalid, but it was found impossible to banish Claire from the sick room. Young Thorne insisted that to her presence he owed his rapid progress toward recovery, and at the slightest symptom of obstinacy on the part of Lapierre he became utterly unmanageable and would not be coaxed or argued into accepting such remedies as would complete his cure.

Neither would Claire consent to be excluded, for she was amused by the vagaries of the refractory patient and interested in his recovery. She flitted in and out, arranging his pillows, bathing his forehead when he complained of headache, and performing those services so gently and naturally that her father finally came to the conclusion that it would be safest to say nothing more to her on the subject.



She was yet too young to become the object of a grand passion, he thought, and far too child-like to return it. Let her aid in restoring this unwelcome guest to health, and then he could go upon his way and forget the good Samaritans who had nursed him through his illness.

On Monday morning M. Lapierre's duties at the Grange compelled him to leave his patient to the joint care of his daughter and old Betty, distasteful as it was to him to do so. By this time Thorne was out of danger, but he was impatient and restless; anxious to leave his bed, but still too much indisposed to do so with safety.

But he refused to listen to the cautions of the old man, and insisted that, wrapped in the dressing gown, he could lie on a wide old-fashioned sofa which stood in the outer room. He was weary of the little den in which he lay; he must get out, or he could not answer for the consequences; his fever would return; he would suffer from a relapse, and then all would be over for him.

Thinking in his heart that Walter Thorne was the most refractory patient he had ever undertaken to manage, M. Lapierre at last gave in. His pillows were transferred to the sofa, and after making such a toilette as was possible with the assistance of his host, the sick man found his way to it, and with a sigh of satisfaction placed himself in a comfortable position.

"This is much better," he said. "I feel like a different person already. Now, if I can only be amused, I shall do very well. I have a volume of Shelley in the pocket of my coat, however, and if you will only permit your daughter to read aloud to me, I shall be

most grateful. She has a charming voice, and I am persuaded that she reads delightfully."

The old man regarded him in grim silence a few moments, and then said:

"You are certainly the coolest youngster I ever have seen. I do not know that it will do any harm for Claire to read to you, and on two conditions I will consent."

"Pray name them, my dear sir, and if possible I will accede to them."

"Oh, they are not very difficult to comply with. The first one is, that you will listen to Christ's sermon on the Mount read by her young lips; after taking that to heart, I scarcely think you will find my second one unreasonable."

"The first is granted; now for the other."

"It is that you will respect her extreme youth and ignorance of life sufficiently to refrain from attempting to gain any influence over her mind or heart. You are rich and high in station; she is poor and humble; her only dower her innocence and beauty. You cannot stoop to our level, nor lift my child up to yours, so I ask you to refrain from using to her such flattering language as worldly men are prone to with every pretty and attractive girl they meet."

There was both dignity and pathos in the words, and with a deep flush mantling his handsome face, Thorne slowly said:

"After such an appeal as that, sir, I should be a wretch if I attempted to tamper with the affections of your daughter. I believe that I am incapable of making so base a return for the kindness you have shown to me. You may trust Claire with me as safely as if I were her brother."

The father's brow cleared, and he more cordially said :

"I thank you for that assurance, Mr. Thorne, and I accept it in good faith. No man worthy of the name would pledge his honor to a course he did not intend to pursue. I will send my daughter to bear you company till my return. I shall be back myself in a few hours, for I have but one pupil now, and she is too young to be kept long at her lessons."

"Thank you for conceding so much," was the reply, but the face of the young man flushed slightly, and he looked uneasily after the retiring form of his host.

He presently muttered :

"I can't do without the child, for she's nothing more. I should die of ennui if I were left to myself, and she is certainly the most piquante and charming creature I have ever beheld. There can be no real danger to *me* in this association, for *my* fate is settled.

"Ah me ! I wish it were not ! Is my own heart playing the traitor to me, that I begin to rebel against the iron will of my father ? No, that cannot, shall not be. I must be on honor with this young creature. I will be on honor with that good old man who has been so kind to me. I will treat her as a lovely and attractive child, and as soon as I am strong enough to go upon my way, I will leave her to forget the stranger to whom she has so sweetly ministered. I can pay the father for his trouble, but for the daughter I can do nothing better than to leave her as pure and innocent as I found her.

"Yet my heart yearns to take her to it as the brightest and sweetest possession it could claim. If I could shake off the shackles that bind me, and assert my right to choose my own fate, how happy I might be !

"But that is impossible, so why should I think of it ? I am the slave of another's will, so I must curb my vagrant propensities, and guard my heart against the tender interest this lovely creature has already inspired. I am the betrothed of another, and an entanglement here would ruin me. Besides, I have pledged my honor to the old man, and I must not forfeit it. Heigh ho !"

The sigh with which he concluded these reflections echoed through the room, and a soft voice spoke close beside him.

"Are you suffering, Mr. Thorne ? My father sent me to read to you, but perhaps I had better give you a sedative. You look flushed and restless."

He smiled brightly and said :

"The best sedative for me will be the sound of your voice, my fair nurse. I did not sleep well last night, and I feel as nervous as a fine lady this morning. Ridiculous, isn't it, for a strong man like me to complain of nervousness ?"

"Not if it is the result of illness," was the reply, "and you have been very sick. Papa's skill has brought you up sooner than I dared to hope, for on the first day of your illness I was greatly alarmed at your condition. You have had a terrible fever, you know, and we must guard against a relapse."

"Yes, I intend to be very careful : but do you really believe that the tinctures and pellets administered to me in such infinitesimal quantities, could have produced any effect upon my stalwart frame ? It seems nonsense to think so ; my constitution is strong enough to throw off disease, that is all."

Claire regarded him with an expression of doubt, as



if she scarcely comprehended him; but she finally shook her pretty head, and with a faint smile, said:

"It does not matter now whether you have faith or not, as papa does not pretend to work miracles. You are out of danger now, and that is enough for him and me. He sent me here to read the Sermon on the Mount to you. I am glad you wish to hear it, for I like it best of anything in the Bible. It should be best though, for it was our Saviour himself who spoke those divine and beautiful words."

"Yes, I know, but there is a great deal in it that is hard on such a mere worldling as myself. I will listen to you, Rose, and try to profit by the teachings of those ruby lips. You are not offended that I have given you the name of the queen of flowers that you blush so charmingly? I wish you would let me call you Rosebud as the old woman does."

Claire simply replied:

"Did I blush? I change color very easily, and you must not mind it. I am but a child yet, papa says, so if it suits you, you may call me Rosebud."

"A rose with all its sweetest leaves unfolded," quoted Thorne with his radiant smile.

"But I must be careful not to brush the dew from its petals; no, by Heaven! I will not! Sit there, Rosebud, beside my couch where I can hear but cannot see you, for if I look on you I shall forget all about what you are reading. I am going to take my first lesson in goodness to-day from the pure lips of an angel."

She laughed at this, and as she took the seat assigned her, merrily said:

"Angels have no mortal failings, and if you could see me in what mammy Betty calls one of my tantrums,

you would think me very far from being even distantly related to them. I can be as naughty sometimes as any other bad child."

He pretended to look incredulous.

"What! can those liquid eyes flash with temper! That lute-like voice lose its dulcet tones! impossible! You only wish to make me think that you share the faults of mortals to take from me the fear that the creature who has so little of our mundane nature, may take wings to herself and fly away to the sphere to which she of right belongs."

With a pretty assumption of dignity Claire replied:

"You must not talk to me in this way. Papa told me that I must check your presumption if you attempted to say flattering things to me. You have done nothing else to me since I came in, and if you do not put yourself on your good behavior I must go away and leave you alone."

Thorne looked embarrassed at this rebuke; he laughed constrainedly, and said:

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle. I have been rather oblivious of my compact with your father, but the language of flattery comes so naturally to my lips in the presence of one of your sex, that I utter it unconsciously. I promise to offend thus no more. Lull me to repose, sweet child, by reading the lesson set for us by your father. After that we will have something more congenial to my taste."

Claire gazed at him for a moment with widely opened eyes, and her lips unclosed to reply to his last words, but she seemed to change her mind; with a little sigh she opened the small Bible she held in her

hand, found what she wanted, and began to read in a clear, well-modulated voice.

Walter Thorne closed his eyes and listened a few moments, but he did not believe in the divine mission of Him whose words were so reverently repeated, and very soon the melody of the voice was all that appealed to him. He heard it floating around him as one in a vague dream; while his thoughts went wandering off to his distant home and the jarring interests centered there.

He was a man of wilful temper and strong passions, combined with a weakness of purpose that often rendered him the sport of his own wayward fancies. With such a being good resolutions are only made to be broken, and every moment spent near the beautiful child of nature who sat beside him seemed to weaken those to which he had pledged himself.

His musings were interrupted by the closing of Claire's book, and the sudden silence that fell around them. The dreamer started, and quickly said:

"Now the sermon is over, we will have poetry that shall thrill your soul to its inmost depths. It will add a new charm to Shelley to read over his finest strains with you."

Claire's knowledge of poetry was limited to Milton's "Paradise Lost" and Pollock's "Course of Time," for her father did not permit her to read indiscriminately, though there was a fine library at the Grange to which she had access.

Walter Thorne was a very fine reader, and when he raised himself to a sitting posture, and threw his whole soul into some of the finest passages in the volume he was so familiar with, the young girl listened in raptu-

rous silence, her eloquent face too truly reflecting the emotions of her heart.

His eyes wandered from the page to the fair face of this beautiful child of impulse; and every moment spent near her only served to enfeeble the good resolutions he had made. He felt the passion she had inspired growing more potent with each passing moment, and his self-indulgent nature prompted him to ask of himself why he should repress it?

Why should he not brave the anger of the father who had hitherto so despotically ruled him, and woo and win this lovely wayside flower, making her lawfully his own, and giving her the position she could so fitly adorn? He shrank from the thought of that other one to whom he was pledged, and persuaded himself that he would do well to place a barrier between himself and his betrothed which even his father would hesitate to break.

Colonel Thorne would relent, would forgive him for thwarting his wishes when he saw this lovely wild flower, the fairest and sweetest that man had ever plucked from its parent stem. He persuaded himself that he was weary of the world and its vanities; he believed that he could be contented to make his Eden in this retired valley, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," if by doing so he could only secure the companionship of the Eve who now made it so enchanting to him.

Walter Thorne was but twenty-three years old, but he had lived a fast life, and he was already sated with the pleasures which society offers to young, rich, and reckless men like himself. As Alexander wept for new worlds to conquer, he sighed for a new sensation

which would be powerful enough to arouse him from the apathetic dullness into which all things had fallen for him.

The freshness of his youth was gone; the glamour departed which once had glorified the world to his perceptions; and in that state of collapse, he had submitted to the will of his father with regard to the marriage he desired him to make.

He proposed to Agnes Willard, thinking she would grace his table and manage his house as well as any other, and he believed himself as much in love with her as he ever should be with any woman. But, after the engagement was made, he felt as if he must escape for a season from the bondage into which he had fallen, for his fiancée was exacting and expected from him a devotion he knew himself incapable of rendering.

He left her in tears, and set out on his vagrant wanderings as an artist, with the promise to return in October and take on himself the station of a Benedict. He knew that, in honor, he was bound to Miss Willard—that she was passionately attached to him; yet his heart had first awakened from its long slumber at the sight of the maid of the valley, and Thorne comprehended, for the first time, how ardently he was capable of loving.

The sweet and artless ways of Claire more strongly rivetted the chain he struggled to break, and, as he listened to her fresh young voice, he thought that to secure it as the music of his home would be to redeem him from dissipation—to bring him back to honor and purity, never dreaming that, after a few brief weeks of possession, he might grow weary of his toy so far as to

feel that the sacrifice of his future prospects would be too heavy a price to pay to retain it.

Thorne was still weak, and the effort of thinking tired him; so he suffered himself to be lulled to forgetfulness by the low, soft tones that vibrated on his ear—for Claire had taken up the volume when he laid it aside, and was reading to him from its pages.

He felt like one lapped in a delicious dream which he cared not to have broken; and, when the young girl looked up, his closed eyes and placid expression caused her to believe that he was sleeping. His hand had fallen by the side of the sofa, touching the folds of her dress; and, after gazing on him a few moments, she stooped and pressed her lips to it.

The touch was as light as the dropping of a rose-leaf, but it thrilled through the unstable man who now counterfeited sleep to see what she would next do. Claire arose, and stood looking down on him with an expression of tender sweetness—her eyes filled with tears, her bosom heaving with the new emotions that were struggling for utterance; and, unconsciously, she murmured:

“Oh, if he had died! If his noble form, his beautiful face had gone down to the dust, what would have been the feelings of those who love him—of those who have the *right* to do so? Ah me!”

The deep sigh that ended her words put to flight the wavering resolutions of Thorne to sacrifice his newborn passion and leave his interest in her unspoken. His expressive eyes flashed wide open, he started up, and throwing his arm around her slender form, with passionate utterance exclaimed:

“My darling, would it have given your tender heart

a pang if I had never risen from my sick bed? Speak, my own, my best beloved, for I would learn the truth; speak it frankly, Rosebud, for it may influence our whole future lives."

She extricated herself from his embrace, blushing rosy red, and naïvely asked:

"How can you love one who was a stranger to you but a few days ago? Don't talk so, please, Mr. Thorne, for my father says that a great and rich gentleman like you can be nothing to me. I—I was only pitying you because you look so pale and tired. You must not call me your darling, for I am only that to papa."

He sunk back with a clouded brow, and presently said:

"You are right, Rosebud. I am wild this morning, I believe. My head is not quite right yet; but I do love my pretty nurse right well—I wish you to believe and remember that let what will happen hereafter. Oh, how I hate the cold conventionalities of this life; they crush our best hopes, our noblest aspirations, leaving nothing better than husks to sustain it."

The bitterness of his tones alarmed her, but she gently said:

"After what I lately read to you, I thought you would feel that we have something more to do in this world than to care for ourselves. Let me read the history of the prodigal son, and you will see that his father gave him something better than husks to nurture him; and our Father will be as good to us, if we ask Him in the right spirit."

"Why what a quaint little Puritan it is!" exclaimed Thorne, with a laugh. "Only read on, my child, and I will listen as one enchanted to the soft music of

your tones. Good Heavens! why can't I talk common sense to you? My unbridled tongue will utter the language of gallantry, though I promised your father to be careful of what I said. Think that I am still delirious, my dear, and pardon the slips of the tongue of which I have been guilty."

She sat down again, and rather tremulously replied:

"I think I fully understand that you mean very little by what you say. It is the way of the people of the world, papa says, and I think he knows, for he was once a man of the world himself."

"Then M. Lapierre has not always lived in this secluded spot?"

"Oh, no; he was once rich and grand, but he lost everything and came away from France. For many years he has lived here, and I was born here. Of course, I am but a simple child, but I wish you would speak only the words of soberness and truth to me. Then I shall not be tempted to misunderstand you, you know."

"Very well—I promise to be on my guard—that shall be our compact. I thought your father superior to his present condition! Is he a political exile?"

She looked puzzled.

"I scarcely know what you mean; he is not an exile as you understand it, for he came to this country of his own free will."

"Oh, that answers my question. It was no difficulty with the government then that induced M. Lapierre to expatriate himself. Can you tell me what position he held in his native land?"

"It was a good one, I suppose, for he was a banker; but he failed through the mismanagement of one he

trusted. He gave up everything, and came to the United States to win his bread by any employment he could find. Since papa has told me this, I have loved him better, and respected him more than ever; but I am sorry he has been so unfortunate. He deserves something better than the petty employment that barely enables us to live. He says that he is unable to put anything by, and when he is taken from me I shall have to depend upon my own exertions for a support. It is sad for him to know that, but I pray to the good God to spare him to me, and enable me in time to do something for him."

Claire prattled on thus with the freedom of a child to the friend it has learned to trust, and the blending of simplicity and earnest thought fascinated her listener more deeply than ever. He presently said:

"I may be instrumental in placing your father in a position more worthy of his abilities. I will think of it, and see what can be done. At all events, Rose, both he and you will have a fast friend in the man whose life you have saved. Remember that, pretty one, and when you are praying, ask God to make him more worthy of your friendship."

"Ah, Mr. Thorne, do you, so good, so noble, think yourself less worthy than we are? I will indeed pray for your happiness—for your prosperity. I will ask that you shall be made a truly good and pious man, but you are more than worthy of our regard now."

With some emotion the young man said:

"You are a sweet and sinless angel yourself, Rosebud, and you judge me by yourself, as all pure natures are prone to do. But my experience has been different from yours; I have known sin and sorrow, and

have felt remorse for my own evil doings. There is a wide gulf between us—a gulf that must never be passed, for it would bring you into dark and turbid waters, that might forever wreck your bark of life. I will repress my own selfish yearnings and leave you as I found you, in 'maiden meditation, fancy free.'"

The listener scarcely understood his meaning, but she grew pale as she heard his words, and after a pause, softly said:

"We are all sinners in the sight of infinite purity; but to comfort us our Father has said: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow.' Yours can never have been of that kind, you have a tender conscience, or you would not feel as you do now."

Thorne was touched by her simple faith in him, but he shocked her by laughing aloud, and she recoiled from him with a dismayed expression on her fair face.

In a penitent tone he said:

"Pardon me, sweet saint. My laughter was out of place, but I was but mocking myself as I listened to your simple words. Tender conscience indeed. Ah me, I am afraid that I have hitherto turned a deaf ear to the whisperings of mine; but I intend to try and be a better man from this day forth, I promise it to you, to myself, so read me the prodigal son, and I will try to profit by the lesson it inculcates."

With quiet gravity the young girl obeyed, but she averted her face from him, and there was the sound of stifled tears in her voice, which went to the heart of the listener. He was making an effort to do good, but he found it very difficult to walk in the straight path of rectitude, where this lovely creature was con-

cerned. He felt his pulse quicken, his brain whirling, as he thought:

"How easily I could make her love me to that degree that she would sacrifice home, father, everything for my sake. Yet I dare not—I dare not."

When Claire finished the parable, she suddenly arose and said:

"You have had reading enough for one day, for you are looking tired and flushed. I must go to Mammy Betty now, but I will look in on you after a while, and at eleven I will send her with your luncheon."

"Going to leave me all alone, Rose? I understood your father to say that you would be my companion till he returns. My own thoughts bore me; I entreat that you will come back as soon as possible and sing to me. I heard you caroling to your bird this morning, and I thought your voice fresher and sweeter than his, though he is called the Virginia nightingale."

With some embarrassment, she replied:

"I do not feel as if I can sing to-day, sir; but if you wish it, I will bring papa's violin and play for you."

"Do you really play on the violin? What a queer instrument for a lady."

"Do you think so? It is the best one we have about the house, for the piano is old, and jingles sometimes, so I coaxed papa to teach me how to use his instrument. I cannot play as *he* does, but perhaps I can amuse you."

"Bring it by all means. It will, at least, be something new to see the bow handled by a pretty girl."

Claire left the room, and Thorne gazed after her retreating form with love-lit eyes. She did not look

back, or, young and inexperienced as she was, she must have understood the meaning of that fervent glance. He turned his face to the wall and groaned:

"Oh, for the power to rule my own destiny! Yet why should I not? My father has land, and gold; far more than I shall ever need, and I am his only child. He is a stern and resolute man; but he would scarcely cast me off entirely if I were to break the fetters with which he has bound me, and secure the one bright spirit I have ever coveted as my very own. With this sweet guardian-angel to watch over me, I should become a noble and true man; as the husband of Agnes Willard I shall be—God knows what! I shall recoil from her; I shall treat her badly, I know I shall, for there are deep wells of bitterness in my nature that will overflow upon the woman I may be forced to accept as my wife."

"What evil fate sent me hither? Had I never met this enchanting creature, I should have accepted the destiny that has been settled for me, and have passed my life as tamely and respectably as most men do. *Now*, it may not be. Having seen Claire, all that is good and true within me bows down before her, and offers homage to her. The very consciousness that she is near me, breathes a subtle happiness through every fibre of my being—the touch of her hand is intoxication—the tones of her voice enchantment. Oh, this is the veriest madness; and what must it end in to her, to me? God help me, for I have no strength left—no power to struggle against this infatuation."

He lay back with closed eyes and compressed lips, trying to calm himself before the return of Claire, yet inwardly fretting her delay, for she was absent more than half an hour.



At the end of that time she came in, carrying the violin in her hand, and with a bright smile, said :

"You think this an awkward instrument for me to manage, and perhaps it is ; but I am very partial to it nevertheless. It is more like the human voice than any other, and therefore it must be the most perfect of all. Papa has taken great pains with me, and I can play quite creditably, I assure you."

"I do not doubt it, but the horrid scrapings that puts the thing in tune always jars on my nerves."

"In your present condition I thought that might annoy you, so I tuned it perfectly before I came in. Will you have gay or sad music ?"

"Which do you prefer ?"

"Oh, I like either, according to my mood. But you need something to brighten you up, so I shall play 'Molly put the kettle on,' with variations which *mon père* has composed. It will be appropriate, too, for Mammy is preparing a cup of tea for you, with something more substantial."

Without giving him time to reply, Claire struck into the gay air she had named, moving to and fro, unconsciously keeping time with it by the movements of her small feet. Thorne thought that he had never seen any creature half so attractive, as her face brightened and her motions quickened with the strain. He had thought the instrument awkward and unsuited to one of her sex ; but the grace with which she wielded the bow, the negligent ease with which she held the violin, induced him now to believe that few things could be more attractive than a lovely girl playing on a fiddle.

Claire executed the long variations without a false

note, and, at the end of the performance, Thorne cried out :

"Bravo ! No professor could have done it better. I declare, Rosebud, you are a marvel of grace and talent. Do you know that you are a musical genius !"

"Do you really think that, Mr. Thorne ? It is good news to me ; for if it is so, I can teach music some day and help papa along. I so often wish that I could do something to assist him !"

"Dear child, you shall yet be the means of placing him in a better position than he now occupies ; yes, I promise you that it shall be so. Since M. Lapierre understands business affairs, it is a shame that he should bury himself in this lovely valley. He shall enter the world again, find remunerative employment, and win for himself as good a position as the one he has lost."

"Oh, if that could ever be !" and she clasped her hands, and sank on a seat, eagerly regarding his face, as if to see if he really meant what he had said. Thorne gravely replied :

"It *shall* be, Claire, if he will only listen to me. I believe that I shall be able to help him forward. My father possesses wealth and influence, and I am sure that I can induce him to use both in the service of the man to whom I owe my life. At all events, no efforts on my part shall be wanting, and I hope that I shall yet see you placed in the sphere to which, by right of grace and beauty, you belong."

"It is not myself I am thinking of, Mr. Thorne. No—no—it is of the best, and dearest of fathers. If he could only see a prospect of providing for me, he would be so happy, and I—I should ever be grateful

to the friend who—who will do so much for him. I would regard him almost in the light of a brother.”

The last word came from her lips with a little hesitation in its utterance, and Thorne looked radiant. He understood women, and the heart of this untutored child lay bare before him; he felt the exalting assurance that her destiny would soon be at his disposal, for he read in the tremulous tones of her voice, in the troubled light of her soft eyes, the secret of which she was not aware herself.

He knew that a few more days of such unreserved companionship would bring to her young heart the fever that devoured his own; would secure to him what he so passionately desired, the love of a creature as pure and unselfish as she was beautiful. He arose from his sofa, and gaily said:

“I feel almost renovated by your exhilarating music. I begin to believe that, like those bitten by the tarantula, your magic strains have wrought on me a complete cure. Give me the violin, Rosebud, for I can play upon it passably. Will you dance for me? I long to see the poetry of motion illustrated by you.”

With perfect simplicity she at once arose, and said:

“Of course I will if you wish it, for papa told me to amuse you the best way I could. I know many fancy dances, but my own favorite is the Cachucha. Shall I bring my castanets?”

“Pray do; it will be enchanting to see you rival even the divine Elssler herself.”

Claire sped gaily away, and after a few moments returned wearing a pair of high Polish boots made of red morocco, which fitted to perfection. She whirled rapidly into the room bearing the castanets above her head;

Thorne struck into the tune, watching the gracefully poised figure before him, wondering if any creature was ever more bewitching or more unconscious of her rare power to charm.

The sparkling face of the dancer varied with every change in the melody, and her movements seemed but echoes to the strain, so perfect was the time she kept. Toward the close of the dance the musician played so rapidly that Claire threw herself on a chair breathless, and laughing. After a few moments, she said:

“I think that is enough for one day. A few more moments would have turned it into a wild witch dance. I must rest now, and here at the most opportune moment, comes mammy with your lunch.”

Her words were truer than she thought, for if Betty had not come in at that crisis, Thorne would have forgotten his promise to her father; ignored his own half-formed resolutions, to remove himself from the glamour of her presence, and have given utterance to the passionate words of love that thronged to his lips.

The old woman drew up the fine table, spread a napkin over it, and placed upon it the tempting viands she had prepared. There was but one cup and plate, and Thorne said:

“So you intend that I shall eat alone, Auntie? Now that I am well enough to sit up, I expect some one to do the honors for me. You must be hungry after the exercise you have taken, Rosebud, so pray assist me to demolish those birds, and that mound of toast.”

“’Taint a bit more’n you ought ter eat yerself,” snapped the old woman, “an’ ef Miss Claire wants anything herself, she knows where she can always git it.”



"My dear Mrs. Betty, don't insist on impossibilities. I could not eat half the nice things you have set before me, so you can save your other provisions, and permit your young lady to partake of my lunch. I shall sternly refuse to touch a morsel unless she sits at the table and pours out my tea."

"She can do dat ef she chooses, caze I aint no power to 'vent her; but if she was *my* darter, she shouldn't be a settin' of herself up to do whatever you axed her, nohow. My name aint Mrs. Betty nuther; I'm only Betty, and I'm a honest 'oman what looks sharp arter what she's bound to see ter. Dis 'ere chile had better come wi' me, for *I* shan't be a fillin' of her head wi' all sorts o' fool nonsense. I does wonder at de marster—I does—a goin' off to the Grange, and leavin' de chile like a lamb in the wolf's clutches."

Claire arose and stood before her with flashing eyes, and dilating nostrils, and Thorne saw that her own words of herself were true; that she was not always the gentle and yielding creature he had imagined her. In a low voice full of concentrated passion, she spoke:

"How dare you address my father's guest in so insulting a manner? Go at once and bring me a plate and cup. I shall share Mr. Thorne's luncheon, and we can dispense with your services till you are in a more respectful humor. My father knows that I am quite capable of taking care of myself, and in any case, he would hardly delegate to you the watch of a *duenna*."

Betty sullenly answered:

"I don't know what dat is, Miss Claire, but I'll go as you tells me. I wash my han's of all dat's to come in dis here readin' and dancin'. *I* knows suffin o' de

worl' ef you don't—you innercent babe dat you is; but ef de furnace is open an' de fires kindled, *I* can't 'vent you from walkin' in it, so de bref of de hot air will burn up all dat's happy an sweet widin' you. Mark my words chile, an' see ef dey don't come true."

"I do not understand you, but I comprehend very well that you intend to be impertinent and intrusive. Bring me what I require, and say no more, if you please."

She looked like a young queen, her lover thought, as she turned proudly from the old woman and sat down opposite to himself, with a brilliant flush upon her rounded cheek. When Betty had left the room, she looked up at him with a wavering smile, and said:

"Pray excuse mammy's rudeness. She means well, but she is brusque, and I lost my temper at her absurd interference. I hope this little scene will not spoil your appetite. When I have waited on you, I must go and make friends with the old woman, for she has been with us ever since I can remember. She means well, though she takes too much on herself sometimes."

By this time, Betty had returned with the things for which she had been sent. She overheard the last words of Claire, and darting a spiteful glance at Thorne, said:

"Don't 'pology for *me*, Miss Claire. *I* ain't 'shamed o' what I don said, for it's God's truffle, as you'll find out some o' dese days. You's a gettin' in de deep waters o' temptation, an' you'd better say de Lord's pra'r an' think o' de meanin' o' de words—dat's all I've got to say."

Before any reply could be made she was out of the room, closing the door behind her with a bang.

"What a quaint old creature," said Thorne, but he felt uncomfortable, and it was several moments before he recovered his usual equanimity. But Claire exerted herself to make him forget this little scene, and they had a merry time together, laughing and talking over the table. He declared the tea to be nectar, and again called her Hebe. She laughed, and said:

"I know nothing about heathen mythology, but I looked in papa's classical dictionary to find out who Hebe was, after you called me by her name. She was the handmaid of the gods I discovered."

"Yes—and so charming that even Juno was jealous of her. I feel like Jupiter enthroned, I assure you."

"Yes, on a shabby old sofa, in a flowered dressing-gown. *You* might pass for a god, perhaps, but your surroundings will not carry out the delusion."

"I feel as happy as a god at any rate, and I scarcely think that Hebe herself was as fair as *my* cupbearer. But I will be discreet—I will not justify old Betty's fears by talking what she would stigmatize as 'fool nonsense.'"

"No, you must go to sleep now. I shall darken the room and leave you to repose, for we have talked nonsense enough for one morning."

Thorne watched her as she gathered up the things upon the table, and placed them on the waiter. Betty came in looking sulky, and took them away; and in spite of his entreaties not to be left alone, Claire closed the curtains and went away.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A SUDDEN TURN OF AFFAIRS.

**A**FTER thinking over the late scene, Walter Thorne through sheer weariness, fell into an uneasy slumber, which was broken by the sound of a carriage driven to the door. He half arose from his recumbent position and looked dreamily toward the entrance, wondering who could be coming to break the tranquil repose of everything around him.

M. Lapierre ushered into the apartment a lady, followed by a little girl about nine years of age. In his quick way the old Frenchman said:

"How are you by this time, Mr. Thorne? I have brought you a visitor. Mrs. Courtney, of the Grange, was kind enough to become interested in my account of you and your wonderful escape, and she proposed herself to come and see you."

Thorne made as courtly a bow as was possible under the circumstances, and said:

"I am sure that I am grateful for Mrs. Courtney's kindness. Indeed I feel quite honored by receiving the first call from a lady."

In his heart he felt the deepest annoyance that an observant and worldly-wise woman should come, probably to put an end to the sweet love idyl he was beginning to find so entrancing, but his manner was that of the most polished courtier.

Mrs. Courtney came toward him with the quiet grace of perfect good-breeding, and he saw that the refined sweetness of her fair face was but the reflex of the

spirit within. She was a tall, well-formed woman, still wearing widow's weeds, though her husband had been dead many years, and they set off the delicate fairness of her complexion, blonde hair and clear blue eyes with much greater effect than colors could have done.

Though the mother of a son who had numbered nineteen years, Mrs. Courtney was still a most attractive and elegant looking woman. In a voice as refined as her appearance was pleasing, she addressed the invalid :

"Pray do not attempt to rise, Mr. Thorne. My old friend, M. Lapierre, has been telling me of your marvellous escape, and I became so much interested in the hero of such an adventure, that I determined to come and see you. It was lucky for you that our friend possessed such skill in medicine, or your fever might have gone hard with you."

Thorne, in spite of his usual self-possession, was embarrassed and annoyed, and he could find nothing better to say than :

"I am sure I am much obliged to M. Lapierre for his kindness : and, to you, Madam, for the interest you are good enough to express in myself. As to my heroic qualities, the less said about them the better, I am afraid. The least courageous creature will do battle for life. I confess the struggle tasked all my resources, but I was fortunate enough to win. Thanks to my kind host, I shall soon be able to resume my wanderings, but they can be to little purpose now, as I was unfortunate enough to lose my portfolio and its contents, and I suppose they were swallowed up in the Lady's Tarn."

She smiled and replied :

"It was partly to inform you of their safety that I came hither, Mr Thorne. Let me explain : one of my negroes was sent on an errand beyond the valley on Saturday. He chose the short cut through the pass, and he found lying against the large boulder that stands above the tarn a portfolio with an oil skin cover over it. I know it is yours, for your name is written on the backs of several of the sketches. The water has scarcely injured them at all, and I should have brought them with me if I had not made up my mind that you are to return with me to the Grange, and be nursed back to health there. I hope you will not decline my invitation, for my artistic taste is such that it will afford me much pleasure to claim one of the craft as my guest for a season."

Thorne flushed, looked more annoyed than before, and said :

"You are too good, Mrs. Courtney ; but—really, I feel unable to exchange my quarters just at present, and I find myself so well off here at present, that I think I had better remain, at least till I regain my strength. M. Lapierre has not yet dismissed me as a patient, and grateful as I am to you, I think I had rather stay with those who have taken such good care of me."

Mrs. Courtney earnestly replied :

"Believe me, the change I propose will be better for all concerned, Mr. Thorne. M. Lapierre comes to my house every day, and he can watch over your convalescence as well there as here. I insist that you have no scruples on the score of our recent acquaintance ; and it will be no trouble to me to receive an invalid. I have an experienced nurse in my family, and your room is already prepared for your reception. It will

be a pleasure to me to entertain you, and it will be far more convenient to me to have a sick guest on my hands, than it is to my friends here."

Lapierre had left the room in search of his daughter, followed by the little girl, and rightly interpreting the clouded face of the young man, Mrs. Courtney chose to place before him what she hoped would prove a conclusive reason for his removal.

Thorne coldly replied:

"You are very kind, Madam, but I must say that I should prefer remaining here a few days longer. I shall give as little trouble as possible, and I can offer to my host such an equivalent as he will not refuse to accept. To *you* I could offer nothing of the kind, and I cannot consent to thrust myself on the charity of a perfect stranger. Accident threw me on the kindness of M. Lapierre, but with you it would be different."

Mrs. Courtney regarded him with a penetrating glance; she presently asked with extreme gravity:

"Can you not divine my motive, sir, for insisting on carrying you off to the Grange in spite of such opposition as you may offer?"

Thorne looked up, but his eyes fell before the clear orbs that were fastened upon his face.

"I—I am at a loss to understand you, Madam," was the evasive reply.

"Then I shall be perfectly frank with you, sir. M. Lapierre has a young and very lovely daughter, who is just at the most susceptible age. Claire is too attractive for her own good, I am afraid, and she is far too inexperienced to know her own danger before it is too late. I take a deep interest in her, for she is my god-daughter, and also a distant relative of my chil-

dren. As soon as M. Lapierre related his story and gave me a personal description of yourself, I decided that you must remove to my house. It is improper for a young girl like Claire to be left to nurse and amuse a young man as attractive as yourself; and M. Lapierre's engagements must take him from home many hours of every day. *Now*, you will consent to go back with me, Mr. Thorne, for you are too much of a gentleman to abuse the hospitality of this good old man by trifling with his daughter. Excuse my plainness of speech, but it is best to be open with each other under the circumstances."

Thorne arose and, with heat, exclaimed:

"I find you too frank, Mrs. Courtney, and I scarcely know how to receive such insinuations. Do you suppose I could be villain enough to act dishonorably toward such an angel of sweetness and beauty as Claire Lapierre? I admit that I have felt the force of her attractions, and I will be as frank with you as you have chosen to be with me. I have made up my mind to the course I will pursue, and nothing shall turn me from it. My father is a man of high position and great wealth; I am his only child, and must eventually inherit the latter. The object of my choice is well connected, so there can be no objection on the score of family; and as to fortune, Claire is so highly endowed in other respects that my father will hardly insist on that. You are the friend of this old gentleman and his daughter; Mrs. Courtney, and in your hands I think I may venture to place my cause. I can elevate your young protégée to a brilliant position, and I pledge you my honor to remove such difficulties as may be in the way of our speedy union."

Mrs. Courtney listened to this abrupt avowal with extreme surprise. She very gravely asked :

"Are you quite sure that your father would consent to your marriage with a girl in so obscure a position as that of Claire ? I scarcely think so young a man as yourself at liberty to dispose of his hand without first consulting his friends. It is but a few days since you were received here, and the passion you have so suddenly conceived for my young friend may die out as speedily as it sprang into existence."

"That is impossible, for her very presence is joy and life to me. The consent of my father must be won ; it shall be, for nothing shall stand between myself and the enchanting being I have already learned to love with all the fervent passion of my heart."

Mrs. Courtney reflected a few moments, and then said :

"You seem to be deeply in earnest, Mr. Thorne, and I will not question the statements you have made to me ; but you must be aware that a father cannot give up his child to a stranger without making such inquiry into his antecedents as will assure him as far as possible that she will be happy and respected in her new estate."

"Of course I will submit to any inquiry M. Lapierre may desire to make."

"He will have ample time for that, for Claire is yet too young to marry. She is not fifteen, and two years at least must elapse before you would be permitted to claim her as your wife."

"*Two years !*" exclaimed the lover in an accent of despair. "Two ages of doubt, fear, and separation ! My dear Madam, say two months of delay and I will

consent to wait that long for my happiness, but not beyond it. I can remain in the valley till September, but when I leave it Claire must be my companion."

Mrs. Courtney smiled faintly, but she decisively said :

"That will be quite impossible. M. Lapierre will never consent to give up his daughter at so tender an age ; and, moreover, if she is to fill a high position, she must complete her imperfect education. Claire has had few advantages, but I shall do all that is in my power to afford her more. I have always intended to do so when she was old enough to be sent away to a boarding-school. I have not hitherto spoken of it to her father, because I have a prejudice against sending a girl from her own home till she is mature enough to have some character of her own and not be too much influenced by her new associations. Besides, Claire is so great an idol with her father that I believed it would be difficult to win his consent to a separation from her."

"I am sincerely glad to hear the last statement, Madam ; for Claire, in her sweet and guileless simplicity, is far more attractive than the finest model young lady ever turned out of a fashionable school. I entreat that you will lay aside such a plan for her benefit and, in its place, win M. Lapierre's consent to an early union between his daughter and myself. Girls often marry as young—nay, judging from your appearance, you must have married at a very early age yourself, for I have been told that you are the mother of a grown-up son."

The lady blushed slightly as she replied :

"Yes, I gave my hand to my husband when I was

little older than Claire now is ; but I was an orphan and not happily situated, that was my excuse."

"I do not think you needed one, Mrs. Courtnay, and I am sure that you never had cause to regret your early marriage."

Tears sprang to her eyes, and in a low voice she said :

"No, never. For ten years of my life I was a happy wife. My first great sorrow was the loss of my husband."

"Then you will induce M. Lapierre to permit his daughter to follow your example, for I swear to you that I will be as tender and true to her as Mr. Courtnay was to yourself."

And, in making this assertion, the infatuated lover believed he spoke the simple truth.

Carried away by the violence of the passion he had so suddenly conceived, Walter Thorne believed it would be easy to overcome impossibilities ; to make the way clear before him in spite of all the obstacles that lay in his path. To win Claire, he thought he would brave and triumph over every difficulty.

After a pause, Mrs. Courtnay gravely said :

"This is a strange interview between two persons who have so recently met as you and I. You must give me time to reflect on what you have said, Mr. Thorne, and to decide as to what will be best for the happiness of my god-child. Of course, I must consider her first for I stand almost in the place of a mother to her."

"That is just enough, Madam. But I hope that no restraint will be placed on my intercourse with the object of my choice ; and that I may now be permitted to remain the guest of M. Lapierre. When my

health is perfectly restored, I will, with pleasure, spend a few days at the Grange ; but just now I think I shall recover more rapidly if I am not removed against my will."

"I do not know as to that. The question of your stay must be settled by M. Lapierre ; for, of course, I am at liberty to reveal to him what you have just said to me, and thus pave the way for you to speak to him yourself."

"Use your own discretion, dear Madam. When I place before the old gentleman all the advantages to be secured by my speedy union with his daughter, I dare to flatter myself that he will not be so blind to her interests as to refuse to give her to me as my wife. I shall write without delay to my native town, and have forwarded to me such proofs of what I have stated of my position and prospects, as will satisfy both you and him of the truth of my assertions."

"You must settle that with M. Lapierre ; if he consents to receive your proposal favorably, you can remain here till you are stronger ; but then I shall expect you to come to me ; remember that."

Thorne could only bow his acquiescence, for M. Lapierre came in again, followed by Claire, to whom Julia was fondly clinging. She held up a bouquet, and said :

"Mamma, see what beautiful flowers Claire has gathered for me. Shan't she go home with us when we take the strange gentleman away?"

"But he is not going with us, Julia. He says that he is not strong enough to be removed."

As Mrs. Courtnay spoke, she glanced keenly from father to daughter to see the effect of this announce-



ment. A cloud came over the face of the former, but the flash of joy that beamed for an instant on the face of Claire assured her that already had this stranger made a deep impression on her young heart. As she looked again at him, she was scarcely surprised at this, for he was singularly handsome, and distinguished in appearance, and he had already avowed himself passionately in love with her."

Lapierre approached the sofa on which his guest was now sitting up, and quietly said:

"I think you are quite well enough, Mr. Thorne, to risk so short a drive as the one from here to the Grange. You will be much more comfortable there; and, inhospitable as it may seem, I must say that it will be best for you to accept the courteous invitation of Mrs. Courtney."

With a faint smile, Thorne replied:

"I appreciate Mrs. Courtney's kindness very highly, I assure you; but I find myself so well off here that I prefer not to change my quarters just yet. I promise to encroach upon your hospitality as short a time as possible, M. Lapierre; and as soon as I have regained sufficient strength to walk over to the Grange, I will relieve you of my presence."

Lapierre's face brightened at this assurance, and he more cordially said:

"So long as you need the shelter of my roof, and the exercise of my skill in your behalf, both are at your service."

He drew nearer to him, and, in a low tone, added:

"You should understand why I seem to violate the rules of hospitality in your case. It is not seemly that you should be left to the care of a young girl like Claire, while I am compelled to be away."

"I comprehend that, Monsieur; but no harm shall come to your daughter through that association, I pledge you my honor."

The speaker frankly extended his hand, while he looked clearly into the eyes of the old man, and victimized as Lapierre had already been by placing too much confidence in others he obeyed the dictates of his own honorable mind, and gave implicit trust to the assurance he had received. He accepted the proffered hand, and then turned towards Mrs. Courtney, who drew him into the portico to speak of the strange declaration his young guest had made.

Thorne called Julia to his side, and was soon in animated conversation with her, in which she confidentially informed him that Claire was her cousin, ever so many times removed, but she loved her as dearly as if she were her sister, and wished she could always have her at the Grange to play with and pet her. But her mamma had promised that some day Claire should live there, for M. Lapierre often talked of going to some distant country, and then her pretty cousin would come to stay with her mamma and herself for all the rest of her life. Would not that be nice?

The listener smiled indulgently on her prattle, and said: "Very nice for you, little lady, but not so pleasant for somebody else I could name;" and he glanced toward Claire to see the effect of his words. He saw that her cheek flushed slightly, but she would not look toward him, and with widely opened eyes, Julia shrewdly asked:

"Who is it that wants to take my Rosebud away from me? Is it you? But you can't have her, for I want her, and you have not loved as long as I have."

Claire turned rapidly toward the talkative child, and exclaimed: "What are you saying there, *enfant terrible*! Come to me, Julia; you will tire Mr. Thorne, and annoy him."

"No I shan't, as long as I talk about you," retorted the precocious young lady. "He as good as told me he wants to take you away from us all. Didn't you, now, Mr. Thorne?"

"Who could blame me for my presumption, if such were the fact," was the laughing response; but Claire, with a displeased look, drew the little girl from his side, and in spite of his pathetic entreaties not to be left alone, took her from the room.

In the meantime Mrs. Courtney and Lapierre had walked out, and stood beneath the shade of the trees, talking earnestly together. The face of the father was pale and disturbed, as he said:

"That was a very singular confidence to pass between yourself and this young man, in the first hour of your meeting, Madam. I cannot understand how he became so communicative to an utter stranger. Nor am I at all pleased with the sudden avowal he has made."

"I did not suppose you would be, and I was as much surprised at his frankness as you seem to be. When he saw I had determined on taking him away with me, he came at once to the point. He seems very much in earnest, and I really think he has fallen desperately in love with Claire. Of course it is for you to judge of the propriety of encouraging his passion. I spoke of Claire's extreme youth, but he set that objection aside, declaring that it is his most earnest desire to elevate her at once to the position of his wife. He offered to

satisfy you in every respect, and to prove to you that he is the heir to immense wealth; but he will speak with you himself on this subject, as soon as you afford him the opportunity."

M. Lapierre leaned on the gate as if to sustain himself, and his slender form shook with the emotions that arose within him. At length, in a hoarse voice, he said:

"But for one thing, I would send him from my house, and never permit Claire to see him again: but—but the time draws near when she will be left alone in the world. Alone, and in deep sorrow, poor child!"

"What can you mean, M. Lapierre? You surely do not apprehend any evil to yourself. You are as strong and well as usual."

With a look of inexpressible weariness and sadness on his sallow face, the old Frenchman regarded her a few moments, and then slowly said:

"A little while, and the earth will know me no longer. For four generations no male member of my family has lived to complete his sixtieth year. I am drawing near that anniversary, and I have already had my warning."

Mrs. Courtney looked at him as if she thought his mind wandering. She hurriedly asked:

"What delusion is this, M. Lapierre? I thought you too clear-headed a man to put faith in such nonsense. You are strong and well, and you should not suffer your imagination to run away with your sober senses."

He dreamily shook his head.

"I have not; I remember remonstrating in the same way with my father when he told me of his summons,

but when it came the third time, he went, and so shall I. I would evade my doom if I could—but it is impossible.”

“In Heaven’s name! what are you talking of?” exclaimed his companion, growing pale. “Explain the nature of this superstition, for it can be nothing else.”

“Perhaps it is, but it is fatal, for all that, to those of my race. I have twice dreamed that my father appeared at my bedside, holding in his hands a branch of immortelles, which he lightly laid upon my breast, saying: ‘Come to me: when I touch you with this the third time, you will have everlasting life.’ He has appeared to me twice lately, with an interval of a few weeks between his visits; the third one will be fatal to me.”

The tone of sad conviction in the speaker’s voice made Mrs. Courtnay shiver, though she tried to conceal from him the emotion she felt. She quietly said:

“Your system must be out of order, or you would not have such dreadful visions. ‘Physician heal thyself,’ for I am sure you have the skill to do it.”

“Ah, if I had the power, how gladly would I exorcise this dreary phantom, but I cannot. I have not told you that for generations this warning has been sent to us. The father summons his son, and two months are allowed him in which to set his house in order, then the curtain falls on the scene of struggle and sorrow through which mortals are doomed to pass. But for my daughter, I should be willing to go; but her helplessness, her dependence on others when I am taken from her, are constantly before me. Perhaps, in his infinite mercy, the *Bon Dieu* has opened before

me a way to provide for her, and console her for my loss by sending this young stranger at this time. He can give her a home, and a future worthy of her beauty and sweetness; but she is too young to become his wife, and I fear his passion is far too sudden to prove lasting. If I listen to his proposal in my anxiety to secure her worldly welfare, I may but give her over to lasting wretchedness.”

“If such are your feelings, then send Mr. Thorne away as soon as possible, and if your presentiments prove true, give Claire to me. I have the best claim on her, and I promise to do the part of a mother by her. But I hope, in spite of your dreary fancies, that you will yet live many years to smile over the painful delusion from which you are now suffering.”

“Would to God it might be so, but I know too well that I must soon leave my child. But I can trust her to you, dear and noble friend, to whom I already owe so much, and I have no words to thank you for your generous offer. If my darling cares for this young man, she can remain with you till he can honorably claim her with the consent of his friends. I could not permit her to enter his family without that, and I am not quite satisfied with Mr. Thorne’s precipitate declaration. He has known us too brief a time to speak of love and marriage: yet if my darling can be happy with him I shall not suffer my objections to stand in the way of her settlement in life.”

Thus wavering between his desire to know that his daughter’s future was provided for before he passed away himself and his fear that her lover was scarcely trustworthy, Lapierre talked on for some time longer with Mrs. Courtnay. It was finally agreed between

them that Thorne was to be permitted to speak for himself, and his future father-in-law would decide as to what should be the fate of his wooing.

Had not M. Lapierre believed that his hold on life was so feeble, he would never, for an instant, have listened to the proposal of this stranger to woo and win his daughter; but impressed with the fatal idea that a few more weeks must be the limit of his earthly life, he was ready to grasp at anything that promised a fairer future for the object of his most tender solicitude, than dependence even on so kind a friend as Mrs. Court-  
nay.

They at length returned to the house, M. Lapierre looking paler than usual, and Mrs. Court-  
nay very thoughtful, for his earnestness had deeply and sadly impressed her, in spite of her incredulity. She could detect no signs of decay in him; he looked as alert and strong as at any time during the previous ten years of his life, yet in some way the conviction had entered her mind that he spoke the truth, and that his days were numbered.

Claire, followed by Julia, returned, bearing in her hand a small open basket lined with fresh green leaves, on which luscious-looking peaches were placed. These were offered with a grace that was all her own, and while they peeled and ate them, the conversation became general and animated. The look of care passed for a season from the old man's face, and he spoke and laughed as gaily as the others.

Mrs. Court-  
nay at length arose to go, and she smilingly said to Thorne:

"I waive my invitation for a few days, Mr. Thorne, but on Thursday I shall expect you to dine at the

Grange with M. Lapierre and his daughter. By that time you will be sufficiently recovered to drive over, and I will send my carriage for you. In the meantime, I will restore your portfolio to you if you wish it, but I shall be glad if you will leave it in my possession till you can reclaim it in person. I should like to copy some of the sketches it contains, for one of the resources of my solitude is a fondness for drawing."

"You will only honor me too highly, Mrs. Court-  
nay, by using any thing my portfolio contains. If you will select such views as you prefer, I will with pleasure make a duplicate of them for you during my stay in the Happy Valley. The only use I have for my productions is to give them to my friends, and I shall be but too happy if you will permit me to class you among them."

"Many thanks; with such a bribe as that, of course I will consent," was the smiling reply, as she extended her hand in farewell.

Thorne pressed it respectfully, and after kissing Claire, she went out to her carriage, attended by M. Lapierre. It was a low-hung pony-phaeton, which she usually drove herself, with the attendance of a young negro boy. As she gathered the reins in her hands, she spoke in a low tone to M. Lapierre.

"Make every effort to rid yourself of the fantasy that oppresses you; for such presentiments often bring about their own fulfilment. In any event, remember that Claire will be safe under my guardianship."

"I am quite certain of that; would that I could do as you advise; but I feel that the decree has gone forth and I can do nothing to change it. Let us not refer to this subject again; but remember my words: the twenty-fifth of August will rise on Claire doubly orphaned."

"I wish you could be induced to think otherwise, or to forget to number the days as they pass."

"It would make no difference; the result would be the same," was the grave response; and unwilling to tell him what she thought of his hallucination, Mrs. Courtnay gave a sharp cut to her ponies, and rapidly drove away.

With slow steps, Lapierre returned to the house to find his daughter standing beside the sofa, with her hand clasped in that of Thorne, and her averted face alternately flushed and pale with emotion. She was saying:

"You must not talk to me in this strain, Mr. Thorne. My father would be seriously displeased, and here he comes to speak for himself."

To the surprise of Claire, M. Lapierre only smiled faintly, and sorrowfully, as he said:

"Leave me alone with our guest, my daughter; I have something to say to him, and afterwards I will speak with you."

Thorne relinquished the hand he held, and Claire fled from the room like a frightened fawn. She sought the seclusion of her own retreat, where she threw herself into one of the large chairs, and burst into a passion of tears.

But they were not tears of sorrow; for when she wiped them away, a smile of tender triumph wreathed her rosy lips, as she murmured:

"He loves me—he loves me! This noble, handsome hero would win me to be his, though I am but a simple, untutored child. Oh, joy! oh, happiness! But what will my father say to him, I wonder. Ah, he cannot—he will not refuse to listen to his eloquent pleadings.

At that moment M. Lapierre was listening with extreme gravity to the passionate avowal of undying affection for her, made by her lover. Since Walter Thorne had so precipitately made up his mind to make Claire his own at all hazards to his future prospects, he determined to carry things with a high hand. He persuaded himself that so advantageous an offer would not be lightly declined by the impoverished old Frenchman: and if he insisted on an immediate marriage, he could himself name the day that would give Claire into his guardianship.

M. Lapierre listened in utter silence till he had fully expressed his wishes and intentions, and then quietly said:

"My daughter is very dear and precious to me, Mr. Thorne; yet I am surprised at the violent passion you express for her, seeing that a week ago you were not aware that such a being was in existence. Such sudden prepossessions are apt to resemble the torrent that bore you into our valley. If you will look from the door you will see that it is now exhausted, and ripples in a thread of silver over the rocks; and I greatly fear that such may be the history of your sudden penchant for my child. Should it prove so, think what her fate would be if I permitted you to win her inexperienced heart."

Thorne listened to him impatiently.

"Have you so completely forgotten your own youth M. Lapierre, that you can make no allowance for the impetuosity of mine? I may have been precipitate in my declaration, but I am deeply in earnest. I love Claire with a fervor that cannot lessen; she is my first love, for I have never felt the slightest preference

for any other woman. Give her to me, and I will make her happy—I swear it to you. I shall inherit wealth. I can at once place her in a better position than the one she now occupies, and she shall share all I may ever possess. I entreat you to yield to my prayer, and let me claim her as my own without unnecessary delay.”

The sallow face of the father flushed, as he haughtily replied :

“I cannot surrender my daughter to a stranger of whom I know nothing, save that he has the bearing and education of a gentleman. I must know something of your past life, Mr. Thorne, before I consent to receive you as her suitor ; and I must have the absolute certainty that she will be received by your friends as the daughter of Armand Lapierre should be, even if she brings no fortune to her husband. Are your parents both living, and if so, will they be likely to regard with approval the disinterested marriage you are so ready to contract.”

“My mother has been dead many years, and I am the only child of my father. He is extremely anxious for me to marry ; and I am certain he will gladly receive Claire as his daughter. I do not ask you to give her to me without every assurance that I have spoken the truth to you concerning myself. I will write to L——, in Pennsylvania, which is my native town, and obtain from there such vouchers of what I have stated as must satisfy you. A few weeks will suffice for that, and then you will give me my bride.”

The father shook his head.

“Not quite so soon as that, my young friend, for Claire is too young to assume the responsibilities of

marriage. If my scruples are set at rest, I will permit you to visit my daughter in the character of a lover ; but for a year, at least, your union must be deferred. That probation will test the strength of your feelings, and enable her to understand her own. Hasty marriages are often bitterly repented ; and it is my wish to save both you and her from such a fate as that. I think this is conceding enough for the present, and you must be satisfied with this arrangement.”

In vain did the young lover endeavor to shake this resolution ; he found Lapierre immovable, and he was at length compelled to yield for the time : but he trusted to the influence he would establish over Claire, to bring about the accomplishment of his wishes, long before a tithe of the stipulated year had expired.

But he talked so fairly to the father that he had no suspicion of the treachery that lay veiled beneath his words. The tie between himself and Claire must be irrevocable before his father could interfere, and demand the fulfillment of the engagement he had been mainly instrumental in forming for him. Once safely married, Thorne believed his father's anger would be as short-lived as it was violent ; and so far as the forsaken girl, whose troth he had won, was concerned, he consoled himself with the thought that Agnes Willard was cold and proud, and she would soon reconcile herself to the faithlessness of the man who had never been an ardent wooer to her. She had fortune, and lovers in abundance would flock around her, when it was known that she was again free to be wooed and won ; and he felt sure that any one among them would render her far happier than he could.

Even if she suffered from his inconstancy, Thorne



determined to cast compunction to the winds, and go steadily forward on the path he had marked out for himself, cost what it would to himself or others.

At the close of their conversation, M. Lapierre said :

"When the letters arrive confirming your statements to me, Mr. Thorne, I will permit a formal betrothal to take place between yourself and Claire, if she wishes it. Such is the custom of my country, and it is one that has never been disregarded in my family. It seems absurd for one, in my humble position, to speak thus, perhaps, but until *my* day the name I bear was a time-honored one. We were a generation of bankers, known in Europe before the Rothschilds were ever heard of. Our house has had transactions with many dynasties of kings ; its head has controlled the finances of France, and made war or peace according to his willingness to unloose his purse-strings. But all that grandeur passed away with the elder branch of the Bourbons. Lapierre & Son sunk with the revolution, to rise again, however, under the rule of Bonaparte, to a faint semblance of their former greatness in the financial world.

"My father established a bank for the people, and we prospered on a smaller scale than before. When I was old enough, he took me into the firm, and for many years all went well with us. But after his death, misfortune came ; one I trusted proved negligent, another treacherous, and—but it matters not how it happened—the old house fell to rise no more : utter ruin to myself was the result of our disasters ; but no taint clung to *my* name, and the creditors permitted me to go upon my way. I chose an asylum in this country, and here

I found the mother of Claire. The Courtneys were distantly related to her, and that is how I came to settle in this obscure valley, contented to win my bread by imparting to others the accomplishments which were bestowed on me as a passport to good society."

"Thank you, Monsieur, for telling me this," replied Thorne. "The knowledge of it will smooth my way with my father, for he will be pleased to know that I have chosen a wife from a good family. He has some prejudices on that score, I confess. I shall be free to tell him what you have just imparted to me?"

"Yes ; make such use of it as you may think fit. I could not permit my child to enter your family without the assurance that, save in fortune, she is quite equal to any one in this democratic country. I have fallen from a high estate through no fault of my own, Mr. Thorne, and I will say that if my daughter can, through you, be restored to the sphere to which of right she belongs, I shall die with fewer regrets than I lately believed possible. You seem noble and generous, and I believe you will endeavor to render her happy."

The lover rapturously exclaimed :

"It shall be the business of my life to do so, I will write home at once, M. Lapierre, and in a few weeks at farthest, the replies to my letters will be here. They will give you the fullest assurance of the truth of what I have told you."

"I believe you," replied the Frenchman simply, as he offered Thorne his hand. "I will leave you now, and seek an interview with my daughter."

## CHAPTER V.

## A BASE DECEPTION.

THORNE sunk back on the sofa in an embarrassed reverie, for he was not quite satisfied with the position in which he had so recklessly placed himself. He yet had honor enough to shrink from deceiving the honest trusting nature he had to deal with; but he believed so much was at stake for himself that he crushed down his scruples; and when old Betty came in bringing writing materials, he suffered her to place them before him, and prepared to fulfil his promise to Lapierre in his own way.

The woman paused at the door as she retired and said:

"Look aheah, Mr. Thorne, ef you're gwine to marry my Rosebud, an' make her a good husbin', I dont 'ject to dis ere gallivantin' an' courtin'. You's been at it, you knows you has, so 'taint no use to try to look innercent like. But ef you aint in airnest, I jiss wish you'd git out a dis as quick as you kin, for I don' want de chile to be pinin' arter you when you'se gone away."

"I hardly flatter myself that such a result would ensue, Mrs. Betty, but I pledge you my word that the well-being of your young lady shall be my first consideration. You will go back to Pluto's dominions with a lighter heart after that assurance, I hope."

"Who tole you my old man's name was Pluto? But *he* haint no 'minion ober *me*, I can tell you. 'longs to my missus. Set up Pluto wi' sich 'thority as dat, indeed! I can mind white folks' orders, but no

nigger, ef he is my husbin, is agwine to make me do what he wants."

"So you set the marital authority of Pluto at defiance—alas, how fallen are the mighty in these degenerate days! I hope you have not lectured your young lady on the duty of wives, eh! Because if you have, I begin to think I had better 'get out o' this,' as you so elegantly express it."

His jeering tone rendered Betty more irate than before, and she angrily retorted:

"I 'gins to t'ink 'twould be better for us all ef you did, young man. I knows berry well dat you're pokin' fun at me, tho' you's young enough to be my gran'-chile; but you'd better 'member de judgment de blessed Marster sent on them chillum dat mocked his prophet. I aint nuffin but a poor ig'rant darkie, but for all dat, I knows some things afore dey happens; and suffin tells me dat 'twas a dark day dat brung you to dis here house to be nussed and tended as ef you was de salt o' de yeth."

The pale face of the listener flushed slightly, but he laughingly said:

"There—that will do, Mrs. Betty. You have let off steam enough for one time. I advise you to get back to your own territory without any further explosion. Time will show whether my advent here was for good or evil."

"Yes, time *will* show. I aint no fool, ef de white folks is, an' I can see dat dere's nuffin in you to 'pend on. You're like the shiftin' san's o' de desert what I heard my Rosebud read about, an' ef things goes on as dey has bin goin' to-day, you'll bring her to grief yit; I feels it in my bones."

Having thus relieved her mind, Betty closed the door suddenly, and Thorne was left to think over her words. Rude and unexpected as the old woman's attack was, he forgave it, for he felt conscience-stricken as he lay back with half-closed eyes and compressed lips, half wavering in the underhand course he knew he must take if he pretended to satisfy Lapierre on the points most vital to him and his daughter.

But he had gone too far to recede now, and he finally silenced such scruples as the words of Betty had aroused, by such specious arguments as he well knew how to apply to his own conscience, and he sat up, seized the pen, and wrote the following lines to one of his own particular chums, who, he knew, would not dare to refuse him the service he asked at his hands:

HAPPY VALLEY, July 15, 18—.

DEAR WINGATE:—You perceive from the date of this that I have found the locality of which the grandiloquent Dr. Johnson so magnificently discoursed in *Rasselas*. It might be located in Abyssinia too, for I have just had a vision of a black gorgen who is one of its inhabitants, so you perceive that there are some disagreeables to be found even in this divine retreat."

"It is so long since you heard from me that I must take up the thread of my adventures where I left off a month ago. I was then engaged in sketching mountain scenery in Virginia; and in pursuit of my hobby. I set out on foot to find the wild valley which Vernon so enthusiastically described to us after his return from his pedestrian tour last year.

"Perhaps it had been better for me if I had been satisfied with his imperfect outline of the locality, but

there is a fate in these things, I suppose, and mine led me, or rather swept me, *nolens volens*, into the Happy Valley.

"You shall hear how it happened, and what has since occurred. I was caught by a violent storm in the rocky gorge Tom described so graphically; the rain came down like Niagara, flooded the narrow pass, and but for my great strength, I must have been borne to destruction. How I escaped going over the fall at the outlet seems a miracle to me, but a boulder happened to stand in the way which gave me a chance to save myself.

"I managed to throw my bruised and exhausted body on a narrow tongue of land on which some bushes grew, and to these I clung with desperation till I succeeded in extricating myself from the most imminent danger.

"When I recovered from the first shock, I gathered myself up and looked around. A rushing torrent was beside me which falls into a dark and sullen looking pool that I shudder when I think of, for it has no known outlet and never yields up what it has once devoured.

"Beyond that lay the valley, a gem of beauty which no words of mine can portray. I was glad to find that it was not without inhabitants, for lying below me, a few hundred yards distant from the fall, I saw a half ruined mansion which was evidently the abode of human beings, for smoke was issuing from one of its chimneys.

"Night was approaching, so I looked for some means of descent from my uncomfortable perch, and found a small pathway cut in the face of the rock. I made

my way down as well as I could in my battered condition, and went towards the house.

"Now, old boy, comes the gist of my story. I found in that old ruin the loveliest Egeria that ever shone on mortal vision. Ah! she of the Roman story was commonplace beside this enchanting maid of the valley; and for the first time in my life I surrendered to the power of Don Cupid. Do not laugh in your mocking fashion, for I swear to you it was deep, true, ardent love that sprung into existence with the first glance from her glorious eyes; such love as I shall never again feel for any of Eve's daughters; and I depend on you, old fellow, to help me to win her for my very own.

"Don't write back a homily reminding me of my obligations to return to L—— at a given time, and thrust my unlucky head into the matrimonial noose my father has prepared for me. I cannot, and I *will* not do it—understand that from the first, for my resolution is irrevocable.

"You are a great admirer of Agnes Willard, and you have my permission to console her for my escapade, and I really think she will soon learn to like you as well as she does me. The elders have arranged the match, you know, and the heart of the fair Agnes is, I believe, as little concerned in the affair as my own. Thus far, all is as it should be, and I call on you for assistance because I have the right to claim it.

"I have helped you over some rough places in our day; and you, in your turn, must aid me in my present strait.

"My Peri is the only child of a broken-down French banker who, from his own account, was once a power in his native land; but that is all past and gone, and

he now vegetates in this valley on a small salary paid him for teaching the young idea how to shoot. He does not keep a school, though, but is tutor to the daughter of a wealthy widow living near him. Mrs. Courtney affords him this employment, being connected with him by his marriage to a poor cousin belonging to her husband's family.

"So you see my lady love has good blood in her veins, and her father is entitled to inquire into my antecedents. That is why I write to you, Bob, and you must prove yourself staunch to our old compact to help each other out of every difficulty.

"M. Lapierre requires me to produce vouchers of the truth of what I have told him of myself, and he is also unreasonable enough to insist that I shall furnish positive proof that my father will gladly welcome his daughter as my wife.

"'Phancy my phelinks' when he demanded such an impossibility as that. Just think of my obstinate old governor, with his furious temper and unbridled license of tongue, when he is in one of his tantrums, being asked to receive as his daughter-in-law an obscure young girl without a sou to her fortune.

"But I took the thing coolly. I assured the credulous old fellow that all should be made right, for I am determined that nothing shall stand in the way of my success with my goddess. I will not describe her to you; I will leave you to judge her when you see her, if ever man had a fairer excuse for acting as I mean to do to secure her.

"I shall marry her as soon as I can gain the old Frenchman's consent, and that I think, will not be long withheld after the arrival of the letters which you

must forward to me. Now, Wingate, attend to every particular of what I am about to write, and do not fail to obey my directions, for everything depends on you. I have been a fast friend to you in some ugly scrapes, and in return you must stand by me now.

"You are an accomplished penman, I know, and you can write most moving epistles on any given subject. I ask you to exercise both talents in this service, and you shall lose nothing by it. Write to me in the character of my *father*, giving his consent to my marriage with my rustic goddess on the ground of his anxiety to see me settled in life. You know how to do the thing up brown, to use your own slang phrase, and be sure to do it in your most creditable manner.

"Also send me other letters from men of straw, vouching for my former steady courses, and the high position held by my family; refer to my own assured prospect of eventually inheriting great wealth—I say *assured*, for the governor will come round, I am certain, after his first wrath is expended, and forgive my disobedience.

"You should feel little hesitation in writing these letters, for there will be sufficient leaven of truth in them to quiet your conscience, and I really intend to make the girl my wife. I have been guilty of some wild pranks, but no young lady of *our* set would be likely to refuse me on the grounds of dissipation, though I *have* sometimes kicked over the traces. I have a devil of a temper, I know, but my angel will never arouse that against herself, though I could not answer for myself if I were forced under the yoke matrimonial with the fair Agnes.

"When my father insisted, I consented to marry

her, because I wished to please him, and I had no decided preference for any other. But now all that is changed. I love this adorable little charmer with all the strength of my nature, and I must claim her as my own, or give up what I hold dearest in life.

"Write to me as soon as this reaches you, and send me what I have asked for, for I wish to be safely married to my true love before the time arrives for me to surrender myself to the bondage the Governor has prepared for me. He cannot ask me to commit bigamy; and after his first fury is past, he will come to terms.

"I forgot to tell you that I have been laid up from the ducking I got the day of the storm, and these good people have nursed me back to health. The father is something of a doctor, and the daughter the most sympathetic, tender little nurse that a man was ever blessed with.

"Good bye, old fellow; I depend on you, and I am yours, according to the fidelity with which you serve me.

WALTER THORNE."

This letter came to the hand for which it was intended, on a warm summer evening, when Mr. Robert Wingate had kicked off his shoes, laid aside his coat, and was lounging at his ease in a dingy little room, filled with dusty book-cases and tables, which he called his office.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE FORGED LETTERS.

WINGATE was a clientless lawyer, living on a small allowance from his father, and hoping for better times when business should come. The prospect of that was not very brilliant, for he was too fond of pleasure to find others willing to trust him with the management of their affairs.

He was a good-looking, indolent Sybarite, who preferred the enjoyment of the moment to any prospective advancement, and he had often thought what a good thing for himself it would be if he could only step into fortune through a wealthy marriage. He had played the agreeable to Agnes Willard, and was quite taken aback by the announcement of her engagement to his bosom friend, Walter Thorne.

But he did not betray his chagrin; he consoled himself with the proverb that "as good fish are in the sea as have been drawn from it," offered his congratulations and turned his attentions elsewhere. He proved himself a philosopher, but then he was not actually in love with the reputed heiress—he was only making up his mind to take the final plunge, if the golden idol gave him sufficient encouragement to risk a declaration.

Miss Willard had not done so; so that was the end of it; but the perusal of Thorne's letter caused him to doubt that now. Slighted and forsaken by her betrothed, the fair Agnes might turn to him for consolation, and he was quite ready to afford it.

Wingate re-read the letter attentively and, removing his meerschaum from his lips, gave utterance to a loud whistle.

"A pretty kettle of fish, I declare," he muttered. "I wonder what old Square-toes will say to his precious son when he finds out all, and all about his doings. I would not be in Wat.'s shoes then for all the old fellow's fortune. He'll never forgive him—that's flat. I know him better than Thorne does, and I believe that man of fire and marble will cut him off with a shilling. He *never* gives up what he has once set his heart on, yet Walter is mad enough to think of thwarting his will. Yes, he's stark, staring mad; but what is the use of trying to show him that? He is as obstinate as the old man and almost as fiery, too; so what can I do but help him to his own ruin? It will be ruin, I know it, if he persists in this folly."

Wingate disconsolately took up the letter, and read it over again.

"Bad, bad! he'll ruin his head in this noose as sure as fate, and I dare not refuse to help him, after all he has done for me. I have always known that if poor Wat. fell desperately in love, he'd risk everything to gain the object of his passion. He's a blessed fool to give up such a girl as Aggy Willard for the obscure creature he has taken such a shine to; but it's an 'ill wind that blows nobody good;' and, by helping him, maybe I can help myself. The heiress smiled sweetly enough on me till her marriage with Wat. was settled. Now he's out of my way, I may have a chance to step in and win. I think I shall try it at any rate; but, good Lord, he asks me to forge a letter from his respected parent, telling all sorts of fibs! And he's as



cool about it as an iceberg. That fellow's cheek is wonderful, but then I owe him a great deal—he's stood by me when I needed help, and he's as liberal as a prince with his money.

"Well, the fact is, Walter knows I can't help myself; I owe him a large sum, and I am bound to do whatever he asks; but if the old colonel found out that I had assumed his venerable character and given his blessing on a union he would move heaven and earth to prevent, I wonder what he would do? Blow me sky-high—shoot me—or drive me out of these diggings—but who's afraid? Not this child by any manner of means! I'll stick to the man that stuck to me when I wanted somebody to back me, and help him through the mud, right or wrong.

"Old Fuss-and-Fury shall never find out that I've gone, and done, and used *his* name in a way that would be peculiarly unpleasant to him. Won't he go into Jerusalem tantrums when he finds that Walter has thrown up the good cards he has no cleverly arranged in his game of life? Oh, Lord! I'll have my own fun out of *him*, if I don't win anything else out of this flare-up.

"But that poor little maid of the valley is getting into a confounded mess, if she only knew it. As to *her* ever being received as mistress of Thornhill, it is out of the question, and Walter is insane to think of it. He'll be sent adrift, and what will he do then? Turn artist and paint pictures for a living, I suppose—for that's all he *can* do. But the poor fellow will find out when people have to pay for his daubs, they won't think them so sweetly beautiful as his lady friends call them now."

"I swear, it's the most suicidal thing I ever heard of—throwing away two fortunes for the sake of a pretty face! I'll tell the old fellow what I think of it; and then, if he chooses to play the fool, why, I suppose he must."

Thus communing with himself, Wingate spread out his paper and set himself to work to compose such an epistle as he supposed a sensible and affectionate father would address to a son whose settlement in life was his most ardent desire. The following lines were the result of his efforts:

"L——, July 21, 18—.

"MY DEAR SON:—Your last letter has reached me; and with some surprise, but more gratification, I read its contents.

"I have long desired to see you happily married, as you well know; for I think the ties of home and domestic pleasures are the best safeguards for a young and gay man like yourself. I should have been better pleased, perhaps, if you had selected for your wife one of the many lovely young girls in our own circle; but to the fairest among them I have observed that you were uniformly indifferent.

"I began to fear that you cared little for matrimonial felicity, and I am the more pleased to find that I am mistaken. The young lady you have chosen is of good family, and that is the main thing to be considered, for you will have money enough of your own to enable you to dispense with fortune with the wife you may bring to reign over the old place.

"I am so much pleased with the prospect of claiming a daughter-in-law, that I insist on the completion of your marriage as soon as possible. My health is

bad, the gout being worse than ever, threatening to put an end to me before very long ; so bring your wife to me without delay, that I may bless your union before I go hence forever.

"You must excuse my presence at your wedding, for I am not in a condition to travel ; but I advise you to have it over as speedily and quietly as possible, and bring hither the pretty creature you describe, to brighten my last days.

"If M. Lapierre is a good linguist, I think I could find him a situation in a banking-house here as foreign correspondent, with a fair salary. His name is well known to me as a leading one in the financial annals of his native land, and I shall be most happy to serve him in any way that lies in my power. Present me to him, and say that we two old fogies can renew our youth in contemplating the happiness of our children.

"With much love to the charming creature who has inspired you with the desire to become a benedict, I am your affectionate father,

"WALTER THORNE."

Wingate read over this effusion, laughed madly, snapped his fingers, and was guilty of many other eccentric evidences of satisfaction over his performance. He exclaimed :

"Just fancy old Touch-and-go reading this with his own name at the end of it. Oh my ! wouldn't it be rich. He'd never survive it—never ; and I should be sent to the valley of humiliation for manslaughter. He'll never see it though, that's one comfort, and now for the others."

Mr. Wingate settled himself again, and dashed off

three other letters, all written in a different hand, certifying the high position held by Walter Thorne's family, and the fair name he had gained in the community in which he had been reared. To these he appended such names as occurred to him, secure that the old Frenchman would have no opportunity of knowing whether they were true or false, till it was too late to act on that knowledge.

Having completed this task, he then addressed his friend :

"L——, July 21st, 18—.

"DEAR WALTER :—You will see from the accompanying letters that I have done your bidding, though to tell you the honest truth, I think you are the most verdant specimen of young America extant to risk so much for a pretty face. You have done the worst thing for yourself that could have happened in losing your head for this young girl.

"I hope that you will yet think better of it and burn these things as a sacrifice upon the altar of duty. I do, indeed, old friend, for I am afraid you are getting into an awful mess, and bringing that trusting little chosen one into a worse one. You can never stagger through life with such a millstone around your neck as the girl must prove who will cost you a cool hundred thousand. It's a high price to pay for a caprice, Thorne, but you'll have to foot the bill as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow if you persist in this folly.

"Just look at your actual position. You are entirely dependent upon as cantankerous an old iron-sides as ever set foot upon this earth of ours ; bound to marry the girl *he* has selected for your wife, and

here you are flying off at a tangent, and getting over head and ears in love with one your respected papa would consider utterly ineligible in every respect.

"Take warning in time, Wat., and get out of your Happy Valley on the best terms you can. You will be the gainer by it, and so will the charmer you have taken such a fancy to, for between your father's fury, and your ruined prospects she will have a thorny path to tread. You see I speak freely, as is my custom with you, and I know you will take it as it is meant. If you persist in marrying the poor child you will be disinherited, I know, unless the old man should go off in a spasm of anger when he first hears of your rebellion. I scarcely think that will happen for he is tough in body as he is willful in mind; so you may as well make up your mind to make your own living, and that of the wife for whom you are ready to sacrifice so much.

"View the case in all its aspects, my dear boy, and come to your sober senses. I have seen the fair Agnes several times since you left, and I found her as quiet as usual. 'Still water runs deep,' says the proverb, and my conscience! what a soundless reservoir must that attractive young lady be. She is still, and fair, and cold in manner, but there is such a thing as a volcano with snow on top. That is what she is, and I do not deny that I once thought I should like to try and thaw that pretty icicle. But I soon found it was no go, the ground was pre-occupied, and I had no chance. Thank you for your offer to give me another, but I am afraid I should fare no better than I did before. Old Willard wouldn't look at such a scapegrace as I am in the light of a possible son-in-law; but if I

thought the pretty Agnes would fancy me, and be as brave as you are ready to be, I might try my luck, for she has a snug little fortune of her own left her by her grandmother.

"Just think of the luck of some people. I don't believe I ever had a grandmother, or if I had, she spent all her money on herself. It is a disgusting fact that I am as poor as a church mouse, and that even a few thousands would be a godsend to me; but I had rather not have a chance to win them with their fair incumbrance, if you are to be so heavy a loser by the transaction.

"Dear Walter, I entreat you to cut the Happy Valley and all its attractions; if you don't, mind my words, bread and butter will be scarce with you on the long run.

"Yours, pathetically, ROBERT WINGATE."

Wingate arose from the table after sealing and addressing the package, and then prepared for a select party at the house of the wealthy banker, Lawrence Willard. He had not made up his mind to go till he received Walter Thorne's letter, but that put a new aspect on affairs, and he thought if his friend gave up the heiress, he had as good a chance with her as another. She had been friendly with him, and that was something in his favor, for Miss Willard was rarely more than civil to those who offered incense at her shrine.

Wingate sometimes suspected that he owed her courtesy to the intimacy which existed between himself and her affianced husband, and that he intended to find out this evening, *if he could*; but, with a sigh,

he acknowledged that it was more difficult to fathom Agnes Willard than most girls of her age.

Wingate, with some difficulty, arranged his neck-tie to his satisfaction, and with much complacency surveyed his handsome features reflected in the mirror. He was a gay, good-hearted, rollicking creature, with few scruples of conscience, as the letters he had so lately written proved; but he meant no harm, and believed the whole thing a good joke, to be laughed over hereafter with Walter Thorne, when he had abjured his present folly. After reading his letter, he thought his friend would pause in his mad career, give himself time to recover from his infatuation, and extricate himself from his equivocal position. But if he should not, Wingate thought it as well to be in a position to be the first to offer consolation to the deserted fiancée, so he made a most elaborate toilette, and set out for Willow Glen, as the place of the banker was called.

It was situated in a romantic hollow, a short distance from the town of L—; and the white walls of the aristocratic looking mansion arose amid a group of fine old willow trees. Hedges, grass and flowers were found there in profusion, though nothing was crowded, and all was arranged with perfect taste.

On an eminence, a few hundred yards distant stood a many-gabled house, with twisted chimneys and lofty towers, known to the outside world as Thorne's Folly, but called by its proprietor Thornhill. It was an incongruous pile of architecture, which had cost a great deal of money, and was valued accordingly by its owner. Colonel Thorne had designed it himself, and if a man's house is the outgrowth of his mind, as somebody said, his must have been a very anomalous one.

The towers were gothic; the central portion built in the quaint Tudor style, finished with Ionic porticos in front and rear. Such as it was, however, Colonel Thorne considered it the most striking and remarkable building on the continent. Perhaps it was, from its very incongruities.

Next to his son, his dwelling was, to him, the most important of his possessions, and both he considered absolutely his own, to do with as he pleased.

Wingate had to pass the gate, opening into the really beautiful grounds which inclosed this singular looking mansion, and leaning over it, was a tall, slender man, with a high, bold forehead, scantily shaded by gray hair at the temples. He had taken his hat off, and was slowly fanning himself with it, and the stern, haughty face was a fair exponent of the unbending nature of its possessor. He had the erect carriage of a military man, for he had served in the last war with England, and won his present title at the battle of New Orleans.

As Wingate approached him, he nodded curtly, and said: "Good evening, Robert. Going to my neighbor's, I suppose? Agnes is to have a party, I hear. They sent over for me, in fact, but I am too old to care for such nonsense. I shan't go, and you may tell her from me that I think she would do as well to put off her entertainments till my son comes back to take part in them. She'll be thinking of some of you chaps, when she ought to be dreaming only of him."

To this address, Wingate blandly replied:

"Excuse me, Colonel. I should prefer having you deliver your message in person. I cannot take so great a liberty with Miss Willard, and she is not a person to forgive lightly, I fancy."

The old man knit his gray eyebrows, beneath which a fiery pair of black eyes scintillated, but he laughed mockingly ;

"Ha! ha! That is all you know about her! What, Agnes unforgiving! No, indeed, she is the meekest, sweetest little white dove in existence, and that's why I want her for Wat.'s wife. I am a fire spirit, and he's got enough of me in him to play the deuce when things don't go to suit him. Agnes Willard is the very girl to bear his temper quietly, and keep things smooth in the old house. *She* won't mind my outbreaks, for she is used to me and my ways. She would only smile if you repeated what I told you just now, and to-morrow she'd come over here and excuse herself, in her pretty, coaxing way. You don't know what an insinuating puss she can be, in spite of her cool, quiet manner to mere acquaintances."

"I know that Miss Willard is very charming, Colonel, and Wat. is a fortunate fellow. By the way, have you heard from him lately?"

"I had a letter, two weeks ago, dated from some little town in Virginia. He was vagabondizing among the mountains in search of the picturesque. Devil take his nonsense and tomfoolery about art! I've no patience with it. I wish I had never permitted him to take lessons in drawing—he had no talent that way. No gentleman should go wandering away through the country as he does, and just at this time too, when he ought to be here to look after the treasure he has won. I don't think though that Agnes would ever play him false."

Wingate could not resist saying :

"But suppose the tables were turned, and Walter

should find some one he thinks more attractive than Miss Willard?"

"By the Eternal, sir! what do you mean to insinuate?" cried the old man, in a sudden fury. "How dare you speak of such a thing as possible? Have you heard from Walter? I know that he and you are on confidential terms; has he been writing to you any such treason as you hint at?"

"Something very like it," responded Wingate, dryly. "He has met with an accident; came very near losing his life, and he has been ill among the mountains. He has been nursed back to health by a charming young creature, who seems to have made a deep impression upon him. I have just written to him, and warned him not to get too deep in the mire, but a letter from you might have more weight, perhaps."

Col. Thorne grew livid with rage as he listened to this cold statement, and he clutched wildly at his cravat as if suffocating. He presently gasped :

"Is this true? How did he come to write to you of his mishap, and not to me? Ill—was he? He had better have died than dream of what you hint at. Come, now, you — young dog, if you have anything serious to tell me, speak it out like a man."

"I am not used to be sworn at, or to be called names, Colonel Thorne," was the cool reply. "And if you were a younger man, I should know how to resent it. Good evening, sir. Walter's address is the same town from which his last letter to you came. Perhaps you had better write to him at once; you may bring him back to his senses, for I think he has lost them."

With this parting assurance, Wingate walked on,

heedless of the calls to return, mingled with curses, that only caused him to laugh, as he muttered :

"I have done him a good turn anyhow, and Walter, too, I hope ; for old Furioso will write him such a scorcher as must put an end to his dallying in that garden of Armida. He will see the folly of his doings, burn those lying letters, and come back wiser than he went. I wish I had not sent them, but it is too late to repent now."

When Colonel Thorne saw that Wingate would not even turn his head, but continued to move steadily forward, he poured forth a more bitter volley of maledictions, and moved like a maniac toward his house. He entered a lower room in one of the towers, which was fitted up as a library. A dog lay basking near the open window, happily unconscious of the evil humor of his master, but Ponto was soon aroused from his dreams by a furious kick, which sent him into the yard below ; a meerschaum was thrown after him, and then a chair followed.

After these performances, the irate old man threw himself on a seat, and cursed in German, French, and English, till the first edge of his wrath was taken off. A servant girl peeped in at the open door, but she was very careful not to allow her employer to become aware of her vicinity. When he subsided into comparative tranquillity, she returned to the housekeeper's room, to report that the master was in one of his worst tantrums, and they would "catch it" before the evening was over.

Colonel Thorne finally jerked out the drawer of his writing-table, took out paper and pen, and wrote the following characteristic letter :

"L—, July 21, 18—.

"You disobedient good-for-nothing dog ! What do you mean by getting yourself laid up among a parcel of country bumpkins, to be nursed—one of them of the feminine gender, too ! I dare say she has made eyes at you, and has done her best to make you play the part of the ingrate and the fool ; but it will not be well for her to tempt you to disobey my will.

"Your precious chum, Robert Wingate, has just hinted to me that such is the state of the case, but the wretch refused to give me any satisfaction as to the facts in his possession. I have only this to say : If you don't come as soon as you are able, I will disown you. If you are not here in time for your marriage with the bride I choose you to claim, I will make my will, cutting you off from all interest in my property. I will, by the Eternal, as my old commander used to say.

"You know me, you conceited puppy, and you also know that you will have nothing unless I give it to you. Your mother had no fortune ; what I have belongs to myself ; and you shall never enjoy the first cent of it if you are not here in time to give your hand to Agnes Willard.

"The wedding finery has been ordered, and some of it has arrived ; and if you dare to think of flying the track, after things have gone so far, you need never appear in my presence again.

"I shall not betray you to Agnes ; the girl loves you, and she will never give you up to another ; nor will I let you go the devil your own way.

"I have said my say, and I mean every word of it, so now take your choice between beggary and obedience.

W. THORNE."



"This fiery missive was dispatched by the same mail that took Wingate's letters, and Walter Thorne had the opportunity of comparing the words of the real man with those written for him by his ingenious and unscrupulous friend—a comparison by no means advantageous to the choleric old man.

## CHAPTER VII.

### REVELATION OF A GIRL'S HEART.

WINGATE moved leisurely up the winding avenue which led to the entrance of Mr. Willard's residence. The house was gleaming with lights, and the parlors redolent of flowers. Vases were filled with them; rustic baskets, which overflowed with them, were suspended from every available spot, and the summer air was heavy with their fragrance.

Wingate was the first guest to arrive, for which he was not sorry, as he wished to gain a few moments alone with the daughter of the house before she was absorbed with her duties as hostess.

Mr. Willard, a slender, gray-haired man, with a cold, proud face, pallid from recent illness, was sitting on the portico, enjoying the still, summer night. He courteously received the young man, and after the usual discussion of the state of the weather was over, he said:

"My daughter is in the conservatory, I believe, Robert. She told me if you came early to send you in there; she wishes to ask you when you last heard from— But never mind—she will explain herself;"

and the frown that gathered on the brow of the speaker showed that he was annoyed at the proposed subject of conversation.

"Thank you, sir; I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in private with Miss Agnes a few moments," replied the young man, as he arose and entered the house.

He walked quietly through the long parlors, illuminated by a cut-glass chandelier, the light through the ground-glass lamp-shades as soft as that of the summer moon. Beyond lay the conservatory, filled with gorgeous tropical plants, arranged with an artistic eye for effect.

A grape-vine, in full foliage, was trained over the glass roof, from which rich clusters of fruit hung; the flower stands descended in regular gradation, filled with blooming plants of rare beauty, and in perfect order; not a dead leaf nor a drooping blossom was to be seen.

At the farthest end of this avenue of fragrance and beauty, was a marble basin wreathed with water-lilies; and from the white cup of each one flowed a tiny stream of clear water, which kept the reservoir always filled to the brim. Gold and silver fish darted to and fro, their bright scales glittering in the softened light of innumerable Chinese lanterns suspended among the foliage of the plants.

Near this fountain stood the young girl of whom Wingate was in search; and as he looked upon her pale, fair beauty, he thought she was a good representative of Undine in the floating clouds of white tarlatan that fell, like spray, around her graceful figure.

Agnes Willard was colorless as a snow-drift, with

hair of a light golden shade, bound closely around her small head, and wreathed in a shining coil at the back. A comb, set with pearls, held it in place, from which drooped a spray of delicate white flowers.

Her features were perfectly regular, and to most persons her face was expressionless, for she was usually as impassive as a marble woman. But those who had once seen her eyes light up, knew that beneath that calm exterior lay a world of passion and pride; the first carefully held in subjection—the last patent enough to all; for Miss Willard was considered the haughtiest of women. She had few friends, no intimates, and moved on her way as if supremely indifferent to the possession of either.

Her eyes were large and well set, of a clear, amber gray, veiled by long lashes, a shade darker than her hair. Ordinarily they were only observant; but they could flash with animation when their owner was aroused from her apathetic calm, or scintillate with anger if the repressed passion of her nature was brought into action.

This girl was a riddle to most of those who knew her, for she was always on her guard; never impulsive—rarely confiding. The polished grace of her manner was perfect; her self-control never deserted her in public, though in the seclusion of her own apartment, she sometimes gave way to paroxysms of wild passion that would have alarmed a looker-on had one been permitted to witness them.

This day had witnessed such an outburst; but now she was calm enough, and at the sound of approaching footsteps she raised her head, and with a faint smile of welcome, held out her slender hand to Wingate.

He took it an instant in his own, and was thrilled by its icy touch on that warm evening. After a few commonplace words had been exchanged between them, she said:

"I am glad you came early, Mr. Wingate, for I have an enquiry to make of you. Can you tell me anything of your friend, Walter Thorne? It may seem strange that I should apply to you for information concerning my betrothed, but—but I have not heard from him lately myself, and I am becoming uneasy about him. His letters must have miscarried, for it is now three weeks since I have received one. Do you know where he is at present?"

With perfect freedom from embarrassment Wingate replied:

"I am glad that I have secured an opportunity to speak with you before the arrival of your other guests. I had a letter from Thorne this afternoon, filled with nonsense; but he has been ill. He came near being drowned in a mountain torrent, took a violent cold, and has been detained in a farm-house among the wild scenes he is so fond of sketching. He has had a fever, and really I think he was slightly delirious when he wrote; of course he could not venture to address you while his mind was in that unsound state, and that is the reason why you have not heard from him for so long."

"*Ill!* delirious, and probably thrown among a set of ignorant barbarians, who will not know how to attend to him properly," she rapidly said, in a voice that for once forgot its equable calm in the presence of another. "Oh, what can I do to help him? What can be done to bring him back safe to us? Have you told his father this, Mr. Wingate?"

The speaker seemed transfigured. Her eyes burned with fiery light; a pale flush came to her snowy cheeks, and her lips trembled with emotion. The woman came out of the frosty atmosphere of conventionalism that held her spell-bound, and in that moment Wingate knew the truth. She had not been induced by her father to accept Walter Thorne, as report said; but she herself had willed the contract to be made which bound her to that most unstable of men. She loved him—that was plain enough. Loved him as the tigress loves her young.

From that moment he gave up all hope in that quarter for himself, and began to think how he could best serve his inconstant friend. After a pause he said:

"Thorne is not so badly off as you imagine. Fortunately for him, the people he was thrown among are of the better sort. The father had some medical skill, which was used for his benefit, and the daughter nursed him back to health. He is out of danger now, he tells me, but you will doubtless hear from him in a short time yourself."

Wingate felt that those amber-colored eyes were fixed full upon his face, and he began to grow nervous beneath their scrutiny. Miss Willard repeated:

"Daughter—there is a woman there, then? Is she young? Did Walter say much of her? She nursed him, too; and—and—Mr. Wingate, you are his friend, and therefore mine—let me see that letter. I entreat it as a favor—nay, I can almost demand it as a right. Have you it about you?"

"No—on my honor; and, indeed, if I had it I could not venture to show you such a rigmarole. I told Colonel Thorne of Walter's illness, and no doubt

he will take measures to get him back home as soon as possible. We shall soon see him among us, and the pretty little nurse must give up her patient."

"Pretty! Did he tell you that?" And her voice vibrated with sudden passion. "Could Mr. Thorne really find charms in an ignorant, unformed country girl? But I forget myself. She was kind to him, and, of course, he was grateful."

Warned by the repressed excitement of her voice and manner, Wingate cautiously replied:

"Of course that was all. When his father's letter reaches him, Walter will doubtless come home as soon as possible. By that time his mind will have cleared itself from the fantasies of illness, and he will return to the happy fate that awaits him. He is the most fortunate of men, if he only knew it."

Her light eyes flashed a sudden look of angry inquiry upon him, and she defiantly said:

"What do you mean by that?—if he only knew it. Does he not know—does he not understand that——"

She paused, shivered before the revelation of her inner self she was on the eve of making, and relapsed into her usual impassiveness. After a brief silence, Agnes again spoke, in a light tone, in which there was an inflexion of hardness:

"Let us return to the reception rooms, Mr. Wingate. I hear voices, and other guests have arrived. I will write to Walter again, now that I know he has not been to blame for his long silence. We must have him at home, where he can be properly cared for till he is perfectly recovered."

She passed serenely on to welcome her guests, followed slowly by Wingate, who was muttering to himself:

"By Jove! Wat.'s getting himself into a mess sure enough! *That* girl is not going to be jilted without making an awful row about it, proud as she is. Between them, she and Don Furioso will crush him down to the depths if he dares to carry out his present plans. The boy is mad to think of flying the track after things have gone so far."

Other guests were in the lighted rooms; and, with her usual moonlight smile and chilling grace, Miss Willard welcomed them. She was accustomed to play the part of hostess, for her mother had been dead many years, and she was undisputed mistress of the house, and also of its master, for Mr. Willard had long since discovered that it was useless to place himself in opposition to the slightest caprice of his quiet but tenacious daughter.

What she willed she accomplished; and he, who was an autocrat in his bank, was at home a mere puppet in the hands of this fair, haughty-looking girl.

The banker was very fond of her, for she was his only child; but he would have been glad if nature had made her less imperious and more demonstrative in her affection for himself.

Both father and daughter exerted themselves to make the evening pass off agreeably to their guests; and Wingate could but marvel at the serene grace of Agnes, after the glimpse he had that night obtained into her heart. He came to the wise conclusion, that Walter Thorne was welcome to such happiness as he was likely to find in a union with her, and he felt few regrets that all chance for himself was over. He again thought over the judgment of her he had expressed in his letter to her betrothed.

"Quiet, but deep," he muttered, under his breath. "Yes—I know that now, better than I did before. She'll lead that poor fellow a devil of a dance, for she'll marry him whether he will or no. His father will bring him back to his allegiance, by threatening to disinherit him; and this snow woman with a volcano in her breast, will bind him to her in chains that will hold him fast enough. Goodness! What a fool I am! Here am I pitying Wat. for gaining what I so lately thought I should like to possess myself. After all she is an exquisite creature."

The party broke up at a late hour. There was some good music, charades were played, and altogether it was a success. Wingate took home a pretty, rosy little girl who had just made her *débüt* in society, and as he listened to her prattle he thought in his heart that Anna Ross would make a far more comfortable companion for every-day life than the high-bred, elegant woman he had been so critically analyzing throughout the evening.

When the last guest had departed, and Miss Willard and her father were left standing on the piazza alone, she turned to him and spoke in a low, even tone:

"Walter has been ill—so very ill that his life must have been in danger, for Mr. Wingate thinks that he was delirious when he last wrote to him. That is why I have not heard from him of late.

"Ah-h!" was the slow reply. "But is it not strange that Thorne should write as soon as he is able to a friend, and not to his betrothed wife? I should not like it if I were you, Agnes."

"Perhaps I do not, but I cannot help myself. You and his father must find means to bring him back with-

out delay, for I think he is in great danger where he now is."

"The danger must be pretty well passed, if he is able to write at all. What do you apprehend?"

"Everything that is most repulsive to me. Walter is weak and willful, but I love him, and I do not choose to leave him among people who may take advantage of his impressible nature to carry out their own plans. Robert Wingate spoke of a girl who has played the part of a nurse to him: from what he said, I think it necessary to rescue my betrothed from her arts before serious mischief arises from them."

The father regarded her with surprise.

"Are you so doubtful of your own power as to fear a rival?"

The fire came to her eyes, and a faint streak of crimson flashed across her white cheeks as she replied:

"My power is not yet firmly established, but it shall be. I comprehend well enough that Walter submitted to the wishes of his father in forming an engagement with me. Though I understood that clearly, I was not dismayed, for I feel sure that I can win him to myself forever, if no other woman comes between us."

"And *you*, with all your pride, are willing to be accepted on such humiliating terms?" exclaimed Mr. Willard, in an excited manner. "I could not have believed this of you, Agnes."

"Nor could I once of myself: but it is so—I *love him*—does not that tell you all? I shall die, or go mad, if Walter Thorne proves false to me. Bring him back to his home and the ties that bind him here, for

everything for me is at stake. I will not give him up—I swear it! If an angel with a flaming sword stood between myself and my betrothed, I would put him aside and grasp the hand that belongs of right to me. Is he not my plighted bridegroom? Have I not given him my troth, and with it my heart, my soul, my life? Bring him back, I say, before something happens that will turn my nature into a volcano of raging fire. The very thought that another is near him, ministering to his wants as I alone should, is riving my brain. How I have lived through this evening I do not know, yet I have played my part as quietly as usual. I will go to my room now, but you must act for me to-morrow. Concert measures with Col. Thorne for bringing Walter back, for he must return as speedily as possible. There is danger to him where he now is."

Mr. Willard shrugged his shoulders. He did not always understand his daughter, but he was rather anxious than otherwise that the marriage which had been arranged for her should not be broken off after things had gone so far. He calmly replied:

"I will see what can be done; but if you intend to be jealous of every woman that comes near Walter, you are making a bad preparation for happiness."

"When we are once married I shall not be jealous. He will then be mine, and I shall know how to win his heart, and hold it, too. Good night."

She abruptly turned, entered the house, and ran quickly up the winding stairs that led to her own apartment. A young girl, who acted as her maid, was sleeping beside one of the open windows. Agnes sharply called to her to assist her in unrobing, and she started up with a bewildered scared expression, and

hastened to obey. After a few moments, Miss Willard drew on her dressing robe and peremptorily said:

"Wake up Nettie, before you begin to undo my hair; if you pull it, I shall be angry. Arrange it for the night, and then go. I shall have no further use for you."

Nettie opened her eyes as widely as possible, but she was too much overcome with sleep to be as careful as usual, and more than once a sharp reprimand was given her by her mistress. Finally the fair Agnes took her long, abundant tresses in her own hands and said:

"Go to bed you stupid! If you tear my hair in this way again, I shall send you back to your mother, and you may starve with the rest of her useless brood."

To this angry threat, the somnolent maid replied:

"You won't do that, Miss Agnes, because you promised my mother to keep me; and you can't find any one else who will bear your humors as I do. I don't get huffed at nothing, you say, though you know you are aggravatin' sometimes."

The amber-colored eyes flashed out a glance of lightning, and then their owner laughed softly.

"I believe you are right, Nettie; for of late I have not had much patience with any one. There—you may go now—I am tired; but I cannot sleep—I wish to think."

The maid was only too happy to be released, and she left the room, carefully closing the door behind her.

When the echo of her steps was no longer audible, Agnes threw herself upon the couch, and abandoned herself to such a tempest of passion, jealousy, and des-

pair, as would have terrified those who knew her best. Tears rained from her eyes, her placid features became convulsed and paler than ever, while her small hands clenched till the nails almost buried themselves in the pink palms.

At intervals, words broke from her white lips, and the sound of her voice was so broken and unnatural that it startled even herself.

"How dare he treat me thus. It was bad enough to leave me in the first days of our engagement; but to find interest in another—in a *pretty* nurse! Faugh! what wretches men are; I cared for none of them till I knew him, and he is all in all to me. He shall never escape me. If his heart has wandered, I will not know it. He shall fulfil his troth to me if I walk through fire to the end. If I cannot make him happy, I can at least repay him for his inconstancy. The world shall never say that *I* have been left to wear the willow—oh, worse than that—worse than that, for my heart would consume itself in jealous rage, and in my madness I should do something terrible—*terrible*."

At length, exhausted by the violence of the paroxysm through which she had passed, Agnes arose, tottered to her dressing-table and took from one of the drawers a small vial, containing a strong sedative, which she was in the habit of using in such a crisis as this. With unsteady hand, she poured out a larger portion than usual, and, after drinking it, threw herself upon her bed, where she soon fell into a disturbed slumber.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE LADY'S TARN.

IN the meantime, all was sunshine in the Happy Valley. Thorne continued to recover rapidly, and on the appointed day the carriage came to convey him to the Grange, accompanied by Lapierre and his daughter.

Believing the assurances of his guest, that all would be right, the old Frenchman placed no restraint on the association of the young people. He half sighed when he thought how differently things were managed in his own country; but as freedom of intercourse was the custom in the land of his adoption, he gave in to it, and consoled himself with thinking that all was for the best.

The future of his lovely child seemed brightening, and his fears for her welfare would soon be set at rest by bestowing her in honorable marriage on one who seemed hourly more infatuated by her charms.

The day was bright, with a soft breeze rustling the foliage of the trees which formed a canopy over the narrow country road that led to the Grange. An iron gate admitted them into the grounds, which were left almost in a state of nature. Lofty trees cast their umbrage over the greenest turf, and deer lifted their branching antlers as the sound of the wheels was heard grating on the graveled road that led through this sylvan solitude.

At length the house, a square, gray structure, with a long piazza in front, came in sight. It was a fine old

place, and the out-houses and servants' quarters were all built in the most substantial manner. A green terrace swept down from the piazza, ornamented with stone urns, in which flowering plants were growing.

Mrs. Courtney was standing on the steps, with her little girl beside her, looking so calm and sensible that Thorne half doubted if she would permit his love-making to her god-daughter to go on without a full and clear understanding of all that was in store for Claire in the new sphere in which he proposed to place her. The doubt only spurred him on to the completion of his own plans. The sweet madness that filled his heart had gained such strength, that, by this time, he thought no sacrifice would be too great to enable him to secure the enchanting being who had only too plainly shown him that he was the arbiter of her earthly fate.

Walter Thorne closed his eyes to all that might happen afterwards, never dreaming that a time might come, and at no distant day either, in which he would shrink from the consequences of his own folly, and leave this tender, unprotected girl to bear the heavy burden he was so recklessly preparing for her.

Mrs. Courtney welcomed her guests with the cordial ease characteristic of a well-bred woman. She led the way into a spacious drawing-room, fitted up with dainty taste, and decorated with pictures painted by herself. These had not great merit as works of art, but they were correct both in drawing and coloring; and the artistic eye of Thorne was soon attracted by them.

Mrs. Courtney laughed, and said to him:

"I warned you that I am a dabbler in your art. I

have had few opportunities to see fine pictures ; but I do not intend to vegetate here forever. Andrew will leave college this fall, and, when spring opens, I think I shall set out with him on a tour to Europe. When I can study the great masters, I shall doubtless think of my poor efforts with contempt ; but such as they are, they have afforded me occupation and amusement in my lonely life. They have helped me to live through many dreary years."

A shadow flitted over her expressive face, and Thorne politely replied :

"I do not think you will ever find cause to regard these things with disgust, for they possess a merit of their own, I assure you, Mrs. Courtney. Some of the landscapes have a delicacy and beauty of handling and coloring, that would entitle them to a place on the walls of an academy."

"I am happy to hear you say that ; but I am afraid that you are only seeking to flatter me. Here is your portfolio, and I have made a copy of this female head I found in it. The face is a very remarkable one, I think. It is fair and delicate, but has a latent fire and will that are wonderful. I fancy the original might be capable of playing the part of a Medea. Is it a portrait, Mr. Thorne ?"

With a sudden flush of vexation, he recognized the picture to which she pointed as that of Agnes Willard. The original was a water-color sketch, elaborately finished, which Thorne had completed just before he set out on his rambling tour. With assumed indifference he took it up, and, critically surveying it, said :

"You must be a close student of the 'human face divine,' Mrs. Courtney. I have known the original of

this several years ; but the traits you describe never struck me before. The face has a great deal of character in it, in spite of its fair, soft beauty. I merely painted it as a type, for that style is not very attractive to me. I like a dark, bright face, flashing with intelligence, and brightening with smiles," and almost unconsciously he glanced towards Claire, who stood on the opposite side of the room, holding Julia by the hand, and speaking earnestly with her father.

Mrs. Courtney understood the look, and quietly said :

"Yes, I understand that such is your *present* fancy, but you have had others, and you will have many more yet before the end comes. As an admirer of beauty in all its forms, you doubtless consider yourself entitled to some immunity ; but you must reflect on consequences. Hearts may be broken, and homes made desolate without any absolute intention of wrongdoing on your part. I hope you understand me, Mr. Thorne ?"

"I am sorry to say that I do not, Madam. Your words are an enigma to me."

"It is one easily solved, then. You gave me leave to examine your portfolio, and I found there something which leads me to think that you are not so free to follow your own fancies as you induced me to believe the other day."

"What is that, pray ?" was the eager inquiry of the young man. Mrs. Courtney opened the portfolio, and significantly pointed to a crayon sketch representing a girl and her lover standing, with clasped hands, beside an altar, on which a flame was rising, clear and high. The face of the girl was dimly outlined, but the man was evidently designed for Thorne himself.

Beneath the picture was written, in a delicate, feminine hand, *Si je te perds, je suis perdue*.

He set his teeth an instant, and then laughingly said:

"It is but a fancy sketch, but I can fill in the face now, for I have found my ideal. Do you observe that this outline has no meaning? A few touches will give it life and expression."

He took up a crayon, and with rapid and accurate hand, completed the head into a striking likeness of Claire.

"But the motto written by a lady's hand," objected Mrs. Courtney, as she watched his progress. "It says a great deal, and I am afraid it was not put there without meaning."

"No, for now it has all the significance I could wish," was the gay response. "The fair friend who wrote those words only anticipated what the future would bring. She expressed my feelings exactly, for if I lose the angel of my life, I *shall* be lost."

"It evidently referred to the writer herself," and she pointed to the last words.

Thorne calmly bore the scrutiny of her clear eyes, and carelessly replied:

"That could not be, for I never loved the person who wrote those words. I aver it on the word of an honorable man."

"After such an assurance, I cannot doubt your word, Mr. Thorne," was the grave response. "You doubtless think this inquisition uncalled for on my part; but since the future of Claire is concerned, I feel justified in making it. You have triumphed over M. Lapierre's objections, I find, and I am afraid made yourself only too acceptable to his daughter. But I also am entitled

to take a deep interest in her fate; and I entreat, if there is a doubt as to her reception in your family, that you will relinquish your pursuit of her before her affections are irrevocably fixed on you. Save yourself from the reproaches of your friends; save her from the humiliation and anguish of becoming the cause of dissension between yourself and those who have the best claim on you."

With an impatient movement, the lover replied:

"There is but one person in existence who has a claim on my obedience. My father is the only relative I possess, and in a few more days I hope to prove to you, under his own hand, that your fears are groundless. As to myself, you require too much when you ask me to give up the only girl who has ever touched my heart. I adore Claire, and I will dedicate my life to her happiness."

Mrs. Courtney sighed:

"So all lovers think and speak, but I have known few husbands who cared for a wife's tears after the first glamour of passion subsided. You are a very impulsive man, Mr. Thorne, and under the influence of your feelings you may commit an imprudence that you will regret throughout all your future life. Claire is a very attractive and charming child, but she is little more at present. She has no fortune, and her father is a decayed gentleman honestly laboring for his own subsistence. If your father is rich, he will probably take a different view of this affair, and refuse his consent to your marriage. If he does, all must end between you at once."

"I have duly weighed all these considerations," was the prompt reply, "and I feel assured in my own

mind that I should risk little in making Claire my wife at once, if that were possible. I shall have enough for both, and you need give yourself no uneasiness as to her future. I shall protect her from harm and place her in the position she was born to fill."

Mrs. Courtnay smiled faintly.

"Claire is scarcely fitted to fill any position yet. She is not yet fifteen, though she looks more mature than that. Her education is incomplete, and if M. Lapierre will consent I shall take her to France with me, and place her in a school for the next two years."

Thorne looked aghast.

"Two years to be spent away from my darling! Oh, Mrs. Courtnay, that is asking too much of me. Persuade M. Lapierre rather to give her to me at once, and she can have masters afterward. But she is sufficiently educated for me. I love her with all my heart just as she is."

"But your father might not be satisfied with your child-bride, even if you would be. When I bring her back to you an elegant and accomplished woman, you will acknowledge that I am right."

"Perhaps I might; but in the interim I might lose her altogether. No one can tell what may happen in so long a space of time, and I——"

What he might have said further was prevented by the approach of M. Lapierre and his daughter; and, a few moments afterwards, Mrs. Courtnay left the room.

Claire, in her light summer muslin, looked as fresh and fair as the flower whose name was so often given her, and she flushed with surprise and pleasure when her eyes fell on the picture of herself and her lover standing with clasped hands above that expressive

motto. With her soft melodious voice she murmured the words to herself, and cast a glance at Thorne that expressed all he could have asked.

He leaned toward her, and in a tone so low that she alone understood his words, said:

"Our destiny is foreshadowed there, my Rose; I drew that form as my ideal wife, but I left the head unfinished until to-day. Now it is complete, and so will our lives be when we stand thus before the altar on which we shall offer the incense of a pure and heartfelt affection."

He had not before spoken so plainly, and the unsophisticated young creature felt as if she was suddenly lifted to the pinnacle of supremest happiness. She sat down, and shaded her face with her hand that he might not see how deeply she was moved; but she said nothing in reply.

M. Lapierre busied himself in examining the contents of the portfolio, and he did not observe the picture Claire still held in her hand. After a careless inspection of the drawings, he curtly said:

"These are well enough in their way, Mr. Thorne, but I scarcely think you could make a living out of your talent, if you had nothing else to depend on."

Thorne smiled faintly, for no artist, however humble his pretensions, likes to be so summarily set down among the nobodies of the craft to which he aspires to belong. He said:

"They are not worth much, I suppose, but they possess some value in my eyes. At all events, I shall ever bless the hour that sent me wandering in search of the picturesque."

And an expressive glance at Claire gave point to his words.

"Umph! that's as may be," said M. Lapierre, shrugging his shoulders. "You are a very romantic young fellow, but the day may come in which you will toss all this rubbish away and wish you had never used pencil or brush. The illusions of life are around you now, but they cannot last—more's the pity."

"Oh, papa, how can you call these beautiful things rubbish?" exclaimed Claire, in an aggrieved tone. "They are only studies, you know, but when they come to be finished off as pictures are they will look very different. I am sure they are very lovely in their unfinished state."

"Perhaps they are to your eyes *petite*, but I have seen the old masters and also the best galleries of modern art to be found in Europe. Mr. Thorne has a very pretty talent with which to amuse his leisure hours, but the divine gift of genius is not his. It is of no consequence either, for a young man of fortune would scarcely give up his time to the severe study and labor necessary to make him a great artist. I trust our young friend here will never be reduced to the necessity of earning a precarious support by means of his pencil."

"Do you really think, sir, that, in such an event, I could not do it?" asked Thorne, in a tone of pique, for he was deeply annoyed at the old man's frank depreciation of his efforts.

"I am quite sure you could not," was the ready response. "Friends may flatter you, as they doubtless have, and eagerly possess themselves of your pictures as souvenirs, but if they were asked for an equivalent for them in hard cash, I scarcely think you would find it pay, as you Americans say."

With a constrained laugh, the mortified artist closed the portfolio, and said:

"Thank you for your criticisms, M. Lapierre; they may be useful to me in the future, and at all events, they have taken the conceit out of me for the present. But here is one sketch that I hope you will appreciate, as it foreshadows what I so earnestly wish to come to pass as soon as possible."

"The face of M. Lapierre flushed as he looked at the drawing. He slowly said:

"The girl has the face of my daughter, but the form is not hers. This was drawn from a living model, and it was not Claire."

"It is an ideal figure, modelled unconsciously, perhaps, from a very graceful friend of mine, but until to-day it was incomplete. I shall round the figure more symmetrically, and it will be that of your daughter," replied Thorne as indifferently as he could. "I thought this, at least, would elicit your approbation, but you seem determined to throw cold water on my artistic aspirations."

"By no means. I approve them as an agreeable means of passing time; I only wish to impress on you that painting can be no resource to you in the future, if you should be so unfortunate as to forfeit the favor of your father. If you have imagined that you can depend on your talents for fame and fortune, the sooner you rid yourself of the delusion the better for yourself *and others*."

"Dear papa, what a pitiless judge you are!" cried Claire, casting a deprecating look towards her lover.

But Thorne only laughed, and said:

"Your father is quite right, Rose, but he is the first

who has ever had the courage to speak so plainly to me. A tour in Europe may open my eyes still further to the defects in my style, and I think I shall make one for that purpose. The study of the old masters may enable me to do something worthy of commendation yet."

"Yes; that is all you need, I am sure," was her eager reply.

But the old connoisseur cynically said:

"I have seen mere copyists who aspired to nothing higher in the walks of art, who can do more than you will ever accomplish, Mr. Thorne. I have no wish to be rude or to discourage you, but I earnestly desire you to see for yourself that a struggle for the means of living would end in defeat if you had to depend on your artistic gifts as a means of winning them. You are too much a man of the world, however, to risk poverty, should a choice be offered you between that and the indulgence of your own vagrant fancies. My daughter should not have seen this to-day, sir, for it is an infringement of the compact between you and myself."

He drew from the hand of Claire the sketch which she had taken up again when her father laid it aside, and the smile of tender bashfulness, mingled with rapture with which she gazed upon it, was exquisitely charming, to the lover, at least; he forgave even her father's severe criticisms for the sake of that blush and smile.

She surrendered it with a little sigh, and moved away to a distant window, through which she gazed without seeing much of the beautiful scene it commanded.

Thorne hurriedly said:

"It signifies very little, M. Lapierre, whether your daughter understands our true position to-day or at the end of another week. My letters must soon be here now, and you will see from their tenor that I have not imperilled my future by losing my heart to the angel of the valley."

Lapierre frowned, bit his lip, and impatiently rejoined:

"A promise should be held sacred by a man of honor, Mr. Thorne; I had your word that until all doubts were set at rest as to the light in which your father will view the disinterested choice you have made, that you would refrain from betraying your sentiments to my child. Since you have failed in this, how can I trust you with what is so vital to me, the future welfare of my darling?"

Thorne felt the justice of the reproof, but he coolly replied:

"You can and will trust me, M. Lapierre, because you know that loving Claire as I do, I shall cherish her as the apple of my eye. If you will recall your own youth, you will understand how impossible it is for me to control every expression of the passion that fills my heart, when near the object that has inspired it. I have not yet asked Rosine to become my wife, because I promised that I would not do so before the replies to my letters arrive; but she is aware that I love her with all my soul, with all my heart, and no one shall come between us to separate us now."

The old man sighed, and faintly smiled, for after all, he was pleased with the fire of the young lover, and believed him to be perfectly honest in his intentions; perfectly fearless as to the result of his application to



his father for his consent to the unworldly marriage he was so eager to make.

No thought of treachery was in his own honest heart, so he presently said :

"Since you are so confident of your father's approbation, there is little chance that any one will come between you. Mrs. Courtney will scarcely object to so advantageous a settlement for her god-child, and she is the only one to be consulted beside myself. I shall not live to witness the happiness I trust you will both find in your union ; and after I am gone she will control the actions of Claire."

"Thank you, sir—but why do you say that you will not live? You look strong and well—good for many years of life yet."

"Yet they will not be granted to me—let that suffice. I cannot explain myself more fully, for you would be skeptical as to the reality of the presentiment that foreshadows my fate. But if I am denied the privilege of watching over my child here, I will do it from that higher sphere, to which I must soon go, and if you are untrue to her, if you use your power over her unkindly, I will torment you myself, or if that is not permitted, I will inspire some earthly influence to avenge her wrongs. Remember this, for I am deeply in earnest."

Thorne stared at him for a moment, and then laughing lightly, replied :

"I scarcely suspected you of such fantastic notions, sir. As to treating Claire badly, that is an impossibility, you know."

But the speaker was, at heart, not ill-pleased with the suggestion that the troublesome father might be

removed by some sudden stroke of fate, and Claire left without a protector who had the right to interfere in her affairs.

Cost what it would to himself or to her, Walter Thorne had determined to marry her at the earliest possible moment, and if Lapierre were only out of the way he felt assured that he could mould the fate of the loving, trusting child to suit himself. He speculated vaguely of the future ; wondering what it would bring to them ; but he was resolved to improve the present, without permitting any inconvenient scruples to lie in his way. All must come right, and if it did not—well, then it would be time enough to reflect on the best means of extricating himself from the difficulties that might beset his path.

Selfish and reckless, he ignored the ties that bound him to his betrothed, and was ready to rush into new ones, which he might find himself as anxious to abjure in the time to come. Thorne really persuaded himself that his father would not long refuse his forgiveness when once the marriage was irrevocably made, but if he should prove obstinate, the young man never asked himself what his own course would be.

His meditations were interrupted by the return of the hostess, who invited them into the library to look over some splendidly-illustrated books which Thorne was anxious to see. The library was a pleasant room, with large windows looking out over the broken country that lay between the Grange and the dilapidated house inhabited by M. Lapierre, with the abrupt cliffs rising in the back-ground, over which a tiny thread of water now flowed.

The windows had deep recesses in front of them, and

Claire sat down in one of these, and looked with a thrill of terror and thankfulness toward the distant spot on which her lover had encountered such perils, and, as she thought, so heroically battled through them.

The books had little interest for her, for she had been familiar with them from her childhood, and in her present mood, she preferred dreaming her own sweet dream, to all the talk on art going on so near her.

She seemed to have suddenly stepped from childhood to womanhood; and young as she was, she began to realize that her destiny for life was settled, so far as her own feelings were concerned. This man, who two weeks before was unknown to her, had appeared in his youth, beauty and power, and made himself master of her fate, almost without a struggle on her part to escape the net he was spreading around her.

She felt that she was his utterly and entirely; that she would bow to his behests, as the veriest slave, and have no will but that of the autocrat she had so blindly chosen. Her love for her father, which had hitherto filled her life, was henceforth a secondary feeling, though she reproached herself that it should be so. But some powerful magnetic attraction seemed to draw her to her fate, and in her blind madness, she was ready to say,

"I know not, I ask not if guilt's in that heart,  
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art."

Claire was too young and trusting to dream of treachery—to imagine that her life might be wrecked at the outset, by the idol she had set up in her heart of hearts, to worship as something superior to all other

creatures of mortal mould. All the fantasy of an imaginative mind was brought into play to gift her lover with every noble attribute of humanity, and even a good and true man could scarcely have filled the ideal of her overwrought fancy.

How far below it this one must fall when he stood before her in his true colors; treacherous, false—seeking self-preservation at any cost to her; leaving her to be swept down by the tide of life, to be bruised, perhaps crushed, by the obstacles he had recklessly placed in her path. Ah! if the curtain could have been lifted, and that sad picture portrayed, how shudderingly would she have recoiled from the precipice over which she was hovering.

Thorne soon came to her and sat down beside her in the wide window seat, leaving Mrs. Courtnay and her father together. Julia was playing with a favorite old dog, who was permitted to come into the house, and the opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* was afforded them. The Frenchman looked after the young man, and gravely shaking his head, said:

"It is impossible to keep them apart, and he is apparently so frank and true, that I scarcely know if it would be well for me to attempt doing so."

"We have both done the best we could," replied Mrs. Courtnay, "and he really seems so much in earnest that I scarcely know what to say. If all Mr. Thorne says of himself is true, the future of Claire seems a fair one; but they must not marry immediately. Should your sad presentiment be realized, I will take Claire under my own charge, and remove her with me to Europe in the spring, for it is my fixed intention to go thither as soon as my son graduates and can accompany me."

The face of M. Lapierre brightened, and he eagerly replied:

"That will be best. Yes—when I am gone, take her to France. Keep her from this imperious lover till she is old enough to understand herself, and to know if he is the one best suited to her of all the world. At times I have a chilling doubt of it. Something seems to warn me that it will not be well with my darling if she is given over to him entirely. But I may wrong him, for he seems good and noble, and—and he is very much in love with her."

"Of the last there cannot be a doubt: sudden passions, however, often die out as rapidly as they are kindled, and I wish to test the strength of this. Two years' probation will suffice for that, and if Mr. Thorne should prove fickle, Claire is too young to be permanently affected by it. I promised you that your little girl shall be as carefully looked after as if she were my own daughter, and in one sense she is, for I have promised before God to be a guide and protector to her."

"Thanks, dear and true friend, for your thoughtful kindness. It lifts from my heart a heavy weight. Claire may need all that you can do for her—oh! never desert her! Be her faults what they may, say that you will stand by her, should all others fail her. Tell me that you will, for something whispers me that she will need you, and the time may come when she will have no other one to look to in her desolation. God help me! but I seem to see a cloud settling around my darling's fate that I am powerless to avert. I shall not live to see it close upon her earthly prospects, but you will and you must promise me to stretch forth a saving hand and be a good providence to her."

He was so deeply agitated that Mrs. Courtnay regarded him with compassionate surprise. She gently said:

"If you can really foresee events, as you so often declare, you must be a sad prophet of evil, M. Lapierre. I pledge you my word that I will do all that is possible to render the life of my god-child prosperous and happy. If misfortunes overtake her, I will not turn my back upon her, even if she should be herself to blame. I assure you that in me she possesses a friend who will never forsake her, so cast your fears to the wind, my dear old friend."

"I will do so from this moment; my heart is most grateful for this assurance, for I can rely on you. Ah! if I could only live to watch over her myself, but that I know is impossible. All now left me is, to make my peace with Heaven and prepare to sever myself from the only creature for whom I would wish to live."

His head sunk on his breast, and he seemed absorbed in painful emotion. Mrs. Courtnay said no more, for she hoped this strange hallucination would pass away, for M. Lapierre seemed to be in the enjoyment of perfect health.

She took up a book and made an effort to interest herself in its pages, but her thoughts wandered far away to her young son, a youth of brilliant promise, who she was aware, had loved Claire from his childhood. The mother knew that it would be a severe trial to Andrew to give up his early playmate to this stranger, yet if the truth must be told, she was not sorry that the two would now be separated without any interference on her own part.

Mrs. Courtnay was not a very worldly woman, and

she possessed a tender and generous heart; but she was ambitious for her boy, and she knew that with his advantages of person and fortune he could select a wife far better suited to his position in life than the lovely daughter of M. Lapierre. She wished Andrew to become a power in the world, and she believed that he possessed the capacity and energy to become a leading spirit in his native land, if he were left free to walk on the path she had marked out for him. She wished him to spend two years at a foreign university, after graduating at William and Mary College, where he now was—travel through the most interesting portions of Europe, and then return to Virginia to enter political life.

Such was the future Mrs. Courtney had sketched for her fiery and rather unmanageable son, and she believed an early marriage would interfere with it; therefore it was better for all concerned that Walter Thorne should have come to the valley to bear Claire away from her boy lover. She had offered to take the young girl to Europe with her, but she intended to place her in a boarding-school where she would be secluded from society, and Andrew would go to Germany, so they would not be thrown together after the voyage was over.

While Mrs. Courtney thus settled her plans in her own mind, the two who sat in the window enjoyed an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*. A sudden shyness seemed to have fallen on Claire, and her soft eyes fell before the ardent glance that rested on her. Thorne kept to the letter of his promise to her father; he did not utter words of love, but every expression of his mobile face, every intonation of his flexible voice, spoke it

more eloquently than oral language, and the fair creature, who understood and responded to these demonstrations, seemed floating on a sea of bliss, over which the sun of her destiny seemed to be rising in unclouded splendor.

For some moments both had been silent, when Thorne pointed to the distant cliffs and said:

"What a magnificent view this window commands! I must really make a sketch of it before I leave the valley. At this distance, Glenrose—the fanciful name he had himself bestowed on the ruined home of Lapierre—looks like a pile of ivy-crowned ruins. The river, spanned by the rustic bridge, and the dark back-ground made by the cedar-crowned cliffs, with the Lady's Tarn below, are fine accessories to the picture. By the way, can you tell me why that name has been given to the dark pool that came so near swallowing me up?"

"It is a sad story," replied Claire, "and one that I am not sure Mrs. Courtney would like me to tell."

"Why not?—she need not know that you have spoken of it. Pray, be good, and satisfy my curiosity, for I wish more than ever to learn the romance connected with the spot."

Of course Claire obeyed, for she could refuse nothing to the man who had made himself master of her heart and life. In a guarded voice she began:

Mr. Courtney had an only sister, who, for years, was the belle of the county. She was a very haughty and beautiful woman, but by some strange fatality she became deeply attached to a young man her father had taken into his family as secretary to himself and steward of his large estate. Young Ran-

dall was of humble parentage, and of course far beneath the daughter of the house, but he availed himself of the encouragement she gave him, and the two were secretly betrothed.

"I dare say he did love her in his way, but what he gave was no fair return for what was lavished on him, as the end proved. Old Mr. Courtney discovered a plan for an elopement just as it was matured, and there was a dreadful scene, as you may imagine.

"He locked up his daughter in her own room, and then, in place of reviling and driving off her lover, as most fathers would have done, he took what seemed to him a wiser course. He understood the person he had to deal with, and he offered Randall a handsome sum if he would leave the valley forever and hold no further communication with his daughter."

"Did the craven accept such terms?" asked Thorne, indignantly.

"Yes—when finally convinced that he would get no fortune with Miss Courtney, if he married her, he accepted the father's terms. He was too poor to burden himself with a fine lady for a wife, with nothing to support her on; that was his excuse for deserting her; so he took the money offered him, went away, and was never heard from again, though old Mr. Courtney would gladly have recalled him if he had known where he was to be found."

"Why was that? Did the young lady pine away in 'green and yellow melancholy?'"

"Worse than that—she lost her reason, and finally became so dangerous that she was kept in close confinement in the east wing of the house. The family was a very gay one, and the house in those days was

always filled with company. Of course the presence of a lunatic, who was often violent, was a great source of trouble and inconvenience. The father began to think it would be necessary to send her to an asylum, but just at that time my parents were married, and when old Mr. Courtney heard of it, he wrote and offered them the house we now live in, and a sufficient sum to live on comfortably, if they would take charge of his mad daughter.

"They accepted the offer and came to Glenrose, as you call it; but it was not then a ruin. It was a nice, old-fashioned house, built in the early settlement of the country, and was large enough to afford a suite of rooms for Miss Courtney at some distance from those occupied by my parents. Old Betty, who now lives with us, was her attendant, and she has told me of these things, for they happened before I was born.

"For a few months after her removal the poor young lady was quieter than usual, and papa used all his skill in her service. He began to hope that she would gradually recover; and she was at length permitted to walk about the place without a constant watch being kept upon her. She seemed to have returned to her first state of quiet melancholy, and little apprehension was felt of another outbreak of frenzy.

"But a paroxysm came on her one evening when my father was absent from home. She set fire to her bedclothes, locked the door of her room, and went out in the gathering twilight.

"My mother was not well, and she was lying down asleep when Betty rushed into her room, with the appalling intelligence that the house was on fire, and her young mistress had fled, she could not tell whither.

A storm was rising and a deluge of rain began to pour down, but the fire gained great headway before it fell, and although help came from the Grange as soon as the light from the burning building attracted notice there, that portion of the house which had been occupied by the maniac was destroyed, leaving only the thick walls standing. With great effort the part we live in was saved."

"And Miss Courtney—what became of her?"

"Ah! that was the saddest part of all. When the fire was at its height, and the whole valley lit up by its glare, wild shrieks from the cliffs on the other side of the stream were heard; and standing on the large boulder of rock that saved you from going over the precipice, was seen Annie Courtney, with her hair loosened and streaming around her. She was clapping her hands and shouting with mad glee over the ruin she had wrought; by that time the rain had swollen the stream to a mad torrent, and she must have gained the rock before it began to swell.

"How to reach her and save her from destruction was discussed, and several active men set out to scale the cliff, and if possible bring her back safe. She saw them coming—waited till they had gained the tongue of land on which the pine trees grow, and then, with a mocking cry of defiance, threw herself over the precipice. In another instant she was swallowed up by the dark waters below; and never from that day has any vestige of poor Annie Courtney been found. That is why I gave the pool the name of Lady's Tarn."

Thorne listened with deep interest to this tragic story. He said:

"It was a sad fate, but better even that, than to live

on in the condition to which Miss Courtney was reduced. Oh, yes; death by any means is preferable to a broken life like that."

"Perhaps it is," replied Claire, "but it seems to me very weak to sacrifice both life and reason to a false and worthless man. I do not think that I should have done so in her place."

Thorne regarded her with an amused smile.

"What, then, would you have done in her place, *pétite*?"

"I can scarcely tell; but I am sure I should not have broken my heart as she did. If I could gain the power, I believe I would try to break the heart of him who deceived me with false promises, as her lover did; for it was base and treacherous in him to be bought off as he was by the old gentleman.

"So it was: but then you see the poor girl could not reach him; he was out of her power. If she had been permitted to marry him she would doubtless have tormented him enough—for when a woman makes a misalliance, she is very apt to repent of it, and make her home anything but a pleasant place to him who shares it with her."

"And how is it with men?" asked Claire, with a faint smile.

"Oh! that is very different; a woman takes her position from that of her husband, and he, if the superior, lifts his wife to his own level; in the other case, she sinks to that of the man she has chosen to marry. I regret having asked you for this sad story, for it has cast a shadow over your bright face."

"I have cause to feel sad when I recall it, for my mother never recovered from the shock she received



that night. She faded away and died a few months afterward. My father remained in the valley, as the tutor of Mrs. Courtney's son, and since Andrew went away, he has instructed Julia. That is how you came to find us still occupying the wing of the old house that was not burned."

This explanation was scarcely finished when dinner was announced, and they went into the dining-room, where an abundant and elegant repast was spread. Mrs. Courtney did the honors of her table with hospitable grace, and her new guest was glad to find himself in a house in which all the comforts and luxuries to which he had been accustomed were to be found.

Thorne was very grateful to the old Frenchman, and exceedingly in love with his daughter, but his fastidious tastes led him to recoil from the extreme simplicity in which they lived, yet with which they seemed perfectly contented. If Mrs. Courtney renewed her invitation to remain a few days, he determined to accept it, as it would be pleasant to rest in this luxurious nest, and visit Glenrose while waiting the arrival of his letters.

Left alone with Claire for many hours of the day, he would find it difficult to refrain from uttering what was in his heart, and the sharp reprimand of Lapierre had proved to him that such self-control would be expected of him. Here he could talk of art with his hostess, find books to interest him, and find it easier to be on his good behavior than if thrown hourly with the object of his passion.

So, after a very pleasant afternoon, when Mrs. Courtney said :

"I shall be glad if I can induce you to prolong your stay at the Grange a few days, Mr. Thorne," to the infinite surprise of Claire, he replied :

"Thank you, dear Madam, I think I will accept your kind invitation, and thus remove all doubts of my perfect good faith from the mind of M. Lapierre. I will remain your guest till my letters arrive."

The old man's face brightened, and he held out his hand, as he heartily said :

"That is well, sir, and I thank you with all my heart. It will be better for many reasons that you should remain here. I know that you will not think me inhospitable for speaking thus, Mr. Thorne?"

"By no means; we fully understand each other, I think. In a few more days I shall be able to claim the right to come as often and stay as long as I please, and I warn you I shall avail myself of it."

He glanced at Claire, but she had drawn a thick veil over her face, to conceal the disappointment she keenly felt, for she had not believed that her lover would consent to be left behind. He drew near her, and whispered :

"It is best so, Rosebud. Ever near you I could not restrain the feelings that are ready to burst into words at every glance of your lovely eyes. Your father has some fantastic notions that I am bound to respect—and I must keep in his good graces. Think of me, dream of me, sweet one, for I shall come to you in triumph before long, bearing in my hand the talisman that will give me the right to speak of all that is in my heart."

She gave him her hand in silence, and stepping into the carriage, was whirled away by the side of her father.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE DIE IS CAST.

WALTER THORNE could not deny himself the gratification of seeing his new idol every day, and he rode out on horseback, ostensibly for the benefit of his health, but really to give an opportunity to call at Glenrose and deepen the impression he had made on the little maiden who dwelt there.

Claire, after the first call, spent the most of her time in wondering when he would come again, and in watching for him with her heart upon her lips. Her life, so lately as tranquil as the clear stream that rippled past her door, had become a wild, impetuous torrent of doubt, hope, dread, and passion, that took from her budding youth all its gentle trust in the future.

She felt as if she had grown older by years since this disturbing element came into her quiet life, yet she would not have gone back to what she was before she knew Walter Thorne. She accepted the lot he had brought her, be it for good or for evil, and shrank from nothing if endured with him, for him. When together, though no word of love was spoken, each understood the other as well as if the most impassioned protestations had been exchanged, and both were supremely happy in the consciousness of loving and being loved with all the depth and intensity of two fiery natures, that responded to each other as the opposing poles of an electric battery.

On the fourth day after Thorne's removal to the

Grange, the mail brought him four letters. Three of them we have already seen; and the fourth one he tossed aside till the others had been perused. He shouted with mad laughter over Wingate's forgery, wondering how he could express himself so properly in the paternal character; but he sobered down considerably when he saw what his friend had to say for himself.

Still graver grew his face as he read the angry protest of his father and his irate commands to return immediately to his allegiance to his betrothed. He sat grasping this letter in his hand a long time, marvelling if the writer would really carry out his threat of disinheritance, if he pursued the bent of his own inclinations. His lip finally curled contemptuously, as he muttered:

"The old fellow is a terrible blusterer, but, like Falstaff, there is more sound than fury in his threatnings. I won't give up to him. I must secure this fascinating little gipsy as my own, or my destiny will be marred. What is the use of all his money if I, his only son, cannot purchase with it the happiness of my life? He declares that he won't give it to me if I disobey him; but that is all bosh. I will bring him round yet, and make him think my Rosebud the most enchanting being in existence."

In his wild dream of the impossibilities he was trying, in imagination, to bring about, he forgot the fourth letter; and, when his eye suddenly fell upon it, he shrank as if a serpent had stung him.

He lifted the dainty envelope, addressed in a lady's hand; and, tearing it open, drew forth the enclosure, and read the following lines:

"WILLOW GLEN, July 22d, 18—.

"DEAR WALTER:—Mr. Wingate tells me that you have been ill, and I was not near you to nurse you back to health; to prove to you how tender and true I can be in the shadows, as in the sunshine, of life.

"I can write to you thus freely, because our position gives me the right to show you how much you are to me, how fondly my heart clings to the betrothed of my soul.

"Oh, Walter, how deeply I felt your strange departure, so soon after our betrothal, I cannot tell you; but I would not believe that lack of love for the girl you had asked to become your wife was the cause of your sudden escapade. Art has so long been your mistress that you were loth to give her a rival who would possibly be so exacting as to draw you from your first love if you remained beside her. I tried to understand that, and excuse your desertion. I *did* pardon it, for deep and earnest affection is fertile in excuses for the object on which it is lavished.

"But now my heart begins to fear that it was not well for you to leave me; that you would have been safer beside me than in wandering so far away. You are ill in body and, I begin to fear, indifferent in feeling, to her whose happiness is centered in you alone.

"Come back to me, Walter; something whispers to me that your heart has wandered from its allegiance, but the inconstancy can only be temporary; you are bound in honor to me, and you dare not break the bond you yourself formed. My pride and my affections are equally outraged at the thought of such want of faith on your part, and I *will* not think such treachery from you is possible.

"I have read over what I have written, and I am strongly tempted to destroy it; yet, why should I do so? After the vows that have been exchanged between us, I have the right to express my feelings without reserve.

"Mr. Wingate came to me last evening to say that you had written to him, though not to me; some things he said gave birth to such pangs of jealous doubt as *you* will never have cause to feel on *my* account. He spoke of the people you are with, and casually betrayed that you had been nursed by a pretty and interesting girl.

"Ah, Walter, when weakened by illness, and grateful for attention to your comfort, you may come to think too tenderly of this young creature. I only speak to warn you, for I can never submit to have a corner in your heart given up to another woman. Come away from these people, I entreat; pay them as liberally as possible in gold for the kindness they have extended to you, but not in the heart's coin, for that belongs exclusively to me.

"By this time you are able to travel, I hope, and I shall look for you from day to day till you make your appearance among those who love and appreciate you far more highly than mere passing acquaintances can.

"Your devoted                      AGNES."

Thorne read over this effusion with clouded brow and compressed lips, and he began dimly to see that he was in a dilemma from which it would be difficult to extricate himself. He saw that his betrothed would not lightly surrender her rights, and he feared that she would use her efforts to keep alive the anger

of his father against him, if he persisted in his present course; for he knew that Agnes Willard possessed greater influence over the passionate and haughty old man than any one living. To bring about a union between himself and Agnes had been, for several years, the most earnest desire of Colonel Thorne's heart; and Walter knew if she wished to hold him to the pledges he had made, his father would never forgive him for deserting her.

He began to think himself a madman to dream of such a course himself, for ruin stared him in the face if he were eventually cast off. He was unfitted for any pursuit in life; he had been an idler, and a man of leisure, with a handsome allowance, which he often exceeded; what could he possibly do towards winning his bread if he found himself thrown on his own resources, was the question he vainly asked himself.

The criticism of M. Lapierre had opened his eyes to the inferiority of his pictures; and even if his talent was above mediocrity, years must elapse before he could hope to win such a reputation as would enable him to live by his art.

So much said common sense. Then arose before him the enchanting face that had so completely bewitched him, and all the passionate impulses of his nature surged up, demanding why he should sacrifice himself and his happiness at the bidding of an unreasonable old man, who possessed the power to disinherit him.

Colonel Thorne would not eventually do it, he persuaded himself; he could not, for he was an only child, and when his father knew the deed to be irrevocable, he must relent. To whom should he give

his wealth but to his natural heir? And as to Agnes Willard, she had many lovers, and among them she could find one to console her for his desertion.

Thorne glanced over her letter again, and thought she asserted her rights too strongly. It was not maidenly to write as she had written. She would be jealous as a Turk, too, that was evident enough, and he must pass a happier life with Claire than she would give him, even if his heart was not so deeply enthralled by her rival. Both loved him, but how could he place the affection bestowed by the impulsive child of nature, in comparison with that cherished for him by a cold, self-reliant woman like Agnes Willard? Besides, she was quite as old as himself, and her rival was a budding Euphrosyne with all the exquisite charms of early youth, combined with a depth of feeling and sensibility, as rare at her age as it was fascinating.

As might have been expected from the character of the man, the scale turned in favor of Claire, and Thorne forthwith destroyed the two letters written by his father and Agnes; the remonstrance of Wingate also shared the same fate; then armed with the spurious consent of Colonel Thorne, to his speedy union with the object of his pursuit, he sought Mrs. Court-nay, and displayed it to her in triumph.

After carefully perusing it she gravely said:

"I am glad that your father throws no obstacle in the way of your marriage with Claire; but I am sorry that he seems to desire an immediate union, Mr. Thorne. I still adhere to my opinion that she is too young to marry, and I shall oppose anything beyond a betrothal for the present."

He laughingly replied :

"We will settle about that, Mrs. Courtney, and due weight shall be given to your objections. I must hasten now to Glenrose to display my credentials. I am impatient to see the bright eyes of my beauty flash with joy and pride, when she reads what I have to show her."

He sprang down the steps, waved a farewell, as he mounted the horse which had been brought around for his evening ride, and galloped off in the direction of the Glen.

Reckless and determined, Thorne was by this time in a mood to sacrifice everything to the attainment of the object he so ardently desired to possess. He would trust to Providence to bring all right in the end, and in the meantime he would have his own way, cost what it might to himself or to Claire.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE BETROTHAL.

THORNE found M. Lapierre sitting on the portico alone, and the young lover sprang from his steed, flourishing the open letter above his head.

"Eureka! victory!" he exultingly exclaimed. "Did I not tell you, sir, what the result of my application to my father would be? Read that, and see how fully and freely he consents to my marriage; how anxious he is to serve you. He knows something of your former high estate, it seems, and he has sympathy for a fallen star of the financial world."

Thorne was very much excited, and in the triumph of the moment, he completely ignored the fraud he was about to impose on this honest old man. M. Lapierre, with some trepidation, took the offered letter, glanced over it, and, with a gratified smile, said :

"This is as explicit as I could wish, and very, very kind, I am sure. So your father has really heard of me; and in the exuberance of his goodness, he offers me a position among men again. I thank him deeply, sincerely, but it is too late—too late. I shall write to him myself, and express my feelings both with reference to myself and my daughter. If he will be kind to her, it is all I ask of him. For myself, it is too late to do anything."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, sir; but we must see about it in the future. Just now I have but one thought, and that is for Rose. I may seek her now, I suppose, and win from her a promise to become my wife!"

"Yes, but at some distant day; that is understood, and I have already given my word to Mrs. Courtney that Claire shall go to Europe with her."

"*Diable!*" arose to the lips of Thorne, but he repressed the exclamation in time, thinking that he would gain his own point yet in spite of them. He had not plunged himself in a web of deceit and falsehood to be baffled now. He calmed his impatience, and quietly said :

"I have heard of that plan, and perhaps it will be as well to defer our union till Claire is older; but I must tell her all that is in my heart, M. Lapierre, and with your permission, I will seek her. By the way, when your letter to my father is written, transfer it to me,

and I will address, and forward it with my own. I shall hardly know how to thank him for the happiness he has conferred on me."

Lapierre smiled and nodded acquiescence, and Thorne disappeared through the door. He heard the tones of the violin, and followed them to the sanctum of Claire. He had often been there before, but only as a guest; now he felt as if he entered it as master of the retreat, and its lovely owner.

Claire, in a white dress, with a few roses in her shining hair, sat near the window practising an air her lover had taught her; but at the sound of the firm step that rang upon the floor, she started up flushing with joyful welcome. She saw the letter he held up, dropped the instrument at her feet, and sprang a few steps towards him, eagerly crying:

"It has come—all is right, for your face tells me so."

Thorne caught her to his heart, and, for the first time, showered kisses on her brow and lips.

"It is right, my darling, my own—my heart's love. I am free to win you as fast as I can; at last I can express what has been struggling for utterance for days past, and you can listen without reproach. But you are not to listen alone, my angel; confirm in words what I have guessed, that you love me as ardently as I do you; is it not so, rose of my life?"

She hid her face upon his breast, and the faint "yes" that issued from her lips was scarcely audible, but Thorne understood it, and he embraced and kissed her again, till she shrank from him, abashed and trembling.

Claire sat down in one of the large chairs, and her lover placed himself on a cushion at her feet, that he

might look up into her face, and read the exquisite changes that flitted over it, each one, he thought, more entrancing than the one that preceded it.

With the abandon of a boy just freed from restraint, he poured forth the love that was in his heart, though he carefully guarded the treachery of which he was conscious through all his happiness. But he soothed his sense of wrong-doing by the proverb that "all is fair in love and war," and, in spite of the misgivings that would intrude, he was, for the moment, as foolishly enraptured as if his prospects rested on the most stable foundations.

He had cast care to the winds, never dreaming that they were likely to nurse it till it burst in a tornado over himself, and the innocent object of his reckless pursuit. He believed himself ready to brave everything for her sake; yet he did not once ask himself if he would stand by her in the hour of need, and defend her cause in defiance of all the world.

Unconscious that she would have a cause to sustain in the enchanting future that opened before her, Claire listened to the raptures of her adorer, and responded to them in her own sweet way, till he thought the world well lost for the possession of such a treasure.

When twilight began to gather, M. Lapierre came in to join them, and the two descended from the radiant heaven to which they had been transported, to the prosaic realities of common life.

The supper of fruit, cream, and tea cakes, had been laid in the front yard under the shade of the trees, for Betty had discovered that the bare and comfortless dining-room was not to the taste of the young autocrat, who, she had shrewdness enough to see, was rap-



idly establishing a strong foothold in the house that had sheltered him.

Thorne had further propitiated her by laying aside his tone of levity when he addressed her, and by the present of a few gold pieces, which the old woman was not sufficiently disinterested to refuse.

"The white folks thought all would be right," she argued with herself; "so why shouldn't she believe in so liberal a gentleman as Mr. Thorne?"

The little party found the table decorated with fresh flowers, and the *al fresco* repast was enjoyed as much as was possible under the circumstances. Thorne was the only one who had much appetite for the dainty fruit and rich cream; but he was recovering from illness, and therefore the excitement of his feelings did not prevent him from doing justice to the good things set before him.

When Betty brought a cup of hot tea to each one, Thorne took it from her waiter, and said, with eyes sparkling with mischief:

"You need not attempt to stand guard over your young lady and myself any longer, Mrs. Betty. Everything is settled; and I have permission to make love to her as much as I please. Ask papa there, if it is not true?"

Claire blushed and laughed, and Lapierre gravely said:

"Yes, Betty; this young gentleman is to be my son at some future day. It is right that so faithful a servant as you have been, should be told of it."

"Bless de Lor' for all his mercies," cried the old woman, devoutly; "I's allers thought dat my Rosebud would come to be a gran' lady. I only hopes as

she'll be as happy as she's sweet and innercent. De good man looks after his own, an' he'll keep her in his han,' I hopes and believes. I'll pray for her every day of my life, as I allers has ever since she was born."

"And I hope you will give me the benefit of some of your prayers, too, old lady, for I am afraid I sadly need them," said Thorne, half mockingly, half in earnest.

"You speaks de trufe, now, young man; but we's tole dat de believin' wife shall save de unbelievin' husband: an' when you has an angel to walk through de worl' wid you, in course you'll git worf lookin' arter by de blessed Marster. But I'll ax him all de same to have a sharp eye on you, an' keep you in the way you should go."

The young lover laughed gleefully at this, and said:

"Of course, with Claire to look after me, you to pray for me, and the Good Master to guide me, I shall not be apt to falter in well doing. But I intend to try and make your Rosebud happy, I assure you, Mrs. Betty."

"In course you thinks so now, sir; but I wonder what you'll do when trouble comes on you, as it must to all yeth's creatures. You's a quick speakin' youngster, an' our Rosebud ain't bein' used to nuffin but pettin' an' sweet words. You must 'member dat, Mr Thorne."

"As if I should be likely to forget it," and he flushed slightly under the old woman's fondness for lecturing.

"That will do for the present, Betty," said Lapierre. "Remove the things now; and you, Claire, had better retire to your retreat, and leave me a little while with Mr. Thorne. I wish to speak with him in private."

His orders were obeyed, and he and Thorne paced to and fro beneath the trees, talking earnestly. The tones of the younger man's voice were several times raised in vehement remonstrance, but in spite of his arguments in favor of an immediate marriage, all he could gain from Lapierre was the promise that a formal betrothal should take place that evening before they separated. Thorne was forced to concede that Claire should complete her imperfect education before their union took place. Deeply chagrined as he was at this, he consoled himself with the certainty that his own influence over the object of his choice would place her fate absolutely in his power, and he fully intended to use it to circumvent her father's wishes.

He smoothed his brow, as he heard the sound of approaching wheels, and in a few more moments Mrs. Courtney drove to the gate, and alighted from her carriage.

"It is late to come over," she said, "but I felt anxious about what is to be settled to-night, and I could not remain at home."

Thorne lightly said:

"I am glad that you have joined us, Mrs. Courtney, for things have been settled to your satisfaction. You have won and I have lost, for M. Lapierre will not consent that I shall have my bride at once. My friends will be disappointed at the result of my wooing, but I find my old friend here immovable."

There was a tone of deep chagrin in his voice, and Mrs. Courtney gently replied:

"The time will come, Mr. Thorne, in which you will acknowledge that we are right to retain Claire among us till she is better fitted for the position in which you

wish to place her. I have sufficiently discussed this subject with you and you fully understand my wishes with regard to my god-child. To carry them out will be for your mutual benefit."

"So you may think, madam; but I cannot agree with you. Pure and perfect happiness is rarely found on this earth, yet you deny it fruition to Claire and myself. You wish to separate her from me, that she may be taught to be conventional and worldly, while I prize her for the sweet simplicity that is her most attractive charm. I wish for no change in her; I adore her as she is."

"I comprehend that; but it does not alter my convictions as to our duty to our child, Mr. Thorne. I expect you to chafe a little under your disappointment. You would not be a true lover if you did not; but you are too reasonable not to yield gracefully to the wishes of M. Lapierre."

He rather sullenly replied:

"Of course I must yield. There is nothing else left me; but I cannot do it with a good grace. Since nothing more is to be gained, I consent to the betrothal, as that will, in some sort, bind Claire to me."

The three went into the house together, and in a few moments entered Claire's retreat. The room was brilliantly illuminated, and, as usual, decorated with fresh flowers. The young girl, herself the fairest flower of them all, stood beside a music-stand, looking over its contents. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes brilliant with the new light of love that flooded her whole being; and in her heart she wished that she was mistress of her destiny, for she would have left both father and friend to follow him she had learned to love so trustingly.

Mrs. Courtney went forward, and tenderly kissing her, said:

"I have come to witness your betrothal, Claire, for I felt sure Mr. Thorne would not defer it beyond this evening. Dear child, do not tremble. It is a simple ceremony, and will soon be over."

"I do not tremble with fear, but with happiness," whispered the young girl, as she buried her face in the maternal bosom that had been her refuge in all her childish troubles. "Oh, *mamma*, that Walter should have chosen me from all others—that he should be willing to lift me to an equality with himself, seems too great happiness for an obscure creature like myself."

"My dear Claire, you must not underrate yourself. In everything, save fortune, you are quite Mr. Thorne's equal. A wife must claim the respect as well as the affection of her husband. Remember that, my love, and maintain your own dignity."

Claire faintly laughed at the last suggestion, for she was too much of a child to dream of dignity in connection with herself. She lifted her beautiful eyes, and glanced slyly towards her father and lover. Lapiere gravely said:

"My daughter, I have formally consented to a betrothal between yourself and Mr. Thorne, and as he is anxious to have the ceremony over, we have come hither for that purpose. Give him your hand, and repeat such a form of words as you may think necessary to keep you true to each other, through the two years of probation that have been settled on."

Thorne sprang to her side, drew Claire to the centre of the floor, and clasping her hand in a fervent pressure, said, in a loud vibrant voice:

"I pledge my love, my life, my honor to you, Claire Lapiere, and vow before Heaven that you shall become my beloved and cherished wife, as soon as I am permitted to make you such, and in token of my faith, I place upon your finger this ring which was once my mother's."

As he slipped on the ring—a plain hoop of gold, which he had worn on his little finger—Claire, with perfect self-possession, spoke in her turn:

"And I accept your troth, Walter Thorne, and give you in return my promise to cling only unto you. To love you, to be true to you through all the chances and changes of life, and to hold myself ready to ratify these vows at the altar whenever the consent of my father permits me to do so."

A voice from the door cried out "Amen," and all turned to see who had intruded on this scene.

A small, fair man, wearing a long, flowing black robe, with an ebony cross hanging from the girdle that bound his waist, stood in the doorway. Lapiere approached him with words of eager welcome.

"Dear Father Jerome, what has brought you to our valley again? I have been most anxious to see you, and you never could have arrived at a more opportune moment."

"Thanks, my son. I have come back to make the Happy Valley my abiding place so long as I tarry on earth. I have been compelled to relinquish my wandering life, and my missionary duties are at an end. I find that I must have a settled home on account of my rapidly failing health."

Mrs. Courtney and Claire came forward with extended hands and smiles of welcome, and Father Jerome said:

"My daughters, I give you my blessing; and this young gentleman is entitled to it, too, I presume, from the scene I have just witnessed."

He gave one hand to Mrs. Courtney, and laid the other on the head of Claire as he thus spoke, looking earnestly at Thorne, as if expecting an avowal of his religious faith.

Lapierre seemed embarrassed, and hastened to say:

"I dare say I have been very much to blame, but until this moment it had never occurred to me to inquire of Mr. Thorne to what church he belongs. In fact, as Claire's mother was a Protestant, I have been more careless than I otherwise should."

The priest gravely said:

"You were the stronger party in that contract, and you allowed your wife the exercise of her own faith. Will this young man be equally lenient with Claire, if he is not one of ourselves?"

To this query Thorne hastened to reply, in such a manner as to make a friend of the speaker, who, he foresaw, might be made useful in the future. He respectfully spoke:

"Holy father, I belong to no sect of Christians, but I am anxious to receive such instruction as will fit me to choose among them. The church to which my betrothed bride belongs I will gladly enter if I can be convinced that it is the true one."

Father Jerome warmly grasped his hand, for he was most earnest in the calling he had embraced from the convictions of his own heart, and he thought he saw before him a promising proselyte to the ancient faith he firmly believed to be the only true one.

He spoke with solemn and impressive dignity.

"My son, the heart that is open to conviction is always a noble and faithful one. We will talk seriously together at a more fitting time, and I hope to be able to convince you where true salvation is to be found. I am glad to know that this pet lamb of my flock will not fall into unworthy hands, for I have loved her from her babyhood."

The priest looked so feeble and worn that Claire hastened to place a chair for him, and he sunk into it breathing heavily.

"Dear Father, I fear that you have over-exerted yourself," said Mrs. Courtney; you seem very much exhausted."

It is the weary travel in the hot sun that has so overcome me. I have walked many miles with this haven of rest in view. I am failing rapidly, my daughter, and I have come back to the old place to yield up my spirit in its peaceful shades. But to the will of God I resign myself."

"I trust that He will not decree that you shall be taken from us in the midst of your days," replied Mrs. Courtney, with emotion. "I have often wished for your return, and now that we have you back with us, we will nurse you into strength and usefulness again."

He shook his head, already silvered over, though he had not passed his fortieth year, and mournfully replied:

"That may never be, for my labors are nearly ended. But I did not come hither to cast a gloom over my friends, and above all, I would not bring the shadow of doom into a house that has just witnessed the betrothal of two young and happy hearts."

Claire had flitted out, and she now returned, follow-

ed by Betty, bearing a waiter on which refreshments were placed. The old woman asked and received the benediction of her spiritual father, and then bustled out to complete the preparation of the tea which she knew would prove the best restorative for the weary priest.

Father Jerome had for years lived the hard and laborious life of a missionary, wandering from one mountain district to another, wherever the followers of his faith were to be found, occasionally spending an interval of repose in the valley among the cultivated friends he found there. Mrs. Courtney had erected a small chapel on her place, in which he officiated when in the neighborhood; and near it was a secluded cottage which she had often pressed him to accept as a permanent home.

Hitherto he had refused to give up his wandering life, but now he had come to avail himself of the promise she had made him, that the place should be open to him whenever he felt himself willing to accept it. A violent cold, contracted during the previous winter, had settled on his lungs, and the priest knew that his days were numbered, so he came to the friends he loved best to die with them.

When he had refreshed himself, Mrs. Courtney cheerfully said:

"Your cottage is ready to receive you, father, for I have had it kept in order for your reception at any hour; but you must spend a few days at the Grange with me before you take formal possession."

"Thanks, my daughter; I knew that I should find your benovolent heart open to my necessities; therefore I came to you and to my old friends here to minis-

ter to me when I am no longer able to suffice to myself. I have not spared myself in this service of others, but it is better 'to wear out than to rust out.' What has become of the young people, and how is it that I find Claire a betrothed bride while the crown of childhood is yet upon her young brow?"

With some reluctance, Lapierre explained how Thorne came into the valley; how ill he had been, and how Claire had been compelled to play the part of nurse to him. But he hastened to say that the ceremony Father Jerome had witnessed was not to be followed by an immediate marriage.

The priest listened attentively, and then said:

"It was unfortunate that the young man was thrown on your hospitality, but it was fate, I suppose. I do not approve of long engagements; they rarely end well. If this Mr. Thorne is all you tell me; if he can secure the future of Claire, I think you will do well to allow the marriage to take place without any unnecessary delay. They seem to be very much in love with each other, so why should you postpone their happiness?"

"But Claire is so very young, as you yourself remarked just now."

"Yes—I was surprised that you had suffered things to go so far, but having done so, it will be best to complete the affair, for Claire will consider herself as much bound to this young man as if the blessing of the church had been pronounced over them; and he, when he leaves her, may consider himself free to go upon his way, and forget his pledges to her. The poor child will be left in a very disagreeable position."

"Really, father," said Mrs. Courtney, "I scarcely



expected you to take sides with Mr. Thorne—for he is most anxious to have his marriage concluded at once. I hope you will not express your views before him, for I have set my heart on taking Claire with me to Europe next spring."

"Of course I shall not place myself in opposition to her father's wishes," was the grave response. "I merely expressed my own convictions. I do not expect either you or M. Lapierre to be influenced by them."

While this conversation went on Claire and her lover were out in the summer night beneath the stars talking such sweet nonsense as lovers like to hear; uttering vows of eternal constancy, and planning the ideal life they would spend together in those days when they would be permitted to walk hand in hand upon the path of life.

Thorne at length said:

"But, Claire, I wish to claim you *now*. Two years are so long to wait, and you will soon be removed so far away. Oh! my darling, if I do not claim you within a month, I have a presentiment that something will happen to separate us forever."

"But what can happen, Walter? The time seems long, but it will soon pass away, and however distant from you I may be, my heart will be ever with you—my thoughts will always hover around you. If I go with mamma, it will only be to render myself more worthy to become your wife."

"I know—I understand all you can say on that subject; but you are all that I wish now. If—if—Oh, Rosebud, listen to me, and yield to my prayer. You are mine by a solemn ceremony now; consent to make

that irrevocable without the knowledge of your father, and all will be well. He will forgive us when it is over. Speak, my angel—tell me that you will become really mine, and I shall be the happiest and proudest of men."

Claire shrank from him, and hurriedly said:

"Don't tempt me to do wrong, Walter. Papa would forgive me, but he would lose faith in me and also in you, if we deceived him. My heart is traitor enough to him without giving him this final blow."

"So you prefer sending me from you, miserable and despairing, sooner than take your fate in your own hands. Oh, Claire, if you loved as I do, you could not be so cruel. I would defy the world for your sake. I would pass through fire to win you, and you refuse me what I have almost the right to demand after what has passed here this evening."

She stood white and trembling, uncertain on which side her duty lay, but at length she faintly said:

"Dear Walter, if you could look into my heart, you would not say that your love for me is deeper or truer than mine is for you. When I listen to you I have no power to resist you, so pray be generous, and aid me to do what is right. My word is pledged to my father, and I must not break it, reproach me as you will. Neither can I bear the thought of a separation from you. It seems to me that I shall die if you leave me alone after this dream of heaven has opened to me."

"Yet I must go, since you refuse to give me the hand I so ardently covet. My father is a very singular and imperious man, and if you do not return with me as my wife, so great is his anxiety to see me married, that he will be capable of insisting that I shall



give my hand to a young girl he has long been most anxious for me to marry. Of course I shall resist his commands, but in doing so I shall disobey him as much as you will *your* father if you marry me clandestinely."

Claire did not see the sophistry of this argument. She tremulously said:

"Your father must indeed be a very strange person to require such submission, when he knows that you are attached to me. Have pity on me, Walter—do not urge me any more, for I dare not wound my poor old father by acting as you wish. He is not strong, and—and I do not know what the result might be."

Thorne saw how much excited she was—how weak in her resistance—and he triumphantly thought that a few more efforts would bring her to the terms he had dictated.

At that crisis voices were heard issuing from the portico, and Father Jerome came out with Mrs. Courtney, followed by Lapierre. Before entering her carriage, Mrs. Courtney took leave of Claire, and said:

"Come to me to-morrow, my love, for I have much to say to you. Father Jerome will talk seriously to Mr. Thorne, and I hope he will ratify all the pledges he gave this evening."

"You must not doubt his perfect sincerity, mamma," was the whispered reply: "for I know that Walter is the soul of honor."

"I trust so, my love, for your sake. Now bid Father Jerome good night, for I am going to take him away with me."

"I am sorry for that, but of course you have the best right to him."

The pallid priest placed his hand upon the head of the young girl, and gently said:

"You have my blessing, my child, and my prayers for your happiness. You may be the means of bringing back a stray lamb to the fold, and Heaven will reward you for it in its own good time."

Claire reverently raised his hand to her lips and deprecatingly replied:

"I am afraid, father, that I have thought more of the earthly happiness of my betrothed than of his eternal welfare."

"But now we will think of both, daughter. I shall talk with Mr. Thorne, and convince him that being one with you in faith will make him more completely one with you in affection and happiness. Farewell, my child, I shall see you to-morrow at the Grange."

Thorne found an opportunity to exchange a few tender words with his betrothed before leaving, and in a few more moments the old Frenchman and his daughter were left standing together in the silent yard.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WARNING VERIFIED.

AS the sound of the carriage wheels died away in the distance Lapierre said:

"Come with me, my darling, for a little while. I am unaccountably depressed by what has happened here this evening; it is selfish in me, but I feel as if I have given another more power over you than I pos-

sess myself. Sit near me, Claire, and let me feel that, now your betrothed is away from you, you are all my own again."

He entered the portico and threw himself upon the wide bench that was placed against the wall; Claire brought a low chair from the house and nestled down beside him, with her soft hands clasping his. She tenderly said:

"Dearest papa, I love you dearly; indeed I do, though I have given my troth to Mr. Thorne. Do not feel jealous of the affection he has won—it is so different from that I cherish for you."

"Ah, yes—so different. I know—I understand, for I have loved myself; I know how exacting, how all-absorbing first love is. I do not think I could bear the certainty that another has taken from me the highest place in your affections, if my life were to be prolonged. But God is merciful, and he takes me from the trouble that must have come at some time, though I scarcely looked for it so soon."

"Oh, papa! don't talk so; I cannot bear it. Why should you, of late, always speak of death in connection with yourself?"

"Because I am an old man, now, and the thought of the inevitable is most familiar to me. But I do not wish to sadden you, Claire, on this evening, which should be so happy to you. You have pledged yourself to your lover, and I trust that he will prove worthy of trust. I shall not live to witness your union with him; nay, do not interrupt me, child; I must speak the truth to you, and you must listen to me with calmness. I cannot bear any more excitement this evening; my heart is beating its funeral march now. Feel its rapid pulsations."

He drew her hand over his heart, and with dismay she felt the wild force with which the blood was rushing through it. She faintly asked:

"What does this mean, papa? Why have you concealed from me the suffering you must long have borne? What is it?—oh, what is the cause of this?"

Lapierre lifted the hand tenderly and impressively replied:

"It is the premonitory warning sent to all of my race when death draws near. A little while, and you will be fatherless—there—hush that cry, and listen to me, Claire, for I feel as if I must no longer delay speaking with you on the subject of your future."

"Oh, papa, papa, it breaks my heart to hear you talk in this way."

"Hush, my darling—don't unnerve me. What I am about to say may console you, even for my loss. Until to-night I have been opposed to an early union with your lover, but something Father Jerome said to me has caused me to take a different view of your position. It may be better to have your marriage over soon—God knows if I am right, and I am so anxious for your welfare when I am removed from you, that I can scarcely judge fairly."

With a movement of joy, Claire pressed his hand to her lips, but he checked her when she would have spoken:

"Mrs. Courtney will oppose an early marriage, and, if you choose, she will take you with her to France and perform a mother's duty by you. Should you elect to go with her, seek your brother—bear him my forgiveness, and use your influence to make him a good man. Ah! he was once the pride and joy of my

life, but he suffered another to come between us—to draw him from the path of honor—but that is all past and gone now. He is my son—your brother—and I do not wish to keep my children altogether apart.”

“I never wish to see him or to hold any communication with him,” said Claire, in a faint tone. “He has been a neglectful son to you. After ruining you he has forsaken you through all these years, leaving you to labor in poverty for the bread you ate. Don’t ask me to seek him, papa, for I can never do it.”

“But it has not been altogether his fault; my child, for I have withheld from him the knowledge of my retreat. Among my papers will be found proofs of the debt he owes me, and to you he must repay it. He is rich—he was once liberal, and for you he must do what I have disdained to accept for myself.”

“Don’t ask me to accept money from Armand, when he has denied it to your necessities. I could not take it from him. You make me wretched, papa, by talking as if you were going to leave me forever.”

“Not forever, my darling; beyond the grave we shall one day be re-united, and that thought sustains me now. I will not press the subject on you, Claire, but hereafter, when you recall what passed between us this night, you will try to do what I wish. I feel very much worn out and depressed, but I am not worse than I have often been of late. I think a good night’s rest will restore me to my usual state; but I shall die suddenly, Claire, and I wish to prepare you for the shock; that is why I have spoken to-night as I have done. But you need have little fear that anything will happen to me yet awhile. I only wish to say to you, that when I am gone, if Father Jerome consents

to unite you with your lover, in place of going to France, you may decline the bounty of Mrs. Courtney, and go with the man of your choice.”

Claire uttered a low cry of mingled pain and joy. She said :

“Why, papa, after the words I used this evening when I gave my troth to Walter, your consent places my fate at his disposal, and you know how anxious he is for a speedy marriage.”

“But my consent is conditional. While I live I will keep you near me; when I am dead if the priest approves, give Mr. Thorne your hand without any unnecessary delay.”

The feelings of the young girl were divided between joy and dread. The words of her father filled her heart with fears for him, while it bounded wildly at the prospect so unexpectedly opened of an early union with her lover. She gathered from his words that Father Jerome was in favor of it, and deeply she thanked him, unconscious that the day would speedily come in which she would have bitter cause to regret the view he had taken of her position and, in his anxiety to secure her fortune, had irrevocably wrecked it.

She kissed her father, and said :

“I cannot thank you as I should, papa, for all your tender and undeviating kindness to me. But you have talked too much already, and I think you had better try to repose now. It is past your usual hour for retiring, and your voice begins to fail you. Tomorrow you will think more cheerfully of yourself, and I trust that you will yet be spared to me many years.”

“Perhaps so; I only wished to prepare you for the

shock when it comes, but I scarcely know what impelled me to speak on this subject to-night. I will go in now, but, after I am in bed, come to me with your guitar, my child, and sing to me some of the grand old anthems you can render so effectively.

Lapierre arose and left her to think over the mingled joy and sorrow he had left with her; and, between the two the excited girl felt as if she must become hysterical; but she controlled herself and seeking her instrument, went into the simple dormitory in which her father slept.

The moon-beams were streaming through the open window, and Claire sat down in the soft light and commenced her labor of love. She had often soothed him to sleep in the same manner, but never had her voice sounded to him so thrillingly sweet as on this night, though there was the sound of tears in it as she gave utterance to the sublime strains that floated out on the still air in all their solemn beauty.

Lapierre lay half entranced by the melody, with his eyes fixed upon the fair face of the musician, mentally praying that she might be saved from all harm—that the life which lay before her might be one of purity and peace.

Alas, poor father! God was good to remove him from the evil to come; yet, had a longer lease of life been granted him, he might, perhaps, have warded off the direct part of the fate that was already closing around his idolized child.

The old man found that the music excited, in place of calming him; and when Claire at length paused and glanced toward the bed to see if he was sleeping, he said:

"That will do for to-night, my daughter. I shall sleep presently, but my nerves are so unstrung that your charming lullaby has not produced its usual sedative effect. Come and kiss me, and then go to rest yourself, for it is growing very late."

Claire came to his side, and after kissing him several times, she sat down on the chair beside the bed and said,

"I am not tired, papa, and if I went away it would only be to think by myself of what you so lately said. If you let me stay with you a-while I had rather be near you. Give me your hand, and I will see if I cannot magnetize you to rest."

He placed his hand in hers, and she started as she felt how cold and nerveless it felt. She held it between her soft palms, stroking it gently; and after a few moments, the restored circulation seemed to bring new vitality to it. Many times he clasped the tender fingers that sought to minister to him, murmuring blessings upon her, but gradually he seemed to sink off into a quiet sleep; and softly disengaging her hand, Claire imprinted a light kiss upon his wrinkled brow, and left the apartment.

It was very late before she slept herself that night—the feverish dread of the doom her father seemed to consider almost upon him held in abeyance the thrill of joy with which she had learned that his views with regard to her long separation from her lover, had undergone a change in their favor.

She scarcely thought of Thorne during these long hours of fear and doubt, for the dread was in her heart, that the father who had been all the world to her for so many years might be snatched from her at any moment. She shuddered as she remembered his words

that night, and again began to feel the dull thud that vibrated through his breast when she placed her hand upon it. She knew now that he was the victim of heart disease, which, she had often heard him declare to be beyond the reach of medical skill.

Not long would this tender father be spared to her, and in the silence of the night Claire vowed to remain with him to the end, in spite of the entreaties of her betrothed to share with him the beautiful life they had planned that evening beneath the quiet stars.

It was long past midnight before sleep came to weigh down her eyelids, and then she slumbered profoundly, for she was young and weary with the varied emotions of the day she had just passed through.

Claire was usually up with the sun, but the next morning she did not wake till old Betty came in with an expression of bewildered fright upon her face, and stood beside her couch. The woman laid her hand upon the sleeper's shoulder, and, in a husky voice, said:

"It's late, Miss Claire; you must get up to onct and come out'n dis, for suffin's happened. Oh, blesser Lor'! dat I should have such a tale as dis to tell to dis poor motherless chile."

Claire started up wide awake at once, and the ashen gray hue of Betty's face filled her with alarm. She rapidly asked;

"What is it, mammy? What can have happened to make you look so? You seem frightened out of your wits. It is very late. I have overslept myself. Have you seen papa this morning? Though, of course, you have; he was not well last night, but I hope he is better to-day."

Claire spoke quickly and almost at random, for something in the old woman's face had communicated to her mind an unspeakable dread of what was to follow.

"Yes, he's better—he's a deal better, but he aint up yet," said Betty, putting a strong constraint upon herself, for she feared the effect of the sudden announcement of the truth. "You git up an' put on yer close, Miss Claire, an' come to yer breakfus; yer pa don't want his yet awhile."

Claire sprang out of her bed, thrust her feet in a pair of slippers, and threw on a dressing-robe, as she hurriedly said:

"He is ill, then. I must go to him at once and see what is the matter."

As she attempted to pass from the room, the old woman threw herself before her.

"Don't ye go now, don't ye, missy—yer fader don't want ye yit. I's bin in to see him, an' he's—he's——"

She broke down and, with a wild, affrighted look, Claire sprang past her, dashed through the intervening apartments, and entered that of her father.

M. Lapierre lay with his face turned to the door in the same attitude in which she had left him on the previous night. Even the hand she had placed upon his breast did not seem to have been moved from its position, and on his face was that look but once seen on that of any creature of mortal mould—the ineffable serenity stamped there by the angel of Death!

Claire knew the truth at once—his spirit had passed away as she glided from his room believing that he only slumbered; and she sank half insensible beside his inanimate form.



But the pang of this sudden bereavement again aroused her to a full sense of the calamity that had fallen on her, and she cried out in her anguish:

"He is gone—gone away from me forever, Ah, my father is cold—cold! and I left him to breathe away his life alone, with no one near him, to receive his last sigh—oh, I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

Betty had followed her closely, and she now took her in her arms as she had done when she was a child, and soothingly said:

"Don't take on so, my lamb. You's allers bin good to him, an' I hearn you a-playing to him las' night to quiet him. Ah, he's quiet enough now, poor soul! but you mustn't break your poor heart. Tha—thar, my pretty! don't look so wild. Come wi' mammy, an' let her comfort you."

Claire struggled faintly, but the old woman held her firmly in her grasp, and she at length submitted to be borne from the chamber of Death.

When she again placed her young mistress upon her bed, Betty said:

"Dere, yer may cry as much as yer likes now, my precious, but you must'nt go back yonder. I's sent Pluto up to de Grange to tell de mistis what's happened here, and somebody'll be down directly to 'tend to things."

"Then—then you have known it for some time! Why was I not called earlier? Oh, mammy, I shall never forgive myself for caring for any one else more than I did for him. He has loved me all his life, too, and he has broken his heart because I permitted another to come between us. I know it is so, and I do not deserve ever to be happy."

"Don't talk dat way, Miss Claire. De Good Man has tuck yer pa from yer, case He wanted him up yonder where yer ma' has waited for his comin' so long. Think how happy dey is together dis blessed mornin', and take comfort to yer poor heart. De blessed Marster never sens sorrow widout sendin' help to bear it ef we ax for it in de right way. When I went inter de room o' de old gemplin dis mornin' an' foun' not him but de shell he had lived in here, I was mightily scar't; I 'sulted wi' my ole man, an' he told me to let ye sleep as long as I could, for t'would be hard enough upon ye when ye did wake up. An' I minded him an' let ye alone till I thought the folks would be comin' down from de Grange an' den I waked ye. Now, my Rosebud, put on yer close an' fix up yer hair, for Father Jerome will be here 'fore long, an' I know he'll want to see you."

"Yes; I must see him," said Claire.

And she mechanically arose and, with Betty's assistance, made her toilette.

This was scarcely accomplished when the sound of a carriage stopping at the gate was heard, and in a few more moments the bereaved girl was pressed to the heart of her maternal friend. Claire related to her all that had taken place on the previous night after her godmother left her, and after calming her emotion as much as possible, Mrs. Courtney said:

"Your father has had lately a strong presentiment of his approaching fate, but he did not expect his summons to come so soon. He talked to me about his death, and arranged what was to be done with you in such an event. You are my child now, Claire; by the desire of your father I am to stand in the place of a



parent to you. My dear love, you know that, as far as I can, I will be to you as tender a protector as he was who has left us."

"Yes, he told me. You are very good, *mamma*, and I love you dearly; but no one can be to me what my poor old father was. Yet I left him to die alone—I slept while he lay cold and lifeless so near me. Ah, why could not some good spirit have been sent to warn me of his condition, that I might have gone to him and tried to save him."

"My love, such regrets are natural to one so suddenly bereaved as you have been, but no effort of yours could have arrested the blow. You could have done nothing for him—his death was painless, for it is evident that he passed from sleep into the rest prepared for those who love and serve God. You know that your father was a good Christian, and the thought that he is now with the spirits of the blessed made perfect should console you. There, my child, bow your head upon my breast, and weep till the fountain of your tears is exhausted, but do not take blame to yourself for what you could not help."

Thus soothing and caressing the afflicted daughter, Mrs. Courtney passed an hour, and she succeeded in calming the first violence of her grief. Father Jerome then came in to see her, and the tender sympathy he manifested for her—the divine consolation he offered for her—at length quieted the tempest of remorse, for Claire, in her heart, believed that the events of the last two weeks, had hastened the fate of her father. Thorne came later in the day, but she refused to see him, and he was glad to escape from the gloomy house of mourning, and return to the Grange.

Arrangements were made for the funeral, and on the second day after his decease, Lapierre was laid to rest in the graveyard of the Courtney family beside the young wife who had been waiting there for him nearly fifteen years!

The old house was left to the care of Betty and her husband, and Claire returned home with Mrs. Courtney to remain with her as the child of her adoption.

In that interval she had scarcely seen Thorne, but he had daily written her most affectionate and sympathetic letters, and went further towards consoling her, than all the tender kindness lavished on her by her god-mother and the good father. Yet if Thorne's heart had been looked into Claire would have found there little real grief for the loss she had sustained. Isolated and lonely as she now was, he felt almost certain that he would triumph over such opposition as she could offer to a clandestine marriage, and he did not despair of bringing over the priest to his side.

He had spared no efforts to win golden opinions from Father Jerome. He had professed his willingness to be convinced by his arguments in favor of his own church, for it was of little importance to Walter Thorne to what sect of Christians he nominally belonged. To gain the desire of his heart he would have become a Mussulman or a Parsee with equal indifference. Claire was the deity he worshipped, and in his heart was no thought of the sacredness of the pledges he was so ready to give, provided they would enable him to carry out his own views.

On the day after Lapierre's decease, he occupied the time in writing replies to the letters he had received. To Wingate he dashed off the following lines:

"HAPPY VALLEY, August 1, 18—

"DEAR BOB:—You have been true to me in one sense, and treacherous in another. In the name of all the Furies, why did you betray anything to the old man? Don't you know well enough what a firebrand he is, and how unreasonable he can be in his tantrums.

"I have a disgusting letter from him, threatening all sorts of absurd penalties if I do not return home at once, and play the part of a dutiful son; a mawkish one from Agnes, throwing herself fairly at my head, and reminding me that I am bound to her in honor.

"After all, still and cold as she seems, she has courted me more than I have her, and I submitted like a fool to have the net thrown over me, which she is ready to tighten, till there will be no escape from it.

"You don't know what it is to have love pulling you one way, and interest another; for it would be a serious thing with me if the governor were to carry out his threats, and really disinherit me. Reading over your letter of remonstrance, and pondering on his too plainly-expressed intentions, has brought me face to face with the reality of the risk I have been so ready to run, and I am consequently partially restored to reason.

"I have left the house of the old Frenchman, and am at present at the Grange, as the guest of its mistress, a middle-aged lady, with whom I am not likely to fall in love. So much for the prudence of my course.

"I am not yet well enough to travel, but I shall leave this neighborhood as soon as possible, and complete the tour I sketched out for myself in the beginning of the summer. I shall not return to L— till the time appointed for my marriage approaches, for

neither my father nor Agnes shall abridge the few weeks of freedom left me. I will write to them both, and set their fears at rest, so far as my good faith to them is concerned.

"The letters you so cleverly forged have been destroyed, so you need have no uneasiness about them. I am much obliged to you for complying with my wishes with reference to them; but it was a useless trouble so far as I am concerned. The young girl with whom I was so deeply infatuated, is to go to France in a few months to complete her education; so you see that I am safely out of that scrape, serious as it threatened to be.

"Since you made mischief with the old man, the best you can do is to set him right about this affair, and dissipate the storm you have raised. You may direct your reply to Richmond, as I contemplate a visit there, and I shall not linger much longer in the Happy Valley. Yours, repentingly, W. THORNE."

"That will do, I think," he muttered, as he glanced over the lines he had written. "Wingate has served my turn, and now he must have dust thrown in his eyes like the others. I shall leave the Happy Valley, but I will take with me all that I value in it. I will not be baffled in that, come what will in the future. And now for the old man."

Thorne seized his pen again, and, with a sneer on his handsome face, wrote:

HAPPY VALLEY, August 1, 18—.

"MY DEAR FATHER:—Your strange letter is before me, and I must confess that I was surprised and hurt by its abrupt tenor. I do not know what Wingate may

have told you to put you in so violent a passion, but whatever it was can be readily explained by me.

"I met with an accident that came near being fatal, and was ill in consequence of it. I was received in the house of an old French *emigre*, and his daughter, a mere child, but a very pretty one, was my nurse. I was very grateful to her; but the rhapsody I wrote to Bob must have been penned under the influence of partial delirium. I have not now the slightest recollection of what I said, but, of course, it was wretched nonsense.

"I was so unfortunate it seems as to mislead Wingate as to the warmth of my feelings toward this young girl; and when your letter came I felt that I had been very foolish to write to him as I did.

"You need have no uneasiness concerning me, for I have left the old man's ruinous abode, and am now the guest of a middle-aged lady, whose penchant for art induced her to offer me her hospitality. As soon as I have regained my strength sufficiently to resume my wanderings, I shall leave the valley, and complete the tour I planned before setting out from home; so you need not look for me back before the time agreed on.

"I can easily make all straight with Agnes, who, by the way, has counselled me to pay my kind entertainers liberally. I am most anxious to take her advice, and I beg that you will send me a handsome remittance for that purpose. Having thus discharged my debt, I will shake the dust of the valley from my feet, and go upon my way. Your affectionate son,

"WALTER THORNE."

"And now for my last and most difficult task," he

thought. "How am I to set the jealous fears of Agnes at rest, and at the same time not infernally commit myself. I do not know that she would use my letter against me; but she might, and I should be in a pretty scrape. She is not a woman to be slighted and thrown off with impunity; but her pride will surely prevent her from suing me for breach of promise. I *must* be lover-like, or her jealousy will blaze up, and spoil my game at the outset. I know that I am getting into an awful mess; but I'll risk being blown sky-high to gain such a dainty, darling, little Rosebud as the one I have found here. When it is done, and she is mine beyond recal, those who have lured me into this other entanglement may make the best of it."

In spite of his lightness of nature, and lack of truth, Walter Thorne shrank from the task before him. With a face strongly expressive of disgust, he wrote:

HAPPY VALLEY, Aug. 1, 18—.

"MY DEAREST AGNES:—Your letter, containing so much that is soothing to my heart, and also much that is bitter to my pride, came safely to hand, and I need not tell you with what eagerness it was read—with what interest each sentence written by your hand was dwelt on.

"My dear girl, I was sorry to see what influence Wingate's nonsense had with you. He does not always stop to consider the effect his words may have, and he often jumps to conclusions that facts will not justify.

"I should have written to you, in place of to him, and told you of the accident that had happened to me, but I was suffering from fever, and my mind was not clear enough to venture on doing so. I must have

sent him a precious lot of nonsense, which he should have kept to himself, and I was surprised to find that he had not done so.

"I had a narrow escape from drowning the day I entered this enchanting valley, and the drenching I got made me quite ill. I have been nursed by good Samaritans, to whom I am very grateful, and one of them, as you have been informed, was a young girl of whom you condescend to be jealous.

"My dear Agnes, if you could see what a mere child she is, how unformed and ignorant of the world and its ways, you would lay aside all fears as to my constancy to yourself.

"You will be convinced how unfounded they are when I tell you I have left her father's humble home and am now the guest of Mrs. Courtney, a wealthy widow, with a grown-up son, who has kindly invited me to remain in her house till my convalescence is complete.

"It is not, however, my intention to linger here much longer, for I wish to continue the tour this accident has interrupted, and I shall bring you back some charming sketches of the scenery I have passed through. I asked for three months of perfect freedom, and it was granted by yourself and my father, and I shall hold you both to your agreement.

"After my marriage I can scarcely take so wild and scrambling a tour, as this has been, for you would expect me to settle down and play the part of a dutiful Benedict, so pray do not seek to abridge the few weeks I can devote to my art with a clear conscience.

"By the fifteenth of October I shall make my appearance in L——, ready to complete the most impor-

tant event in my life. Till then, adieu, dear Agnes, and cease to torment yourself with jealous fears concerning me. I am a man who cannot be chained down by conventional rules, and I should only recoil from those who attempted to control my freedom of action. At the time mentioned you will see me in L——, and my destiny will then be settled.

"Yours truly, W. THORNE."

With a clouded brow and compressed lips Thorne read over what he had written, and muttered:

"It is the best I can do, but it is unsatisfactory. It commits me decidedly, yet it will not entirely reassure that jealous and exacting girl. I escaped from her because I knew she'd tie me to her apron-string, and expect me to play the part of a pining, love-sick fool. Heigho! I begin to think I had better have done that than have come here to risk all my prospects in life, for the sake of a bewitching little angel, without a shilling of her own.

"I wish I could break away from Rose and do the honorable by Agnes, but that is impossible. The die is cast by the old man's death, and if my charmer will consent to go with me, I will risk everything for her possession. If she refuses, why then I'll go back and sacrifice myself upon the altar of Mammon, to please the governor."

Thus ruminating, Thorne closed and addressed his letters, and then busied himself upon a picture he was painting.

A picturesque ruin, with its ivy-crowned walls, stood in the background, with a narrow stream, spanned by a rustic bridge in front. On its margin

stood a young girl, holding a spray of roses in her hand: Claire, in all her budding beauty, looked out from the canvas, and Mrs. Courtney, for whom it was designed as a parting present, had declared the likeness perfect.

If he stole from her the child of her adoption, the artist thought it would be but a fair exchange to give her the shadow for the substance, and he worked on with smiling lips and love-lit eyes.

As the fair features glowed into life beneath his touch, the soft clear eyes looked into his own, he thought only of Claire and the means of winning her consent to a secret union, for he felt assured that Mrs. Courtney would not forego her own plans for the future welfare of her ward.

Now or never must he win her, and in his egotistic selfishness he refused to listen to such doubts as suggested themselves as to how the object of his headlong passion might fare when he became the master of her fate. What was he preparing for her, for himself, in the future? He could not answer that question satisfactorily, so he ignored it altogether, and only planned for the immediate gratification of the wish he had most at heart—to make this trusting child irrevocably his own.

Thorne believed that he could win over Father Jerome so completely that he would not refuse to pronounce the blessing of the church over them, even without the knowledge of Mrs. Courtney. He was aware that the priest disapproved of long engagements, and he felt sure that he was anxious to secure so good a match as he believed himself to be for the daughter of his old friend. So he doubted not that he should eventually succeed in his plans.

## CHAPTER XII.

## GUARDIAN AGAINST LOVER.

AFTER a few days Claire began to recover from the first stunning effects of the blow that had fallen upon her; but she was still so deeply depressed that Mrs. Courtney was alarmed for her health. She appeared so languid and hopeless that nothing seemed to interest her; but, at length, her kind friend induced her to leave her room, and, with some reluctance called on Thorne to aid her in bringing back some portion of the young girl's former fire and animation.

At first he found even this a difficult task, but gradually the magnetic power he wielded over her made itself felt, and under its influence the color returned to her cheeks, the light to her dimmed eyes.

For a few days Claire thought of her love for Walter Thorne almost with terror, for she believed it was the knowledge of that which had struck a death-blow to her old father's heart. It was true that Lapierre might have died any day, but she knew that, if agitation had been spared him, he might have lived on for months or years to come.

But, as the days passed on, that remorseful thought grew dim, and soon it almost ceased to grieve her, under the renewed infatuation that filled her whole being to the exclusion of every other feeling. In the wide world Claire saw but one refuge for her—and that was in the love of this man who so tenderly wooed her to his heart.

Her father had repented of his opposition to an early



union, and now no one should stand between them—no, not even the maternal friend who was so anxious to save her from a too precipitate marriage.

Thorne saw her revive under his skillful charming—saw the light of home and love relume in her lovely eyes—the pale cheeks again kindle into bloom beneath his ardent glances—and one evening when he stood alone with his hostess on the piazza, he said to her :

“You can see for yourself, Madam, that your young charge must go with me. She will droop and fade away on your hands, if you insist on sending me away from her. It would be a cruel experiment to attempt such a thing.”

Mrs. Courtney coldly replied :

“Yet, it is one I must make, Mr. Thorne. I stand in the place of a mother to this poor girl, and I must do by her as I would by my own daughter. I shall not remain here after you go away. Father Jerome needs better medical advice than the valley affords, for I begin to perceive a failure in his mind that alarms me. I am afraid it is softening of the brain, brought on by overwork, from which he is suffering. Claire needs change too, and I think I shall spend the fall and winter in Baltimore. I shall place both her and Julia in a good boarding school till my son is free to accompany me to Europe.”

“This is something quite new to me, Madam. What does the priest say to your plan for his benefit? I have myself remarked what you speak of, and I think his mind is certainly losing its balance.”

“Father Jerome approves it, and he will take up his abode with a brother of his order, who is an intimate friend ; but I own that I have many doubts as to

his ultimate recovery. He should be placed under treatment as soon as possible.”

A cloud settled on the face of the listener, and he curtly said :

“If my presence here is any drawback to the carrying out of your wishes, Mrs. Courtney, I will make arrangements to leave immediately. I regret that I have not been earlier informed of them, for I should be sorry to become *de trop* in your house.”

“Nor have you been, Mr. Thorne. I invited you hither of my own free will, and I have enjoyed your society much ; but I cannot shut my eyes to the necessity of removing Claire from your presence as soon as possible. The greater your power over her, the stronger seems the need of placing her where you cannot be daily and hourly near her. Her spirits have in a measure recovered their tone, and she is now able to bear the separation from you. She will be permitted to correspond with you regularly, for I do not forget that her father sanctioned the engagement between you. But you must pledge me your word not to seek her after we remove to Baltimore, till we are on the eve of embarking for Europe.”

“By Heaven ! Madam, this is asking too much of me. I cannot consent to an arrangement that will separate my betrothed from me and place her under the control of a set of teachers who would regard the very fact of our engagement with a species of horror. It will be too severe an ordeal for Claire to pass through, for she is not strong, and—and she only lives in my presence. You can see that for yourself, Madam.”

Mrs. Courtney steadily replied :

“I have seen with regret how utterly her will is



dominated by yours, and that is why I must remove her from your influence. It is a duty I owe to her. New friends and new scenes will gradually restore her to her natural condition, and she will learn to love you reasonably without bending before you as if you were an ideal incarnation of perfection. Such love as that does not bring happiness to the woman who cherishes it, nor yet to him on whom it is bestowed. Claire, like all girls of her age, is full of romantic nonsense; but, if she were permitted to marry you now, the real man would fall so far below the ideal she has formed of you that a fatal reaction in her feelings might take place. I have known girls to marry under such hallucinations, and end by heartily wishing that Fate had severed them from the object of their choice before the Church had irrevocably bound them to a destiny that proved far from happy."

"And you think it *possible* that such a change could take place in the heart of the girl I adore?" exclaimed the lover, with much heat.

With irritating calmness, Mrs. Courtney replied:

"I am only discussing possibilities, Mr. Thorne. I believe that you and Claire are ardently attached to each other, and I think you would try to make her happy in your own way. But she is too unformed—too much of a child yet—to risk taking on herself the duties of a wife and mistress of a family. It was but the other day that she was chasing butterflies with Julia, as much a child in heart as she is. Indeed, you must consent to give her up to me as has already been settled; and I wish you to understand that I will not recede from that. I love Claire almost as if she were my own daughter, and she has no one but me to

look to in this crisis of her destiny. I shall be ready and willing to surrender her to you when the proper time arrives, and I think that is as much as you can reasonably expect of me."

Thorne controlled his annoyance, and with a faint smile, replied:

"But I am not reasonable, Mrs. Courtney, nor do I suppose you expect a man as much in love as I am to be so. I must yield to your authority, I suppose, but you will not banish me before your plans are quite settled. You will let me bask yet a little while in the sunshine of my darling's reviving spirits, for it will not be well for her to be too suddenly separated from me."

"I have no wish to send you into exile, Mr. Thorne, till the time for my own departure draws near. I shall be happy to claim you as my guest for the next three weeks. That will bring the middle of September, and that will be soon enough to settle ourselves for the autumn and winter."

"Thank you for conceding so much; and now I will seek Claire, and tell her what you have determined on. Have you spoken of your removal to her?"

"Not yet. If you choose, you can repeat to her what I have just said."

Mrs. Courtney left him, and went to her own apartment, where she found Julia playing with a pet kitten.

She detained her child near her that the lovers might have an uninterrupted interview, never dreaming that Thorne would abuse her indulgence by tempting the yielding and loving Claire to abjure her authority and even win her consent to deceive the only true friend she possessed.

Thorne found the object of his search in the library, lying listlessly upon a sofa drawn near an open window. She was paler than usual, and the deep black in which she was robed, the sad composure of her face seemed to have added several years to her age. Claire looked up as she heard his step, and light came back to her dark eyes, smiles to her sad lips. She sat up and arranged her dress, and Thorne placed himself beside her. He tenderly said:

"You are almost yourself again, *petite*. I have been very unhappy about you, but your old animation seems to be coming back, I am glad to see. But tell me, love, would you not fade and droop again if my presence were withdrawn from you? I am vain enough to think so."

She regarded him with a half frightened expression.

"You have not come to tell me that you must go away? Oh, Walter, how can I bear to lose sight of your dear face now *he* is gone? You will not, you cannot be so cruel as to desert me when I am almost your——"

The word died on her lips, but he drew her to his heart and whispered:

"Almost my wife—yes; but not quite, my angel. Only consent to become such, and no one shall stand between us. *No one*, Claire, for the right to claim you is mine. Mrs. Courtney is your friend, and she wishes to do what she thinks right, but she is planning to take you from me; to carry you to Baltimore and place you in a boarding-school till she sets out on her foreign tour. You will be shut up with stupid people, who will have no sympathy for you. They will exact difficult tasks from you, when you might be with me so

happy, so adored. Oh! my love—my sweet love, only listen to my prayer, and I will remove you from her control. I will devote myself to your happiness."

"Are you quite certain of this, Walter?" she asked, in a faint voice.

"Quite—for Mrs. Courtney told me herself, and allowed me to seek you and break her intentions to you. Dear Claire, I shall be wretched without you, and of what value will be accomplishments purchased at such cost to us both? After we are married, you shall have masters if you wish it; but if we take our fate in our own hands, it must be without the knowledge of your protectress. She has no legal claim on you, yet she is firm in her determination to withhold you from me for years to come."

Claire raised her head and after a pause said:

"Walter, it is right that I should tell you what papa said to me the night he left me forever. He seemed to have changed his mind with reference to our marriage, and he said it might be best for us to be united without delay. If he had lived I think he would have consented to give me to you before you left the valley."

The lover listened to this revelation in delighted surprise:

"If that is so, Claire, you cannot hesitate to do as I wish. The blessing of your dead father will be upon us, and we can dispense with the consent of Mrs. Courtney."

"But I owe a great deal to mamma. She has been very kind to me throughout all my life."

"True, love; but your first duty is to me. Everything depends on our immediate union, Claire. My father will withdraw his consent, I am almost certain,

if I do not bring him his new daughter when I return home. Only consent to a clandestine marriage, and your friend will forgive and receive you again when it is over. Oh, darling, if I lose you I shall be the most wretched of men."

She softly said:

"And I the most desolate of creatures separated from you; taken from the scenes I love and thrust among strangers. I could not live through such an ordeal, I know I could not."

"Such is also my conviction, and I said as much to Mrs. Courtney, but she insists that you will find change of scene all that is necessary to restore your health and spirits. An exhilarating change she proposes! She will remove you from the freedom of your country life, and shut you up in stuffy rooms, with books for your companions, the drudgery of study your only occupation. Contrast that with what I offer you, Claire, and make your decision."

Thorne could scarcely have conjured up a more repulsive picture before the mind of the thoughtless creature who listened to him. She had never been compelled to acquire anything; the lessons set for her by her indulgent father had been learned or neglected, as suited her own fancy, and but for the quick perceptions and retentive memory with which nature had endowed her, Claire would have acquired very little.

But these had enabled her, in a desultory way, to gain as much cultivation as girls of her age usually possess, and the library at the Grange had afforded her a wide range of literary reading of which she had eagerly availed herself.

After a pause of some length she said:

"Have you consulted with Father Jerome on this subject?"

"Yes—and I have nearly brought him over to our side. He thinks it best for our union to take place before I leave the valley, and in spite of Mrs. Courtney's opposition, I believe I can induce him to unite us."

Claire vaguely said:

"Father Jerome is a good man, and I can abide by his decision without fear. In fact, I have my father's permission to do so."

"Then if I bring you the assurance that he consents, you will not refuse to give me the right to call you my own? My precious love, that is all I ask, for I am certain of success with the priest."

Claire shrank from pledging herself so far; she timidly said:

"I wish I knew what is right—what will be best for us both. I have heard it said that clandestine marriages are rarely fortunate, and I—I must give up my only friend to go with you, Walter. I shall be so utterly dependent on you for everything."

"And that is just as it should be, my angel. The wife should look only to her husband for protection and support, and you shall find that you have lost nothing by the exchange I wish you to make. Besides, Mrs. Courtney will forgive you, and be as fond of you as ever, after your fate is irrevocably fixed."

"Ah, if I thought that, I would not hesitate. And you are quite sure that your father wishes you to be married without delay?"

"I wish I were as sure of everything else as I am of that," replied Thorne, laughing. "The old man is

terribly in earnest about putting the noose matrimonial upon his only son. He wants a mistress at Thornhill, and the gay company young people will be sure to draw around him."

Claire's face brightened.

"Then I may feel certain of a kind welcome from him. I like the thought of presiding over his house much better than being shut up in a stifling school-room, poring over difficult tasks. I hope that I shall be able to make your father love me dearly, Walter. I shall try, at any rate, to brighten his life and reflect on him a portion of our happiness."

Thorne could scarcely repress a shiver as he thought of the reality that probably awaited her, but he stifled the faint feeling of remorse, and rapturously exclaimed:

"Then you *will* go with me, darling of my life?"

And he snatched her to his breast and kissed her many times.

Claire extricated herself from his embrace, and tremulously said:

"Give me till to-morrow to think over what you have said. I must know what Father Jerome thinks of such a step before I irrevocably consent. It seems very wrong for me to deceive so good a friend as mamma has always been to me, and she will think very hardly of us when she finds that we have betrayed her confidence."

Mrs. Courtney will forgive us, love. She has no legal authority over you, for she has not been appointed your guardian. Young as you are, you are quite free to act for yourself; if you refuse to avail yourself of your position, and do as I wish, I must

leave you at once. I will no longer linger here, maddening myself by the sight of that which I cannot hope to attain. I give you your choice, Claire, between a secret union with myself or a speedy parting. I am willing to allow you the time to decide on one or the other."

She raised her humid eyes to his face with an expression of pathetic entreaty in them, but the words she was about to utter died on her lips as Mrs. Courtney entered the library.

Thorne removed himself further away from his betrothed. Claire flushed deeply and then became pale as death. Her friend remarked her agitation, and gently said as she seated herself:

"Mr. Thorne has communicated to you my plans by this time, my dear, and I hope you approve of them. My most earnest wish is to do what is best for you, Claire, for you are a precious legacy to me from your father."

"I believe I understand that, mamma, and I am most grateful for all your kindness; but—but to tell you the truth, I do not like being sent to a boarding-school. You know that I have never been used to confinement, nor to wearisome tasks."

Mrs. Courtney smiled faintly as she replied:

"I know that you have never yet been disciplined into obedience to the requirements of life; but it is necessary to your future well-being that you shall submit yourself to it. At first you may feel as a wild bird suddenly caged, but you are too rational and gentle a creature, to dash yourself as he does, against your prison bars. I must do my duty by you, Claire, and you will yet acknowledge that I am right. Your father's

wishes should have much weight with you too; and you know that I am to control your destiny till you are of an age to leave my guiding hand with safety."

"But he talked with me the night he died, and he then spoke as if he had changed his mind as to—as to my marriage with Walter. His words gave me freedom to act for myself; and I think papa's consent to an immediate union gives Mr. Thorne the *right* to demand the fulfilment of the pledge I gave him when we were betrothed."

Mrs. Courtenay looked much annoyed and more surprised at this bold assertion from the lips of her adopted child. She coldly said:

"You must have misunderstood him, Claire, for M. Lapierre expressed himself very differently to me. At all events, I shall use my own judgment as to what is best for such a mere child as you are; and I scarcely think Mr. Thorne will set up his claims in opposition to mine. If he loves you as he should, he will see that I am only actuated by the tenderest affection for you in what I have planned for you."

She looked towards Thorne, but he attempted no reply; he had risen, and was standing beside the window, impatiently drumming upon the frame. Mrs. Courtnay bit her lip, and said:

"Come with me to my room, Claire; I wish to talk seriously with you, with no disturbing influence near us. Excuse us, Mr. Thorne. We will leave you to the companionship of books, while I reason with this untamed spirit, and try to show her what will be for her good, and yours."

Thorne turned his head, and, with bitterness, said:

"Of course I must excuse you, Madam, though you

take from me the light of my existence. I will console myself by reading Hervey's *Meditations* among the Tombs, as they will be most congenial to the present state of my mind."

Mrs. Courtnay excused the petulance of the annoyed lover, and, with a faint smile, replied:

"I recommend, in preference, something less sombre. A package of new books came to-day, and you will find them on the table. Come, my dear, let us leave Mr. Thorne to recover his temper, and, with it, his usual suavity of manner."

The two went out together, but when the young girl gained the door, she turned, gave a glance of intelligence to her lover, and, kissing her hand to him vanished.

"She's good pluck after all," muttered Thorne, "and she'll stand by me yet, in spite of the lecturing. Mrs. Courtnay may as well preach to the winds, for I can see that Claire means to risk her fate with me."

"*Risk!* Good heaven! why did such a word come to my lips? I know that I am mad to persist in this, for God knows to what I may bring that poor girl yet. I love her with the most insane passion; but would I sacrifice myself for her if the worst should come? Alas! I fear not, for I am weak and unstable as water."

He sat down, and tried to think, for, false as he was, Walter Thorne was not utterly base. He meant to do what was right by this helpless young creature, if he found it possible, without too great detriment to his own interest; but thinking was not his forte, especially when the subject was an intricate one, so he soon started up, and went in pursuit of Father Jerome, hoping to gain from him some encouragement to rush headlong into the ruin he was preparing for himself.

Now, when the consent of Claire was almost won, he began to waver himself, and doubt the result of his rashness.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE HASTY MARRIAGE.

THORNE found the priest in possession of the pretty cottage in the rear of the chapel which had been erected especially for his use. The chapel was a small gothic building beautifully finished, and the interior was decorated with paintings from sacred subjects, which had been executed by Mrs. Courtney herself. The altar was draped with hangings, embroidered by the same fair hands, for in her solitude it had been the employment of several years of her life to ornament the shrine at which she offered her devotions.

The cottage contained but two rooms, fitted up with the ascetic taste of the occupant; but Father Jerome belonged to a very strict order, and, even in his delicate state of health, he allowed himself no luxuries.

The floors were bare, but the walls of the outer room were covered with devotional pictures; in a recess between the windows stood a marble head of Christ crowned with thorns, and above it hung an ebony crucifix. The interior apartment contained an iron bedstead, which supported the straw mattress on which the priest reposed his worn and wasted frame when his vigils allowed him to seek the rest nature imperiously demanded. Two chairs, with a small table, completed the furniture.

Seated beside the latter, was the emaciated figure of Father Jerome, with a large tome open before him. Thorne looked at the pale, spiritual face, and remembered what Mrs. Courtney had said. There was a singular brightness in his eyes that told of constant inward fever, and a vagueness in the expression, which betrayed the insidious disease that was sapping his mental powers.

The shock of M. Lapierre's sudden death had given the last impulse to the lurking evil; the tension upon his system had been too great and long sustained; for, in the intervals of his active life, the priest had been an ardent student, and the over-wrought brain was rapidly giving way. He began himself dimly to suspect that it was softening beneath the load he habitually laid upon it, and he was most anxious to consult a medical friend in Baltimore as to his actual condition; hence his ready assent to Mrs. Courtney's plans.

He had been making an effort to think earnestly on the subject of the lovers and their fortunes, but in his anxiety to secure a proselyte, and save a wandering soul, he gave little weight to Mrs. Courtney's objections to an immediate marriage between them.

He thought if Thorne escaped him now, he would return to the world, and forget the serious impressions he had led this good man to believe he had received; but if he took with him as his wife a daughter of the church, she would keep him in the path in which he should walk, and with Father Jerome every other consideration bent before that.

To save souls was his mission, and of what consequence was a clandestine marriage, in comparison with the weightier consideration? I am afraid he thought



of Claire very little, for he had taken so great a liking for Thorne, that he regarded her fate as quite secure in the keeping of one who professed to be so deeply impressed with the sublime truths they had discussed together.

The priest welcomed his guest with a wan smile, and pointing to a chair, said :

"I am glad that you have come, my son, for when I am alone I cannot lay aside the old habit of study, and I begin to feel that it is too much for me. The mind weakens with the failure of the physical energies, and I am not good for much now. I have been trying to think over what you said to me yesterday, and to decide on what is best to be done. It is a pity for all concerned, that Mrs. Courtney is so immovable, when she thinks she is in the right. As to myself, I can see no objection to this marriage taking place at once, if, as you say, your parents are willing to receive Claire Lapierre as your wife."

"I have already assured you of that fact, Father," replied Thorne, perfectly unembarrassed. "No one has a right to an opinion on the subject but my father, and you have read his letter to me. I have also shown you others, which prove the truth of what I have stated with reference to my family and future prospects."

"Yes—yes—all that was satisfactory enough," was the musing reply. "It will be a fine thing for a dependant young girl to step at once into such a position as you offer Claire. She will have the power to do much good, and that should always be considered."

"My dear young friend, I hardly like to let you go out into the world again without taking with you this

pretty creature. She is a good child, and she will be a sweet monitress to you in the temptations that will assail you. I really think that Mrs. Courtney is too hard on you in this affair ; but she will not listen to my representations any more than to your's."

"No—she chooses to have her own way, that is the truth of it," said Thorne, bitterly. "Mrs. Courtney, with all her goodness, is a very imperious woman, and likes to make every one around her bend to her will. I have been speaking with her this afternoon, and she is like granite. I have also had an interview with Claire, and I have learned something from her which is important. She says that on the last night of her father's life, he gave his consent to an early union between us, and she is under the impression that something you said to him caused this change in his views."

"I remember—I expressed my doubts as to the prudence of long engagements. I said to M. Lapierre, that they rarely end happily for the parties concerned."

"Nor will this one end well, if I am compelled to yield my wishes to others. Besides, Father, when Claire and myself were betrothed, she expressed herself in such a manner, that armed with her father's consent, I have the right to demand the ratification of her vows. She declares that consent was given, and I ask you to pronounce over us the blessing of the church, without allowing Mrs. Courtney to suspect that such a thing has been done, till I think it best to proclaim our marriage. If you will consent to this, I pledge myself to prove to you that I am a liberal and true son of the faith. I shall receive my bride at your hands, as the dearest gift you could bestow, and in requital of the service, I will make a rich offer-

ing to your church. So far as you are yourself concerned, I know that you are indifferent to money, therefore I do not offer it to your individual acceptance."

"Thanks, my son. Of course I am not at liberty to refuse your liberality to the great hierarchy of which I am a lowly servant; for the money bestowed on us, enables us to succor the helpless—to lift up the down-trodden, and maintain the prestige of the church. I have served it in my humble way, but I doubt if it will be right for me to accept a bribe to do what it would be so displeasing to the friend whose hospitality I enjoy. She would take the defection of her adopted child greatly to heart, and I scarcely see my way clear; though, heaven help me! I can see nothing clearly in the last few weeks!"

He pressed his hand to his brow as if in pain, but Thorne paid little attention to that. His own lately-awakened doubts, as to the prudence of his course, died out as soon as he found any wavering on the part of the priest. He impetuously exclaimed:

"It is your duty to serve and save me, Father Jerome. If you refuse what I ask, I will go on my way, reckless of what may happen to me. I will plunge into the wildest dissipations, with no check upon me; for if I lose Claire, I shall become desperate. With her hand clasped in mine, I shall walk safely over temptation—without her, I shall be lost—lost."

The old man lifted his head, and gazed on him with his glittering and unsteady eyes, and a shudder thrilled through his frame at the repetition of the last word. He tremulously said:

"No—no—not lost, if I can save you, by the sacrifice

of a few scruples. My son, you are terribly in earnest, I see, and—and—as the consent of M. Lapierre was given, I do not think it can be wrong to give you the bride you covet, especially as so much is at stake, for yourself. You have conquered: come hither with Claire at midnight, and I will pronounce over you the blessing of the church."

Thorne started, and seemed divided between joy and surprise at the sudden concession. He said:

"So, soon as that father? We may not be able to make our arrangements as rapidly as you require."

"It must be to-night, if at all, for I feel very strangely. To-morrow it may be too late to serve you, and in the hereafter God may require at my hands the soul that I might have used the means to save, and would not. In some respects the marriage must be informal, but as you have professed the Catholic faith, you will feel that it is indissoluble; and—and—I am sure that I can trust you with the welfare of my friend's daughter."

"You *may* trust me, Father," and the speaker was deeply in earnest when he uttered the words. "I can never thank you sufficiently for conceding so much to me, so I will not make the attempt. I have already made my confession and prepared myself for the ordeal before me. Is there anything else that remains to be done?"

"Send Claire to me," was the faint response. "I am not well, and I must see her before I lie down to repose my worn out body."

Thorne lifted his thin hand, and, respectfully pressing it, said:

"I will seek her at once, Father, and communicate to her the result of our interview."

He left the cottage in a whirl of feeling, which it would have been impossible to analyze. His fate was settled beyond recall now, and the few scruples he had were cast away. In a glow of rapture he moved forward, as if walking on air, through the winding avenue of trees that led to the house.

At a sudden turn in it he beheld Claire moving slowly and dejectedly in the direction of the chapel. Her eyes were bent on the ground, and she was evidently unconscious of the vicinity of her lover. Thorne sprang forward, clasped her ardently to his breast, and rapidly said:

"It is all right, my darling wife! The good father will unite us. He has pledged his word to do so immediately. My love, you look so deeply depressed, and I am delirious with joy. What has Mrs. Courtney been saying to make you so unhappy?"

Claire wept hysterically upon his breast a few moments, and then brokenly said:

"Mamma was very grave, but very kind. She tried to make me see that it is necessary to test your constancy, Walter; but if I thought you could be untrue to me, I should die at once."

"You shall not die, Claire, but you shall live for me. Father Jerome is waiting for you to hear your final confession before we are united. This night he has himself appointed, and I hope you will make no objection."

Claire uttered a faint cry.

"So soon as that! Oh, Walter, how can I consent to so sudden a marriage?"

"You will consent when I tell you that the priest is evidently becoming very ill, and if there is any delay,

he may not be in a condition to serve us at all. It is lucky you came hither so opportunely, for I was wondering how I could communicate with you before night."

"Mamma sent me to confess to Father Jerome, and ask his advice. I am afraid that we are all treating her very badly."

"I don't know about that. She treats us cavalierly enough in all conscience, for she lays down the law, and expects us to abide by it. Don't look so shocked, little one. I know it sounds like treason to you to speak thus of Mrs. Courtney, but my patience is worn out with her exactions. Go on, *petite*, and see the priest. I will follow you in half an hour, and walk back to the house with you."

With a troubled and doubtful heart, Claire pursued her way to the cottage. She found Father Jerome still seated in his chair, but so white and unnerved that she hastened to offer him water. This revived him a little, and he listened to the artless confession she came to make.

At its close he earnestly asked:

"Do you love this young man above all earthly creatures, my daughter? Do you believe with all your heart that you can be faithful to him through good and evil report—through all the chances and changes of life?"

"I do love him, Father, with all the strength of my soul. I will be faithful to him through everything."

"Then there is no need of further delay. I feel very strangely this evening, and I cannot tell what is impending over me. I must make your future sure

before my senses quite desert me. Summon your love at once, and let him assist me into the chapel. It will be best to have the nuptial rites over before my senses fail me."

Alarmed by his strange looks, Claire tremblingly said:

"You are too ill to attend to anything now, Father. Walter is near here, and I will summon him to assist you to your couch."

"Do so. But if you wish me to marry you at all, I must not lie down before doing it, for I scarcely think that I shall ever rise from my bed again, when I am once placed upon it. This is your hour; avail yourself of it, or give up your marriage altogether. Without you to guide him in the right path, that young man will go down to destruction, and his soul will be required at my hands. Call him, I insist. It is too late to shrink back now."

Claire went to the door, and found Thorne lingering near it. At a sign from her he rapidly approached, and together they entered the inner room.

The priest languidly raised his head, and faintly said:

"It is too late for me to go to the chapel now, for I feel as if all my strength is deserting me. Kneel down before the table; it can serve as an altar. I have already baptized you, and received your first confession, Walter Thorne, and thus you have become a son of the church. Take the hand of your betrothed, and receive her as your bride."

The young pair, with rapidly beating hearts, obeyed his commands; the voice of Father Jerome seemed to gain strength, and in resonant tones he performed the

marriage service. But as he pronounced the blessing, he fell back quite insensible.

The married lovers had no time to think of the strange scene in which they had just borne so important a part. Thorne dropped the hand that rested in his own, and, starting up, lifted the father to his hard couch, and placed him upon it, while Claire busied herself in efforts to restore him to consciousness. But he lay before them, white and cold, with no sign of life save his heavy breathing.

"I must remain with him while you go up to the house, and inform Mrs. Courtney of his condition, Claire. Betray nothing by your looks, my darling, for we must keep what has happened here a profound secret till we are far away. You will be careful?"

"Yes—yes. Oh, Walter—if he should die, it would be dreadful to think that we were married by a man on the brink of eternity."

"He will not die if he has help at once. Hasten on your errand, my love, for much depends on promptness in such a case as this."

Claire sped away, to spread consternation through the family, for Father Jerome was beloved by every one in it. Assistance soon came, and Mrs. Courtney had him carefully removed to the house, where a more comfortable apartment had been hastily prepared for him.

When the physician who was sent for arrived, he still lay in the same heavy stupor, and Dr. Bledsoe pronounced the attack pressure on the brain. He resorted to such remedies as he hoped would relieve him, and they were so far successful, that during the night consciousness was restored. But it was evident to

those around him that his mind wandered, and the physician shook his head over the symptoms, and expressed his fears that the overwrought brain would never react again.

Father Jerome might regain bodily strength to walk about as usual, but the power of controlling his thoughts had departed from him forever.

This was sad news to Mrs. Courtney, for she had long relied on him as an adviser and comforter, but she bowed her head in submission to the affliction, and occupied herself in contributing to his recovery as far as lay in her power.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE FLIGHT.

**W**ALTER THORNE had triumphed over the weakness of the stricken priest, and won the coveted idol he had set up for a worship, destined to be as brief as it was intoxicating.

He overruled the desire of Claire to inform Mrs. Courtney of what had taken place in the cottage on the evening of Father Jerome's seizure, and, clothed with his marital authority, he insisted that she should secretly leave the home in which she had been so kindly received, and go forth with him into that world which she had pictured to herself as a scene of enchantment.

Thorne was well supplied with money by this time, for his father, reassured by the tenor of his last com-

munication had sent him a check for a considerable sum in the belief that it would be used to reward those who had nursed him through his illness, and release him from any further obligations to them.

Col. Thorne had accepted his son's explanations, and believing that Walter would not dare to deceive him so flagrantly, he dismissed from his mind all fear as to his non-appearance at the time appointed for his marriage with Agnes Willard.

Thorne wrote to the neighboring town in which he had passed several days before his advent in the valley, and ordered a carriage to be sent by midnight to wait at the lower gate opening into the grounds around the Grange till he made his appearance. The price he offered for the service ensured secrecy and punctuality on the part of the men employed; and Claire, with a palpitating heart commenced packing such articles as were absolutely necessary to take with her.

By the time their preparations were completed, the priest was declared out of immediate danger, though his mind was still wandering and unsettled, and he but vaguely recognized the friends that ministered to him so tenderly. With many tears Claire prepared the letter she was to leave behind her. Thorne warned her not to betray to Mrs. Courtney, the part Father Jerome had played, lest she should be angry at being circumvented by him. He declared it would be quite as well to have her to suppose that their union would take place after their evasion, and thus the helpless invalid would escape all blame from the friend on whose kindness he was so completely thrown.

To Claire this seemed very generous on the part of her dear Walter, and she obeyed him without question,

unconscious that she was thus placing in his hands a power that would ere long be fatally used against herself. She penned the following lines with a sad heart, but she did not for one moment regret the step that she had taken :

"MY DEAR FRIEND AND MOTHER.—I dare to call you by the last name, though I am proving myself a most ungrateful child ; but, oh, mamma, I love Walter to that degree that I cannot refuse to do anything that he asks me.

"When you read this, I shall be far away—I shall be his alone—his beloved and cherished wife. You know that Mr. Thorne is honorable and true, and therefore you can trust me to him, though I am so young and helpless.

"Dear Mamma—I love you very dearly, and it makes my heart sad to deceive you ; but you were so unbending you would not listen to our prayers, and I had not strength to struggle against the entreaties of him I so adoringly love. You will forgive me—Walter insists that you will—and I am only too willing to believe that your tender heart will not close against the child of your love, though she has deserted you for another.

"You will remember that I had the consent of my father to our union, and if he had lived, this flight would not have been necessary. That thought will help to reconcile you to your poor child, for I shall always love you as if you were indeed my mother.

"We are going to Eastern Virginia, where we shall remain several weeks before going to L——, to take up our abode with Walter's father. He will welcome

me kindly and graciously, although I bring nothing to his son, save a warm and true heart and an earnest desire to render the home over which I am to reign, a happy one.

"Dearest Mamma—I hope the time is not far distant when I shall receive you in my house its most honored and beloved guest. Have no fears for me. I place such faith and trust in him who has chosen me from all the world as the companion of his life, that I am sure I risk nothing in going with him, even in this clandestine manner.

"Before you set out upon your travels we must meet again, for I could not bear so long a separation without being clasped to your heart, and hearing from your dear lips the assurances that I am forgiven. Kiss Julia many times for me, and do not feel too harshly towards your poor child, for my heart is sadly divided between love and duty.

"Your attached, though disobedient,

"CLAIRE."

Having sealed and addressed this missive, Claire went to the apartment of Father Jerome to take leave of him for the last time, she feared. He lay in a pallid trance, muttering vaguely of the duties he must no longer neglect, for his time was very short.

A young brother from the neighboring town had come over to watch beside him, but worn out with his vigils, and the heat of the past day, he was sleeping in a large chair by the bedside, and the light step of the visitor did not arouse him.

Claire knelt beside the couch and pressed the pale hand of the sufferer, which lay upon the coverlet,



reverently to her lips. She prayed fervently for his restoration, and mentally blessed him for the happiness she believed he had conferred on herself, and the object of her ardent affections.

Father Jerome unclosed his eyes, and a gleam of intelligence came into them. In a faint tone he whispered:

"Is it you, my daughter, where is Mr. Thorne? I wish to speak to him—to tell him how solemn are the duties he has assumed toward a being so helpless and dependent as you are."

In the same tone she replied:

"Walter is not with me, Father—he will come later to see you. You are much better, I trust."

"Yes—all is well with me now. I am going to my reward, but you have much to do in the long life that is probably before you. I gave you to your lover, Claire, that you might keep the wandering feet straight—the light and erring nature from straying in forbidden places. You are good and true—you will make your husband so, for much depends on your influence."

His words became unintelligible, and Claire hastened to implore his blessing before he sank off into one of the deep slumbers from which it became more and more difficult to arouse him. Father Jerome seemed to understand her, for he gropingly placed his hand upon her head and, in a scarcely audible whisper, uttered a few broken words, the sense of which she failed to catch.

Claire, however, knew what he meant to say, and she arose comforted and strengthened for what lay before her. She flitted out as noiselessly as she had

entered, without disturbing the slumbers of the tired watcher.

The supper bell sounded soon after, and the excited girl made an effort to appear at this last meal without betraying the agitation of her feelings. Thorne was radiant and his gaiety was so irrepressible that Mrs. Courtney regarded him with grave surprise and asked if he knew that Father Jerome was considered by his physician in a very critical condition.

"Pray excuse me," he said. "I feel unusually light-hearted this evening, and I forgot that a dying man is in the house. I was trying to brighten up Claire a little, for she looks as if she had lost her last friend."

Mrs. Courtney glanced at the face of Claire, and saw that some unusual emotion was mirrored in it. She kindly said:

"Till I am laid to rest Claire will have one friend who will stand by her through good and evil report. Let her console herself for the good Father's condition by that thought. He has been her spiritual guide, but I am the mother chosen by her own heart to fill the place of the one that was so early taken from her."

Claire impulsively grasped the hand of the speaker and pressed it to her heart, as she said:

"Dear mamma, I can never sufficiently thank you for all your past kindness to me. Let what will happen, never believe that I am ungrateful."

"Why, what can happen to make me think that?"

And Mrs. Courtney glanced from the changing face of Claire to that of Thorne, but his defied scrutiny. He vailed the annoyance he felt, and coolly said:

"Your fair protégée has paroxysms of sentiment, I

perceive, Madam. Claire is too impulsive. She must learn to control the expression of her feelings, and I see now the wisdom of the training you are so anxious to afford her. We should both be very grateful for your thoughtfulness."

Mrs. Courtney glanced from one to the other with a puzzled expression; but Claire, warned by the sharpened inflection in Thorne's voice, stifled the emotions that were struggling for utterance, and succeeded so well that her friend only said:

"I am glad that you are convinced of the wisdom of my plans for securing your future happiness. Nothing could be more fatal to it than a precipitate marriage between two persons so young and inexperienced as yourself and Claire. You have a great deal to learn, Mr. Thorne, before you are fitted to become a kind and considerate husband, and this child has been so tenderly and indulgently reared that she will exact a great deal from you when you are married. I——"

Thorne eagerly broke in upon her:

"Pardon me, Mrs. Courtney, but I must say that every exaction on the part of the woman I love I shall consider as a proof of her affection for me, and I would devote my life to render her happy in her own way."

Claire gave him a radiant glance of thanks, but Mrs. Courtney drily replied:

"So you think now, I doubt not, but the glamour of passion soon passes away, and a gentle and tender confidence must succeed it to render the matrimonial yoke endurable. If the fervent heat of summer continued forever there would be little comfort in life, and if the egotism and selfishness of love did not soften into something less entrancing, but better for the con-

tinent of every-day life, the union you are so anxious to cement would become a burden."

"Oh, mamma, what a disenchanter you are," murmured Claire. "I should wish to dwell forever in the dream castle I have built, and forget the prosaic realities of life."

"That is what the romantic heart of youth desires, my love, but such is not the will of Heaven. Many duties are given us to perform, and in the extended sphere in which you will hereafter move you will find your present crude theory of life an impossible myth."

In a displeased tone Thorne replied:

"If such are to be your teachings, Mrs. Courtney, I scarcely think I should be willing to leave my Peri with you, if I could help myself. Let the bewildering dream of love be as brief as intoxicating, is my theory, provided one is perfectly happy while it lasts. It will at least be something to look back on, and recal with joy, if one can say, 'I have once walked the earth as a demi-god and revelled in such bliss as an angel from Heaven might have envied.'"

His impassioned eyes sought those of Claire, and the expression he read fully responded to the sentiment he had just expressed. Mrs. Courtney smiled sadly.

"You remind me of a man of whom I once read, who spent the last money he possessed in a magnificent supper, and after enjoying it with infinite zest, he awoke from the sleep that followed to find himself a pauper. The wild passion you describe lasts but a day and the night that follows is dark and dreary enough. I think it well that I have refused to allow Claire to give you her hand without a probation that may bring you more rational views of life."

"Perhaps so," he said, and the smile that wreathed his lips was inexplicable to her.

They arose from the table, and Thorne courteously said:

"I have to thank you for your hospitality, Mrs. Courtney, and take my leave of you to-night, for I shall depart at so early an hour of the morning that you will not be visible."

"Are you really going, Mr. Thorne? I thought you would remain till Father Jerome is better."

"I might in that case linger for months; and happy as I should be to remain at the Grange, the commands of my father will not permit it. I have already made arrangements for my departure: a carriage comes from S—— to take me away, and by dawn I shall set out."

Mrs. Courtney glanced at Claire, who had grown very pale at this announcement. She courteously said:

"I am sorry that you cannot give us a few more days, Mr. Thorne, but if your father commands your presence, of course you must obey. As I do not wish to play the part of the stern duenna, I grant Claire permission to spend this last evening with you in the library. I wish you a pleasant and safe journey, and I shall look forward to a happy re-union hereafter, when our views will be more in harmony."

"Thank you. I owe you much, Mrs. Courtney, and I shall not forget the debt. Think of me as kindly as you can, and accept my thanks for this last boon."

He bowed over the hand she extended to him, and then left the apartment, taking Julia with her after she had been kissed and patted on the head by the departing guest.

The lovers went into the library together, and in great agitation Claire exclaimed:

"It is dreadful to act in this underhand manner, Walter! Mamma is so honorable herself that she cannot suspect us of double-dealing. Oh! what will she think of me when she knows with what treachery I have rewarded her confidence?"

"Think, my darling! Why, only that youth and love are reckless of consequences. She who has been content to 'dwell in decencies forever,' will begin to comprehend the delirium of passion and to understand to what lengths it will drive its votaries. Claire, if you had not been mine past recall, I should have been maddened by the cold and prudent utterances of Mrs. Courtney to-night. Don't you agree with me that present bliss is worth all the future may hold out to us as a lure to sacrifice that which is within the grasp?"

She faintly replied:

"I—I hardly know, Walter; but I should like our happiness to be as enduring as it is entrancing. Ah! if we could live on, loving as we do now, we would not envy the bliss of the angels in Heaven!"

"Then let us be angels while we may. If a change must come—if a blight must fall on the love we cherish for each other, at least let our bliss be perfect while it lasts. Cast that cloud from your brow, my sweet love, and smile on me, forgetful of all on earth or heaven but him to whom you have given yourself."

Thus lovingly adjured, the momentary cloud left the brow of the infatuated Claire, and she nestled to his side, laid her head upon his breast and listened entranced to the tender promises he breathed into her

ear. Never should she have cause to regret the clandestine marriage she had made—never cease to find in him the adoring lover he then was; and Thorne deluded himself into believing all he uttered.

His self-love was flattered by Claire's unquestioning reliance on himself—her implicit obedience to his commands; his conscience silenced by the strong will which led him to gratify himself at all hazards; and even his dread of his father's wrath was laid at rest by his determination to enjoy his brief dream of bliss without one intruding care.

If he was like a man on the brink of Niagara, about to be swept down by its resistless waves, he would at least float down with the music of the waters in his ears, the sun shining through the mist, weaving a rainbow of glowing loveliness around him as he clasped his beloved to his beating heart and dared the plunge for her sake. He would not think of the future, the present was all in all to him; the hereafter might take care of itself.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Courtney came in to speak a few more parting words to her guest, and to take Claire away with her. Thorne had labored to impress on the latter the necessity of repressing all outward sign of emotion when she bade her protectress good night, but when they stood together at the door of Mrs. Courtney's chamber, the poor child threw her arms around her and returned her good night kiss with such fervor that her friend laughingly said:

"One might suppose it was I you were about to part from, Claire, in place of your lover. There, my dear, go to your room, and try and compose yourself. I will send Nancy to you with a sedative, which you must drink like a good girl."

Claire feebly murmured her thanks, and hastened to her own room, to struggle with the emotions which, at this last moment, threatened to overwhelm her powers of self-command.

In a few moments the servant came with some aromatic drops which she accepted but took very good care not to take. When the house was quiet, and all seemed buried in profound repose, she stole into a small room opening from Mrs. Courtney's, in which Julia slept. The little girl was in the sound sleep of childhood, and she did not even stir when Claire wept over, and kissed her, wondering where and how they would meet again.

She then flitted back to her own apartment, completed her preparations for departure, and sat beside her window awaiting the signal that had been agreed upon between herself and Thorne. The room was on the second floor, with windows opening to the floor of the long piazza in the rear of the house; from this, a flight of steps led to the lower story, and it was easy enough to effect her escape without danger of detection.

Claire heard the hours strike upon the large clock in the hall, and when two rang out, it was followed by a slight scraping sound upon her door. She started up, unclosed it, and Thorne came noiselessly in, softly closing the door behind him.

"It is time," he whispered. "The moon is rising, and we can be far away before your absence is suspected. I have been down to see the driver of my carriage, and everything is quite ready."

"And I too am ready," was the reply, but her voice slightly quivered, and she cast a regretful glance

around the secure shelter she was leaving for—she knew not what.

Thorne advanced to the window, unclosed the shutters, and together they slipped out, made their way noiselessly to the lower floor, and passed toward the steps. Old Carlo lay upon a mat near the door, but he only raised his head and uttered a feeble whine of recognition, and permitted them to go on without any further demonstration.

When they had crossed the yard, Thorne carrying her carpet-bag in his hand, Claire ventured to whisper:

"I forgot Carlo. If he had barked, mamma would have been sure to look out to see what was the matter."

"I took good care of that," he carelessly replied. "I remembered the danger from him, and I gave him a sedative more potent than the one I met Nancy taking in to you."

"Oh Walter! I hope you gave the poor old fellow nothing that could hurt him," gasped Claire.

"Pooh, child! what was I to do? There was no alternative, for I would not permit the life of so insignificant a creature to stand in the way of our successful evasion. He will not suffer long, and he will only be helped off to dog's paradise a little sooner than he must have gone at any rate."

Claire felt as if a sudden blow had been dealt her, and she uttered a little cry.

"Are you mad?" asked Thorne, almost fiercely, "that you risk such an outcry as that while we are so near the house? What have I done that you should act in such a manner?"

"You have wounded my heart, that is all," she

faintly replied. "The dog was fond of you, and I have often seen you pet him. Do you always rid yourself of what is in your way, in this summary manner, Walter?"

"Don't be a goose, Claire. If a man does not put impediments out of his way, how is he to get on in life? Things that are of no consequence I thrust aside with very little remorse. As to old Carlo I think I have done him a service by giving him a ticket of leave from this lower world, in which he was getting to be a nuisance."

"But I thought you were attached to him, Walter. I could not strike a deadly blow at the life of any creature I love."

"Perhaps not; but you are a woman; men are different, you see, and you must make allowances. It was a choice between getting safely off with you, or leaving Carlo the power to give the alarm. Of course I could not hesitate."

It came to the lips of Claire to say that humanity was of no sex, but she repressed the words with a faint shiver, and Thorne, who had made her take his arm, asked:

"Are you cold, my darling? I hope you have not come away without wrapping a shawl around you."

"No—I am not cold, and I am sufficiently wrapped up. I am only trembling at the thought of what will be felt by mamma to-morrow when our flight is discovered. Walter, I have given up everything for you, and—and—I begin to fear that I may become one of those impediments upon your path of which you spoke just now."

Thorne stopped and looked down on the pale face

on which the moon was shining, and he earnestly said:

"How can you imagine such a thing as that, Claire? It seems like sacrilege to utter such a suggestion. Are you not my chosen wife—flesh of my flesh? We are one in the sight of Heaven, and in trampling on you, I should be outraging myself. What are all my vows worth if they have not brought to your heart the conviction that you are the one desire of mine?"

She thrilled with happiness at this assurance, and clung to his arm with a tender pressure that expressed more than words.

"Forgive me, dear love; but I have only you, and I tremble at the mere thought that I may become a burden to you. I am so helpless—so dependent—and I have nothing to give you but my poor little faithful heart."

"I ask for no higher prize, my darling. Do as I do, Claire. Make the most of the passing hour, for that is all that we are sure of in this uncertain life. Do not poison 'love's young dream' by the intrusion of a single fear, but accept the bliss the gods provide, and be thankful for it. I do not suffer a care to dim my present, though I might, if I would permit myself to do so."

"Then all is not perfectly serene in his Heaven any more than in mine," thought the poor little runaway, and she clouded her horizon still further by conjecturing what drawbacks to perfect felicity her companion thrust away from him, that he might enjoy his stolen bliss in its utmost capacity to bless.

She was madly attached to him, but she thought of the long and prosperous future that she believed opening before them, quite as much as of the present. To

be near him—to live in his presence—was not enough for her, delightful as it was. She must have some assurance that this happiness was to continue and increase as the years flowed on before she could fully realize that it was hers.

They crossed the wide lawn, passed through a skirt of woodland, and gained the lower gate, to find the carriage drawn up on one side of the road, with the driver nodding on his seat.

Before the man was fully aroused, Thorne had placed Claire in the vehicle, and was preparing to enter it himself. The driver drowsily said:

"Is that you, Mr. Thorne? I've waited so long that I believe I was almost asleep just now."

"There can be but one opinion about that, John. There—I'll shut the door myself; drive on, and get to S—as soon as possible. I wish to be in time to catch the morning stage."

"Very well, sir. By five o'clock I'll set you down at the tavern, and you'll have time to get a bite before the stage starts."

"All right then; go on as fast as you can."

"I wonder what he's in such a hurry for, and what's a takin' of him off in this here myste'rous way?—but 'taint none o' my business," soliloquized the driver; and with this philosophical conclusion, he whipped up his horses, and was soon winding through the steep road which had been cut through the mountain ridge that enclosed the valley.

The egress was on the opposite side from that on which Thorne had made his abrupt and dangerous entrance into it, and as they emerged on the table-land above, the first rosy gleam of day was seen. The stars



faded out, one by one—the moon paled her brilliancy before the royal ruler of the day, as she arose amid the pomp of golden and purple clouds.

Claire shed a few bitter tears as she was borne from the scenes she had known and loved from her birth, but they were wiped away by her lover, and her emotion soothed by the tenderest assurances of eternal devotion.

She believed them, for she had unbounded faith in him, and after the decisive step she had taken, nothing was left for her but trust in the promises he so profusely lavished.

This was given as unreservedly as Thorne could have wished, and by the time they reached the little village to which they were bound, Claire had almost forgotten her regrets at forsaking the friend of her life to go with him.

They drew up at the door of the unpretending tavern, and the driver was struck with astonishment when he saw a lady handed from the carriage. He uttered a loud whistle, and exclaimed under his breath:

"Well, by Jingo! this beats all! It's the old Frencher's gal, as sure as shooting! and she's going off with that feller. I might ha' knowed, when I was told to wait in that hollow, that some mischief was afoot. But it's none o' my business—as she bakes, she must brew,' as my old mammy used to say; but it's a sorry drink she's getting ready for herself, or I'm no conjuror."

Thorne ordered a private room—in which their breakfast was served. He was in the gayest of spirits, and Claire, obedient to his impulse, brightened up, in spite of her sleepless night, and they passed a pleasant

hour before the stage-horn sounded beneath the window. In a few more moments they were whirling rapidly towards Richmond, and the young fugitive was borne onward to the sad destiny she had so recklessly embraced.

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## CHAPTER XV.

FATHER JEROME.

IN the morning the first thing that happened at the Grange was the discovery of Carlo lying stark and stiff upon the mat on which he usually slept. Nancy found him thus when she came in to her morning duties, and she presently hurried to her mistress to report what had happened. With staring eyes she stood beside Mrs. Courtney's bed, and said:

"I clar' mistis, dat somebody's bin about de yard dat oughtn't to bin, an' dey'm bin and pizened dat good ole Carlo, caze he'd 'a' barked and waked you up."

Mrs. Courtney sat up and looked at her in some alarm.

"Has anything been disturbed?" she asked. "Have you been through the house to see in what condition it is?"

"Yes'm—I's bin through every place, 'cept Miss Claire's room, an' dat were locked. I knocked at de do', but she never heard me, and so I come to you. But nuffin aint bin took as far as I kin see, an' ef 'twas a robber, he only wanted suffin he foun' outside

de house. Mr. Thorne's done gone, but in course 'twan't *him* dat was a prowlin' 'round, a killin' of our dog."

With trembling hands Mrs. Courtney hastened to make her toilette, and then went out to ascertain the state of affairs. Carlo was quite dead, so she ordered him to be removed and decently interred. After a hurried survey of the house she called to Claire to open her door, and when all remained silent in her room, with a quickly beating heart she moved toward the lower end of the hall and unlocked a door that gave on the back piazza.

On stepping out a single glance showed her that the shutter nearest to her was imperfectly closed, and even before she entered the vacant room Mrs. Courtney felt certain of what had happened.

On the toilette table lay the letter addressed to her by the fugitive, and she read it with mingled emotions of compassion and anger—compassion for the misguided girl, and anger for the duplicity of which she had been guilty toward herself. At that moment she was not disposed to extenuate Claire's fault, for she felt her ingratitude too deeply. She had placed her in the position of a daughter, and trusted her as such, and this was her return for all the kindness lavished on her.

"I wonder if she poisoned my poor old dog," she thought. "It would only be in keeping with the rest. Yet no—I wrong the poor child—badly as she has acted, she could not have done *that*. Another and a more ruthless hand gave Carlo his fate, and Claire, in her turn, will find the same iron grasp crushing her to the earth. Unhappy child! this reckless, selfish man

will work her wo yet, I sadly fear, for she has no one to stand between him and herself and demand justice for her. If he marries her, all may be well, but who knows if he will do that? Oh! Claire—Claire, why have you deserted the only friend who could have averted from you the evils into which you have so recklessly plunged."

She folded the letter, and slowly sought the lower part of the house. When it became known among the household that Claire was missing, the mystery of Carlo's fate was solved, though few among them believed that she had destroyed the old dog who had been the companion of so many of her rambles in the days of her childhood.

"It was *he* as done it," was muttered among the negroes.

And Nancy said:

"Though he may think a poor dog o' no account, it were a bad start to make wi' Miss Claire. I s'pose he's a-gwine to marry of her an' come back here askin' of the missis' parding; but 'twont be no use, caze she looks white an' set in the face, an' I don't b'lieve much would come of it."

When Julia learned the flight of her playfellow, she wept and implored her mother to send after her darling Rosebud and bring her back in spite of Mr. Thorne's opposition. She wailed:

"My Claire will be sorry and come back, mother, whether *he* wants her to or not. It was wicked of Mr. Thorne to take our Rosebud away from us—and what will my brother say?"

"He can say nothing more than I do—that Claire has chosen her own lot and we have no further con-

cern with her affairs. Do not speak of her to me again Julia, for I can never hear her name without pain. She has wounded my heart so deeply that I hardly can ever forgive her."

Yet in spite of her resentment, Mrs. Courtney would have sent a messenger upon the track of the fugitives, authorized to see them married, had there been any one near who could have been dispatched on such an errand. But there was not—her son was far away, and if Andrew had been at the Grange, she would scarcely have considered it safe to send him in pursuit of the man who had robbed him of the object of his boyish preference. His temper was violent, his feelings ardent; and she understood better than any one else how deep a blow the knowledge of Claire's evasion would be to him, young as he was.

She could only fold her hands and sigh as she thought over the fate her childlike protégée had so recklessly embraced, and all anger died out of her womanly heart as she foreboded the disastrous consequences that might result to Claire from the event of the past night.

When the scarcely-tasted breakfast was over, Mrs. Courtney went, as was her usual custom, to inquire how Father Jerome had passed the night. She found him a little better, and this morning he seemed able to speak quite rationally.

He noted the unusual cloud upon her brow, and asked:

"What is it, daughter, that troubles you? Let me lift the burden from your heart and offer such consolation as I have often given you in past days."

"If I thought you could bear the revelation I have to make, Father, I would not hesitate; but I fear that

the cause of my sadness would too deeply affect you."

He gently replied:

"Christ bore the burden of our sins, and I, His humble representative on earth, must not shrink from my share. I am stronger than you think. I feel much better this morning, and my brain is clear enough to advise you. Tell me, daughter, the cause of your trouble, that I may offer such balm as religion can afford."

Thus urged, Mrs. Courtney briefly informed him of Claire's elopement, and read to him the letter she had left for herself. He pressed his hand upon his brow, and after a few moments of wandering thought, brought to his memory the events of the evening on which he had been seized with illness. He said:

"It is right that Claire should go with her husband, though why she has gone off in this clandestine manner I am unable to understand. She told you of what took place in my cottage on that night before I fainted."

"She told me nothing, Father; her course throughout has been one of deceit. To what do you refer? Surely—surely *you* did not lend yourself to the service of these young people, and then conceal it from me! But pardon me, I forget that you have not been in a condition to speak of this since that night."

"No"—was the faint reply. "I have been lying as one in a trance since that day; but they came to me assuring me of the consent to their union given by M. Lapierre before his death, and I was weak enough to believe that I was serving the good cause by uniting them. I was gaining a son to the church, for Mr. Thorne made his marriage a condition of becoming one

of us. I thought any means justifiable to save a human soul, and Claire will keep him in the path that leads to salvation."

Mrs. Courtney listened with surprise and chagrin to this explanation; but it relieved her of her darkest fear on Claire's account. She quickly asked:

"Will the marriage stand any scrutiny, Father? Should Mr. Thorne find it convenient to repudiate it, will not Claire be able to prove its validity? There could have been no license, and no witnesses were present."

The sick man proudly replied:

"The service of the church will suffice to a true believer, and I think Mr. Thorne was sincere in his profession of our faith. He will not dare to cast off the wife wedded to him with all the forms. The ceremony is binding, even without such legal securities as men have invented. 'Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' Is not that sufficient? *You*, at least, should believe it, my daughter."

"I do, Father; but if this young man should prove recreant to the vows he has taken, what redress would this young girl have? Should you not recover, she may be placed in a most wretched and helpless position."

"Why should you imagine such a possibility? Mr. Thorne seemed an earnest and true man, and he was madly in love with Claire."

"I think the last myself, but such passions are apt to exhaust themselves quickly, and he may soon tire of her. I feel assured, now, that he has deceived us as to the consent given to his marriage by his father. If his statements had been true, or if he had intended

to act honorably by Claire, he would not have concealed their union from me when I no longer possessed the power to prevent it. Nor would he have exacted from his wife that she should not refer to it in her letter to me. Did you not remark that she speaks of becoming his wife: she does not state that she is already such."

"But, my friend, that is unfair to the young man. He showed me letters which proved the truth of all his statements, and I am unwilling to attribute to him such turpitude as you hint at. Claire has no fortune, but she is of good family, and quite his equal in other respects. Why then should you doubt his honorable intentions?"

"I may be wrong to do so, and I will hope for the best; compose yourself, Father, for you are becoming too much excited. When you are stronger, I will get you to give me a written certificate that the ceremony of marriage was performed by you, and that may help to keep Mr. Thorne true to his pledges."

"I will give it to you. Let me be propped up, and writing materials placed before me. I will at least perform this act of justice before I die."

The young priest was summoned from the next room, where he was resting upon his night watch by his friend, and Mrs. Courtney went in search of what was required.

She soon returned, but in that brief interval a sudden reaction had taken place, and Father Jerome lay white and nearly insensible upon his pillows. Every effort was made to restore him, but he sunk from that moment, and never rallied before his death, which took place a few days later.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## ANDREW COURTNEY'S FURY.

IT was much to Mrs. Courtney to know that Claire had not abandoned her protection till a husband possessed the right to command her to follow him, but she bitterly regretted that proof of the marriage in some tangible form had not come into her possession. A vague dread that Thorne intended to act unfairly by his mysteriously wedded bride would remain in her mind, and she watched and waited for some communication from the fugitive with a solicitude that could scarcely have been greater had Claire been her own daughter. She could not write herself, for no clue had been afforded to the place to which they had gone, and she was compelled to suppress her anxiety as she best could. A boy was sent regularly to the post-office several miles distant for letters, but four weeks rolled by before one came. The postmark was Richmond, and Mrs. Courtney eagerly tore open the envelope, and read the following lines from Claire:

"RICHMOND, October 15, 18—.

"DEAR, DEAREST MAMMA:—I should have written to you before, but Walter would not permit me to betray the place of our temporary residence till we were on the eve of leaving it. He is the dearest and most devoted of husbands, but he is a little imperious in his ways, and you know it is my duty to obey him. It is also my pleasure to do so, for he is all the world to me.

"How complete is his power over me you may be able to comprehend when it induced me to abandon you and my darling Julia, to go out with him into that world of which I was so ignorant. Pardon that desertion, dear mamma, and believe that my heart was saddened by remorse for the part I was compelled to play.

"When I have your forgiveness I shall regret nothing in the past, for I have gained everything by conforming to the will of my husband. He devotes himself to me—he loads me with beautiful presents, and shows me everything that can interest or improve me; and his refusal to permit me to write to you before this was occasioned by his fear that you might send some one in pursuit of us to intrude on the charming seclusion of our honeymoon.

"We came directly to Richmond and took lodgings with a widow lady living on Shoco Hill, who has a lovely home, embowered in trees and foliage. Her family consists of herself and two small children, and she was glad to give up two of the best rooms in her house for the liberal price offered by Walter.

"We were at the hotel but two days, and we lived there very privately, till my husband found this charming nest of bloom and verdure. From our windows we have a view of the city lying below us, with the romantic river beyond foaming and struggling over ledges of rock, and on the opposite shore the pretty town of Manchester.

"There is nothing to remind me of the wild mountain glen in which I have passed my life, but there is much to charm and delight me. There is an old brick church on a neighboring hill to which it gives

its name, which was built before the revolutionary war, and the grass-grown yard that surrounds it is filled with the graves of those who have long since passed away. I went there once, but Walter thinks it too gloomy a place to visit a second time, and our rambles are taken in another direction.

"Such long and charming walks as we enjoy! how my heart swells with thankful joy as I lean upon his arm, and listen to his dear voice, discoursing with that eloquence with which even you have been charmed.

"Col. Thorne wishes him to enter political life, and if he does I am sure he will soon be known as one of the finest in the land. Think how proud I am that this gifted, noble being has chosen me, insignificant as I am, as the companion of his life—the sharer of his future greatness. What can I offer him in return but the entire devotion of my life?

"I would make any sacrifice to prove my devotion to him; yet why should I speak of sacrifices, when Walter asks none—would accept of none from the being he wishes to screen from every sorrow, from every danger. If you could witness his tender care for me you would be satisfied that my happiness is safe in his keeping, and you would admit that I have done well to trust my future in his gentle hands.

"Dear mamma, think kindly of Walter, though he did steal your adopted child from you. Remember that it was to crown her with perfect bliss that he was guilty of that treachery, and pardon him for the sake of the little wife he seems so proud of. Yes—I am happy; there will not be a cloud on my horizon when I am assured of your forgiveness; so hasten to send it to me as soon as you receive this.

"Walter has taken me to see the capitol, and there I saw the statue of the Father of his Country, portraying the grand and noble lineaments of the greatest and best of men. There is also one of La Fayette, which is said to have been a good likeness, but the gallant Frenchman looks like a common mortal when brought in comparison with the serene grandeur of our countryman.

"We often linger in the beautiful grounds around the capitol, and Walter has been reading to me the history of the times that 'tried the souls' of all good patriots. He finds my mind full of poetry and nonsense, and he is endeavoring to lay a foundation for something more solid. I listen to him with devout attention, but I am afraid that my thoughts too often wander from the subject to the beloved reader; my vagrant fancy busies itself with picturing the beautiful future that lies before us, and I please myself with imagining the triumphs *his* genius will some day attain.

"He paints a little, too, for he is taking another portrait of me; I think he must have idealized my head a little, for I cannot be so lovely as the creature that glows upon his canvas. Walter scouts that suggestion though, and insists that he has made a failure; that he can never transfer to his picture the animation of my mobile face. I hope you will see it some day and judge which one of us is right.

"Our honeymoon is nearly over, alas! but if fate should maliciously deny me the perfect happiness I anticipate in the days to come, I shall at least be able to look back upon these precious weeks as a golden reflection from Heaven. Walter has even made me at times, forget that such a cloud as your displeasure lin-



gers on my horizon. Lift that from my heart, beloved mamma, and I shall go on my way serene as the sunshine that falls around me on this lovely morning.

"I half sigh, however, when I think how soon we must leave this fairy spot, which will always be enchanted ground to me as the scene of our first wedded experience. Yet I am glad to go to my future home—to behold all the fine and beautiful things of which I am to be the mistress.

"Thornhill is a magnificent residence, Walter tells me, and the old gentleman is impatient to have a youthful mistress established over it. I do not know how I shall bear myself in those unaccustomed scenes, but I am trying to assume the dignity of a matron before I am introduced to my father-in-law. I rather dread the ordeal, for Walter admits that Col. Thorne is a man of odd temper, and sometimes difficult to please. He is good enough to say, though, that he has no doubt I shall win my way to his favor as readily as I have to his own heart. I am afraid that Walter asserts this only to keep up my courage, but I shall do my best, and make every effort to please the old gentleman for his son's dear sake.

"By the time this reaches you we shall be on our way to L—, and your reply must be sent to me there, under cover to Walter. Dear mamma, I entreat that you will write at once, and gladden my heart by a full and free pardon for all the uneasiness I have made you suffer on my account.

"I hope by this time that Father Jerome is quite restored, as he seemed to be improving before I left. Kiss Julia for me a score of times, and remember me to all the servants.

"Walter will add a few lines to this long epistle, and I leave him to say all that he wishes for himself.

"Your grateful and attached,

"CLAIRE LAPIERRE THORNE."

"P. S.—I sign my name in full, because it is the first time I have had occasion to write it, and I wished to see how it would look."

In a dashing, free hand Thorne had added these lines:

"My dear Mrs. Courtney, I flatter myself that you will forgive me for stealing your pet from you, when you learn how happy she is in the new life to which I have introduced her.

"We have enjoyed a brief interlude of Eden blessedness which I shall always gratefully remember; but all things must come to an end and life's duties will no longer permit me to dally longer in this Armida's bower. I have made a sketch of the exquisite cottage home in which we have passed the last four weeks, and I have had it framed to be forwarded to you as a peace offering.

"You will detect a figure robed in white, standing in the sunshine that glints through the trees, and you will have no difficulty in identifying it as the darling of both our hearts.

"It is necessary for us to leave this place in a few more days, for my father is becoming impatient at my long absence, and I must hasten to make my peace with him by presenting to him the gem of which I robbed you. Pardon me for making such a return for your hospitality, but the temptation was irresistible,

and you were so immovable that no other alternative was left me.

"It will be best for Claire's letters to come, for a season under cover to me. I cannot explain why at present, but you shall soon know my reasons, and also how your protégée prospers in her new sphere.

"With the highest sentiments of esteem, I am  
yours respectfully, W. THORNE.

Mrs. Courtney read these letters over twice, and pondered long upon the last. She remarked with a feeling of discontent that Thorne never referred to Claire as his wife, though she called him her husband, and doubtless believed herself as securely wedded to him as if a dozen witnesses had been present at their espousals. She accused herself of becoming suspicious, but she admitted that there was cause to doubt the fairness of his proceedings, since he was unwilling to permit Claire's letters to be sent openly to her under her new name.

If Thorne's assertions respecting his father were true, why was this precaution necessary? She reluctantly came to the conclusion that a battle would have to be fought between the father and son before the young wife could be received in the paternal home. That Claire was perfectly unsuspecting of the deception he had practised, was evident from the tenor of her letter; and judging Walter Thorne from that fact alone, so high-toned a woman as Mrs. Courtney could arrive at but one conclusion; that the agreeable man of the world had few scruples where a question of self-gratification was involved, and she regretted more bitterly than ever that Claire had ever taken so false a step at the commencement of her life.

Mrs. Courtney was very sad, in spite of the joyous tenor of Claire's letter; she felt it impossible to withhold for a single day the forgiveness she so sweetly implored,—for the poor child might need it to console her for the unlooked-for difficulties into which she was about to plunge.

"She went to her desk and dashed off a few lines, intending to write more fully when she felt more in the mood. She wrote:

"GRANGE, October 25, 18—.

"MY DEAR CHILD.—I freely send you my forgiveness, and hope that it will, indeed, lift from your life the only cloud that rests upon your perfect happiness; that it may continue, and increase, is my ardent prayer.

"Father Jerome is indeed better, for he is in the home of the blessed, ministered to by angels. He revived sufficiently to explain your abrupt departure, by assuring me that he had himself bestowed on Mr. Thorne the right to command you to go with him. He told me of what took place in his cottage on the night of his seizure; I can only account for the deception he countenanced, by the partial failure of his mind, for I do not think it was well done to solemnize the marriage ceremony in a clandestine manner, and so informally, so far as the laws of the land we live in are concerned.

"Of course, as a true Catholic, Mr. Thorne must feel as much bound to you as if a hundred witnesses were present, but I should have been much better satisfied if every precaution had been taken to render your union indissoluble.

"Pardon these doubts, but Mr. Thorne's course to-

wards myself has not been such as to inspire me with perfect confidence in him. I consent, however, to judge him by his future conduct toward you, and if he continues to render you happy in the lot you have embraced, I will gladly suffer the past to be buried in oblivion.

"Should you need a friend, remember that, in spite of your desertion, I shall always be ready to stand by you, and sustain you to the best of my ability.

"Your affectionate friend,

"JULIA COURTNEY."

These lines she enclosed in the following reply to Thorne :

"GRANGE, October 25th, 18—.

"MR. THORNE.—As you desired, I send Mrs. Thorne's letter under cover to yourself, but the necessity of such a precaution fills me with doubt and fear as to the reception she is likely to meet with from your father."

"You led me to believe that he desired to see you speedily married, and cared little on whom your choice might fall, provided your wife was presentable, and well connected. I hope you told me the truth, that the letters you exhibited were genuine ; for if they were not I can think of no height nor depth of treachery of which you could not be capable.

"I will not dilate on this subject, for it is too painful to me, and too humiliating to you. Father Jerome is dead, but he informed me of the marriage before he expired : he would have left written proof of it, had time been granted him ; but it was not. I tell you this to show you how entirely my poor child is

thrown upon your honor. Oh ! be true to the vows you have plighted to her, and shield her from the effects of your own imprudence.

"If my surmises with reference to your father's opposition to your unworldly choice are correct, you will be tempted to cast Claire off to regain his favor ; but I will not think that you could be capable of such a wrong as that. You seemed to adore her, and you will not break her heart, for she is as utterly devoted to you as one human being can be to another, and she would scarcely survive a separation from you.

"I fear that I have said too much, but you will excuse it as the offspring of my solicitude for the dear girl I have loved so long, and cared for as if she were my daughter.

"Your friend or foe, as you shall deal by her,

"JULIA COURTNEY."

A few days after these letters were dispatched a box was sent over from S—, in which was packed the picture to which Thorne had referred. Mrs. Courtney had it taken out, and set up against the wall for examination, and she was surveying it with critical eyes, when she heard the sounds of an arrival. A well-known step sounded through the hall, and in surprise and dismay, she heard the voice of her son, asking where she was to be found.

She had given Andrew permission to pass his summer vacation in a pedestrian tour through Maryland, and a portion of southern Virginia, but by this time she supposed he had returned to Charlottesville to resume his studies with the new term. She was annoyed

and rather alarmed to find him under her roof when he should have been in his class.

The door was thrown wide, and a slender youth of about twenty years of age entered the room. He bore no resemblance to his mother, for his complexion was very dark, his features delicately and sharply cut, with deep-set eyes, of a bluish grey that contrasted somewhat weirdly with his olive skin and lustreless black hair and eyebrows.

His thin lips were strongly compressed, and the stormy expression of his face did not relax when he saw his mother advancing to greet him. She anxiously asked:

"My dear boy, what has brought you home at such an unusual time as this? Though I am always glad to see you, I must disapprove of your breaking off from your studies in this abrupt manner."

Andrew put out his hands to take the one she offered him, but withdrew it again almost with a gesture of repulsion, as he bitterly said:

"It does not matter where I am, madam, for I am in no state now to give my mind to study. I am better here than where I should disgrace myself by neglecting everything that would be required of me."

"Why, what can have happened to you, my son?" Mrs. Courtney apprehensively inquired. "Have you got into another difficulty with the professors? I hoped that you had sown all your wild oats and meant to devote yourself to your studies."

He looked at her with a faint, defiant smile, and said:

"I would have done that—I would have made every effort to gain your approbation, if you had not played

me false. You know to what I looked as a reward for steadiness and application; yet, in my absence, you have permitted a stranger to enter your house and bear from it the pearl of my life. Was this well done, mother? Why was I kept in ignorance of what was going on here unless it was to serve your own purpose by placing an impassable barrier between Claire and myself?"

Thus brusquely arraigned, Mrs. Courtney coldly replied:

"I had no voice in the arrangement of Claire's marriage—it was secretly solemnised, and she eloped with Mr. Thorne. I did not mention it in my letters to you, because I did not wish your mind to be disturbed by news which I knew would be painful to you. How have you learned anything about it?"

Andrew passionately said:

"I have seen her, but only for a moment. I was loitering on the public road, on my way to Richmond, when a stage passed me, from the window of which Claire was looking. I knew her in a moment, and I shouted to the driver to stop; but he only laughed, and called back:

"'All full, youngster—no room for wayside passengers.'"

"He cut his horses and dashed on, though Claire confirmed my recognition by kissing her hand to me, and she pointed to the fellow that sat beside her, who looked so well pleased that I could have killed him. I never knew till that moment how dear she was to me, but when I saw that carriage rolling away in the distance, bearing her from me forever, I felt as if all joy, all hope, all ambition went with her. I left my compan-

ions and came hither as soon as I recovered from illness that attacked me on the way, to ask you to explain why you have permitted so great a wrong to me to be consummated. You have long known what Claire was to me, yet you have received that man in your house—you must have encouraged his pretensions, or he would never have dared to snatch from me my heart's darling."

Mrs. Courtney began to comprehend now what she had not before suspected—that the childish love of her son for his pretty playmate had become the absorbing passion of his life. She had not believed that, at his age, the feeling could have struck so deep, and she listened in alarm to the passionate vibrations of his voice.

Andrew had a difficult temper to deal with, for he was both tenacious and resentful, and for many reasons she had been unwilling to allow his childish romance to have any other ending than the one which had so abruptly come. Jealous, violent, and haughty, she knew that few women could be happy as his wife, and she deprecated the thought of his uniting his fate with that of another fire spirit; for, in spite of Claire's loveableness, she knew that in her nature lay undeveloped traits which would spring into active and baneful life under such treatment as Andrew would give even to one he loved.

Better a disappointment, she thought, than life-long wretchedness through an unsuitable marriage, and from this conviction had arisen her tacit encouragement of Thorne's suit. To soothe and reconcile this impetuous, and often unreasonable being, was now her task, and, as she looked into his dark face, instinct with

passion and pride, she felt how difficult of accomplishment it would be. She gently said:

"My dear Andrew, do not blame me for what has happened. Mr. Thorne met with a severe accident in entering the valley through the gorge above the Lady's Tarn. He came near losing his life, and lay ill several days at M. Lapierre's house. It was then that the attachment was formed which has led to such an unhappy result. After her father's death, Claire came to me. Mr. Thorne was already my guest, as I had asked him here for the purpose of separating him from my god-child. I could not refuse him the hospitality of my house, and I did not dream that he would abuse it in the manner he did. I made every effort to retain Claire with me, and her secret marriage was as displeasing to me as it seems to be to you. But since it is irrevocable we must reconcile ourselves to it."

Andrew almost savagely replied:

"As if that were possible! I remember that you wrote something to me about a fellow being nearly swept into the tarn, and I suppose it was he. I wish to God that he had gone down, down into the tideless water, never to be seen among men again! It had been better fate, perhaps, than the one that may overtake him yet."

His mother looked into his agitated face, and, laying her hand upon his arm, firmly said:

"That threat must be an empty one, Andrew. If you love Claire, or care for her happiness, you can never seek to injure the man with whom she was so deeply infatuated as to forsake her home, and every friend she possessed in the world, to go with him. You feel this bitterly now, but your pride will soon teach

you to forget a girl who has preferred another before you."

"Oh, mother, you don't know how bitter it is to have the sweetest hope of a young life suddenly wrenched away!" and his voice, which had been hard, suddenly broke, and a burning tear rolled down his cheek. "I could take the life of this man who has rivalled me, and never feel a regret for doing it. But of what avail would that be? I should only make Claire hate me. I hope he will be as false to her as he was to you when he stole her from you. I hope he will estrange her heart by unkindness till it is forced to turn to *me* for consolation. Don't look at me so. I do hope it, and Claire deserves such retribution for forsaking those who so truly loved her, to run off with him."

"Andrew, my dear son, do not speak thus, I entreat," remonstrated his mother. "If we all met our deserts think what a howling wilderness of pain and despair this bright and beautiful world would be. Remember the French proverb, 'that curses, like chickens, come home to roost,' and refrain from invoking them on our poor, thoughtless refugee."

"If the curse would only take the form of Claire, and she would come back to us half broken-hearted by that fellow's barbarity, I could do nothing but rejoice, for then I might be able to console her."

Mrs. Courtney gravely shook her head.

"She would only be more widely severed from you than ever, my poor boy. Give her up as lost to you for ever, Andrew, and seek to uproot every fibre of the unfortunate passion you have cherished for her. Claire would never have made you happy; she was unsuited

to you in every way; but I trust that with the man she has chosen she will find such happiness as will develop the better portion of her wilful nature, and leave its darker passions unstirred. If you really care for her, you will pray that such may be the result of her precipitate marriage."

"Pray!" he scoffingly repeated; "pray for such a consummation as that! No—I am not such a muff! I would much sooner take some of Old David's maledictions and hurl them at the pair. I only hope that their fool's paradise will soon come to an end, and that Claire will think, with a sore and aching heart, of the love she slighted and ran away from. I cannot forgive her; neither can I help loving her, and hating the man she prefers to me. I would like to punch his head for him, or thrash him to a jelly for his presumption. If I had known what was going on here, I'd have done it, too, long ago."

He rose from the seat on which he had thrown himself, and walked to and fro, in much excitement, and his mother sat pondering in pained silence, wondering what to him would be the result of this bitter disappointment. She had very little control over him, for his imperious temper had always mastered her when she attempted to use such authority as she possessed, and, in the present crisis she felt certain that he would set it entirely at naught, if she made an effort to draw the rein ever so slightly.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon the picture which Mrs. Courtney had set up in a good light. He recognized the figure of Claire at a glance, and, with a tiger-like bound toward it, he exclaimed:

"Who painted that? Who dared to send back the shadow when the reality has vanished?"



"Mr. Thorne is an amateur artist; that picture is his work, and it only came to me this morning. He sent it as a peace offering."

Andrew glared at it with his strange looking eyes, from which fire seemed actually to scintillate. With bitter emphasis he said:

"Love has taught the artist a good lesson at all events. Small as that figure is, no one who has once seen Claire would fail to recognize the grace and harmony of her person. Even the tiny face is full of life and expression. But the eyes! I never saw that light in them before! God! was it born of her love for the painter!"

"Had she ever regarded me with that love-lit glance, I should have gone mad with joy," and he fastened his burning eyes upon the brilliant face, as if he would intoxicate himself with its marvellous charm.

Andrew went on as if communing with himself:

"Doubtless, that flower-wreathed cottage was the temple of their love—those shaded paths the Eden in which they wandered—my idol crowned with happiness by another hand than mine, the queen of those sylvan shades. But for how long will that royal gift of love be hers? Already her sceptre may have departed, and she may have learned that her hero, her demi-god, is but a clay image, with hand of steel and heart of stone. I hope it will be so—I pray that it may, for then she will return to me, and I—yes, I will console her."

His mother tried to catch the sense of his mutterings, but failed to do so. She was anxiously regarding him, when he suddenly turned to her and abruptly said:

"Give me this, and I will forgive you for letting Claire escape from your guardianship. If it *was* painted by my detested rival, I shall value it as no one else will."

Mrs. Courtney deprecatingly said:

"It will be better to have no reminder of Claire near you, Andrew. How can you hope to forget her if that picture is placed where you can see it every day?"

"I don't intend to forget her—I have no wish to do so, and I could not if I wished it ever so much. Something tells me that we have not lost her for good. She will yet come back to us—I am sure of it. Give me the picture—I have the best right to it."

There was a latent fierceness in his tones which warned his mother of the volcano of passion that was ready to explode, and she hurriedly replied:

"You may take it to your room for the present, if you wish it; but as it was a gift to me, I do not feel justified in transferring it to you."

He seized on it and, going toward the door, with a strange smile, said:

"Possession is nine points of the law. I have it now, and when you will get it back, I cannot tell. I will have the shade if I cannot possess the substance—that's about as much as most people get in this world of wretched mistakes and maddening disappointments. I am going to my room—don't let any one come near me; keep Julia away—I must be alone till—till—I have mastered my own heart."

He left the apartment, and Mrs. Courtney sat listening till he slammed the door of his chamber, which was above the room in which she sat. She heard his

rapid feet pacing to and fro, occasionally stamping on the floor, in the whirlwind of rage and passion that moved his soul, and she shivered and grew pale with dread.

Julia, who had been out walking with her nurse, came in eager to see her brother, and it was with some difficulty that she was prevented from going up to him. But the child was tractable and easily controlled, so the unhappy mother succeeded in keeping her near herself, though she found it very difficult to explain to the little girl why she was not to go up and talk with Andrew, when she had not seen him for so long a time.

He came down to supper, looking quite calm, fondled Julia, and was more respectful to his mother. Later in the evening, to her surprise and joy, he announced his intention to set out on his return to Charlottesville the next day.

To her inquiring look he abruptly replied:

"I cannot remain here to devour my own heart in the solitude of this place. I will bury myself in books till the spring comes; then you will go to Europe, as you promised. You need not look apprehensive, ma'am—I am not going after the robber who has appropriated the precious jewel I left in your charge. I am not quite such a zany as that. It will come back to us when the pinchbeck setting is proved worthless. I know some things beforehand, and I have a presentiment of what is to happen. Runaway matches seldom end well, and this one will not prove one of the exceptions."

"My son, I beg that you will not predict evil to Claire, and exult, as you seem to do, in the hope of its accomplishment."

Andrew laughed hardly.

"She has brought evil enough to me, God knows, and tit for tat is fair play. But we won't renew that subject, mother; let us talk of something more agreeable. I will tell you of my summer tour, for I met with some amusing adventures in my rambles. I should have looked back on them with unmixed pleasure but for the meeting that abruptly ended all enjoyment for me. I will try, however, to put that in the background, and tell you what preceded it."

The remainder of the evening passed away more agreeably than Mrs. Courtney had dared to hope. She was amused and interested by the details given with much graphic power by the young man. At a late hour they separated; and when she awoke the following morning, she was surprised to learn that Andrew had been gone several hours. He left behind him a note for herself, which only contained these words:

"DEAR MOTHER:—I shall return to my studies at once, and try to regain the time I have lost, but you need not hope that I shall distinguish myself. I shall no longer strive to do so, for I have lost the incentive that spurred me on. I take with me the only inspiration that can give me courage to go on in the course you have marked out for me—the picture of Claire. I may madden over it in the solitude of my chamber, but I should certainly lose my reason if I left it behind me.

ANDREW."

Thus ended his brief visit, which seemed only to have been made to bring his mother to an account for

the part she had taken in giving a rival the opportunity to win from him the girl of his heart.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE VEIL RENT AWAY.

AT the last stage of his journey toward L—, Thorne left the public conveyance and hired a small open carriage, in which he could drive himself and his companion on to his father's house. It was but ten miles from the point at which he stopped, and the afternoon was more than half gone before he was ready to set out.

He lingered at the stopping place longer than was required, for he wished to get to Thornhill after night, as he had many painful misgivings as to the reception he might meet, and he began to dread presenting his companion as his wife.

As the inevitable hour of trial approached, in his heart he cursed himself as the most egregious of fools for the part he had played. Now that the object of his pursuit was won, after the fashion of men of his stamp, he ceased to value what was so entirely his own. He had thrust care behind him and enjoyed a few weeks of halcyon bliss, which he now thought had been too dearly purchased if the price exacted for them was to be his father's favor and the possible loss of his inheritance.

He vainly asked himself what he should do if the old Colonel proved inflexible. He could decide on nothing till that first momentous interview was over, and

a cold thrill came to his heart as he thought that nothing less would appease the ire of Col. Thorne than the sacrifice of the confiding being who sat beside him, perfectly unconscious that her advent in the home to which he was taking her would produce a storm that might forever wreck her bark of life.

"Should he stand by her through everything?" was the question Thorne asked himself more than once, but he could find no reply to it. His love-dream had been very sweet, but he was becoming a little weary of its monotony, and with every mile they passed over, a slight feeling of irritation against the hapless cause of the dilemma in which he found himself placed, gained ground.

Claire caught a glimpse of his knit brows and troubled face, and she paused in her prattle and asked:

"What annoys you, Walter?" Are you afraid that your father will be dissatisfied with me? I promise to try and make the best impression on him. I am so anxious to do credit to your choice, that I shall make every effort to please him."

He uttered a constrained laugh.

"Don't fill your head with fancies, Claire, or you will be sure to fail. Do your best, *pétite*, and I—well, we shall soon know what we have to depend on now."

"What do you mean, Walter?" Is there any doubt—any fear in your mind as to—as to——"

Her voice died away, and Thorne turned and looked sharply in her face. He slowly said:

"I wonder what you would think if I were to tell you the exact truth?—you must soon know it now, at any rate."

He saw that she became very pale as she asked:

"Have you withheld from me anything I ought to know, Walter? Has not everything been perfectly fair and above-board with your father?"

"Why no-o—not exactly. The fact is, the old man does not know that I am actually married, and as he has rather strict notions on the subject of filial duty, he may flare up rather unpleasantly when he first sees you. He is a regular bombshell, but I hardly think he will explode with violence when I introduce *you*, for you are pretty enough to disarm the rage of a tiger. I only say this much to prepare you to excuse his infirmities of temper, and—and to bear with them for my sake."

"If that is all, you need not look so grave, for I can bear a great deal more from *your* father. But I am sorry you kept from him the knowledge of our marriage. I thought the news would be so pleasing to him that you would hasten to inform him of it."

"Don't you see, Rosebud, that the Governor would have been offended if he knew that I was forced to elope with you in order to secure you? And then he would have insisted that I should come home at once with you; but as I wished to enjoy our honeymoon without being intruded on by other people, I did not care to let him know what had happened."

"But you have surely written to tell him before this, Walter? You would not take me to your father's house without first preparing him to receive me as your wife?"

"Well—yes—I did write, but——"

He paused, unwilling to admit that he had not possessed the courage to send his letter.

"But what, Walter?" Claire asked, her voice almost failing her.

"Oh, nothing. Don't go and agitate yourself now till you become so unnerved as to be unable to sustain yourself creditably through the ordeal that awaits you. Everything depends on you, Rose; if you don't win the good graces of the old gentleman in your first interview with him I don't know what the result may be to both of us. I tell you this to put you on your mettle, for you are a plucky little thing when once you are fairly roused."

There was a sudden flash from her dark eyes, but the fire was speedily quenched by the tears that sprang to them, and she faintly said:

"I regret that so much deception has been necessary to win so worthless a prize as I seem likely to prove. If you had told me the whole truth about your father, Walter, I think I should have elected to remain with mamma till you could openly and honorably have claimed me."

"In that case I should never have claimed you at all," Thorne cynically replied. "My only chance was to take time by the forelock, for my father was determined to have me married, and he never would have consented to the delay of two years. I have brought him a daughter-in-law he should be proud of, and it rests with yourself to render the path before you smooth and easy to travel."

"I will do my best," was the low reply, and Claire asked no more questions, for she began to dread the revelations that might be made to her, and she felt that she needed all her strength for the approaching meeting. If Walter had deceived her in one thing, might he not have done so in others? What reliance could she place in him, if all his assurances of a tender wel-

come in her new home were false? Claire was too much bewildered to think clearly, but the future which she had pictured in such glowing hues, suddenly loomed before her dark and menacing, though she could not comprehend the extent of the danger to which she was exposed.

Comforting herself with the thought that he had in some measure prepared his wife for the rude shock that awaited her, Thorne drove on in silence till the stars came out, and at a sudden turn in the road the lights from the town of L—— shone like fireflies in the distance.

"We are in sight of L——," he then said, "and the large gabled mansion, on the rising ground to the left, is Thornhill. We shall be there in a few moments; remember what I have said to you, Claire, and be calm and courageous."

"I am calm," was the reply; I have been nerving myself for what was so unexpected, and will be so unpleasant—but I shall not fail to do all in my power to conciliate Col. Thorne."

They drew up at a gate leading into the grounds; the horse was secured by throwing the bridle over a projection of the iron fence, and Thorne lifted Claire from the vehicle, as he said:

"I think it best to avoid the bustle of an arrival, therefore we will walk up to the house. I wish to see my father alone a few moments, and at this hour I shall find him in his library. I will take you to a sitting-room near it, and leave you there till we come to you. You won't be afraid to stay by yourself in the dark a few moments?"

"No—I am not afraid of the dark, but I do not

like to be smuggled into your father's house as if I have no right to enter it. I never expected from you such treatment as this, Walter, and I begin to dread—I scarcely know what."

"Pooh! nonsense, child. I only wish to bear the first brunt of his anger, and make things easier for you. After I have talked him over, I will bring him to you. Let us take this path—it leads to a side entrance near the room to which I wish to take you. You will be quite safe from interruption there, for no one ever enters it at this hour."

With most reluctant feet did Claire enter the grand house to which she had so lately expected to be graciously welcomed as its future mistress. Trembling with dread and excitement with which bitter and angry mortification was mingled, she sat down in a large chair which Thorne wheeled toward a window through which the moon was shining.

In reply to his whispered words of apology and encouragement, she curtly replied:

"I shall do very well, only I hope you will not be gone very long; neither my courage nor temper may stand this test if you try them too severely."

"Temper, my angel? I thought you were always as serene as a calm summer morning."

"Lightning and tempest are born of summer heat," she lightly replied; "but on you the storm shall never burst if you continue to me all you have lately been. If not, I cannot answer for the result."

Thorne haughtily drew back, and asked:

"Is that intended as a threat, Claire?"

"I hardly know. I am bewildered at the strangeness of my position; it is so different from what I

have been led to expect. Don't try me too far, Walter. If you get angry with me just now for the first time, I may break down when it is most important to be calm."

Thorne stooped forward and kissed her on the forehead, and she received the caress as a peace offering, through her heart was too sore at that moment to respond to it. All this had come upon her so suddenly—she was so unprepared for the reception she was likely to meet from her new father-in-law, that she could not entirely quell the resentful pangs that disquieted her heart.

Thorne went out, leaving the door open behind him. As Claire sat there alone in the dark and cheerless room, a chill struck to her very heart, and she felt as if all the light in her young life had been quenched in the certainty of the double-dealing of him she had so implicitly trusted.

How far had he revealed the truth to her? she wondered. What means would he take to appease the wrath of the parent he evidently dreaded to meet? Poor little girl! she was as proud as she was loving, and she felt humiliated to the dust by her present position, while she clung wildly to the husband to whom she had so unreservedly given herself.

All her dreams of grandeur faded suddenly away, but she felt strong to go out upon the hardest path, and fight the battle of life with the man she loved, if his strong hand was held forth to sustain her. That he would give her up at the command of his haughty father, she did not once think.

Claire knew, without being told, that the marriage made by Col. Thorne's son would not be approved by

him, and she grew faint and sick as she remembered that letter which she was constrained to believe a forgery. In excuse for her husband she said to herself:

"He must have loved me to desperation, or he would never have used such means to win me. Poor, dear Walter! with so tyrannical a father as Col. Thorne must be, there was no other course left open to him. I, at least, should be the last one to judge him harshly for what was done for my sake. No—no—I will not—I will not."

But in spite of all her efforts to be truly loyal to her husband, fears and doubts would still surge up, and through all her after life, Claire remembered the half-hour passed in that darkened room alone, as the bitterest of her unhappy experience.

Thorne stumbled through the narrow, lateral hall till he came to a door which opened into a vestibule lighted by a bronze lamp swung from the centre of the ceiling. He crossed the floor noiselessly, and entered a room on the opposite side without knocking. A small fire burned in the grate, though the evening was warm for the season, and a shaded lamp stood on a circular table drawn up near it.

The door leading into the octagon room before described, was open, and through it floated the fragrance of a fine cigar. By this token Thorne knew that the terrible judge he sought was not far away, and with a weak and trembling heart he advanced to that sanctum in which he had so often borne the brunt of his father's wrath. But all that had gone before, would, he believed, be child's play in comparison with what now lay before him. Thorne could scarcely have been more unnerved if he had been about to enter the den



of a tiger, and his courage sank down to zero as he approached the open door.

By the dim light, Thorne saw the old gentleman reclining at his ease in a large chair, with his feet resting on another. He was smoking vigorously, a habit Col. Thorne always had when he was in an irritable mood. Walter hesitated a moment, but he felt that he must get through with what he had to say, and go back to Claire before she became too much agitated to play the part assigned her in the reconciliation on which so much depended. So he cleared his throat as a hint of his presence, and was greeted with the exclamation—"Who the devil is that? and how do you dare intrude on me in my own sanctum?"

"It is I, father; I have just arrived, and I thought it best to seek you here, without troubling any one to announce me."

"Oh! it's you at last, is it? I had begun to think that I should be forced to go in pursuit of you myself, if I got you here in time for your wedding. A precious lover *you* are, to be sure! If I were Agnes, I would send you to the inferno before I would accept so tardy a wooer."

"I should not care much if she were to do so," was the indifferent response. "Better to go to as hot a place as the one you mentioned, than freeze in the icy regions to which such a woman as Miss Willard belongs. I must speak the truth to you at once, father, for this is no time to falter. I have come home to break the engagement you induced me to form. I cannot marry Agnes."

"What is that you dare to say?" thundered Col. Thorne, jumping up and confronting his rebellious son.

"I say, sir, that it is impossible for me to make the young lady you have chosen for me my wife."

With a chilling sneer, his father responded—

"Indeed! but I am a man who tramples on impossibilities, and I will grind both you and them into the dust, if you persist in the assertion you have just made. Are you mad, Walter Thorne, that you come hither within two days of the time appointed for your marriage, and talk in this absurd manner?"

Walter cowered before the fury of his tones and gestures, but he found voice to say—

"No, sir! I am not mad now, but I think I have been so for the last few weeks of my life. I must tell you at once, that I have placed an impassable barrier between Miss Willard and myself; a man hampered with one wife can scarcely be expected to take another."

Col. Thorne suddenly sank down on a chair as if he had been shot, and for several moments nothing was audible save his gasping breath. Walter had made a desperate plunge, and almost breathless he waited for the result. He expected an outburst of furious abuse, but presently his father said, more as if communing with himself than addressing him:

"So—this is what you've been up to since you left L——? *Hampered*, are you? then the veil has fallen, and you see the girl who has taken you in, and made an egregious fool of you, with disenchanted eyes. Who is she? What is she? I must know all the particulars of this inconceivable folly."

He was so much calmer than his son had dared to hope, that he was deceived by this unexpected quietness; and quite unconscious that it was only the lull

before the storm. Walter sat down and gave him as brief and correct an outline of the last few weeks of his life as was possible to one so steeped in deceit as he was. Col. Thorne listened with set teeth that at intervals were ground together with internal raging he found it difficult to repress: but he did it till such facts as his son chose to place before him were known; then, in tones hoarse with fury he cried:

"I know you to be a weak, impulsive fool, Walter Thorne, but I never supposed your imbecility would take such a form as this. You, bound to one woman by every tie of honor, have actually given your hand to another! And she?—what is she, that you dare come to me with this story? An obscure, penniless creature, with nothing to recommend her, save a few fleeting charms that happened to please your fickle fancy. I swear to you by all my hope in life, that this nobody that you have picked up in your idle tramp, which I was a fool to allow you to undertake, shall never enter *my* house. She shall never be acknowledged as a member of my family, and if you persist in clinging to her, you may give up all expectations from me. I will cast you off; you may beg, starve, die in a ditch, and I will not put forth my hand to aid you. There!—I hope that is plain enough speaking: and by the Eternal! I mean every word I have said."

"But, father, if you would only see her," pleaded Thorne, in desperation, "only talk with her a few moments, you would not be able to withstand the sweet charm of her presence any more than I did."

"Sweet charm! Don't exasperate me to frenzy, Walter. I *won't* see her, and you may choose this hour whether you will go with her to poverty and

wretchedness, or consent to repudiate the tie that binds you to her. An informal marriage such as yours can easily be set aside, especially where there is wealth on one side, and obscurity on the other. The artful minx who has entrapped you so cleverly is a mere nobody,—she will have no friends *here* to sustain her, and I can easily get this absurd marriage annulled. Consent to be divorced, and I will pass over this folly; refuse, and you may leave my house never to enter it again—never to look to me for the smallest assistance in the dismal future you will embrace. Do you think a pretty face is worth such a price as that? Will your charmer be able to console you for the sacrifice of the wealth you must give up, if you persist in clinging to her? I trow not, for luxury and ease are the idols of your self-indulgent nature."

Walter Thorne leaned against the window-frame for support, for his agitation was extreme, and for several moments he was incapable of utterance.

"Speak," thundered his irate father. "Choose your path; for by the Eternal, I have offered the only terms on which I will still continue to acknowledge you as my son."

"Oh, sir—oh my father, have mercy on this poor child—on me, for I love her. She has trusted herself to me, and I cannot play the part of a villain by her."

Col. Thorne raised his finger and pointed towards the door. "Then, there is your path, sir. Walk out of my house, and never dare to appeal to me again under any circumstances. My heart will be steeled to you—my purse closed. I will repay Agnes for your desertion by settling on her every cent of my fortune. Her father is ill unto death, and your marriage must

have been postponed at any rate ; I shall have time to free you from your degrading bondage if your consent is given. Agnes must soon be an orphan, but I will be a father to her ; she shall console me for giving up my ungrateful son."

"Father, you only say this to try me. You know that, reared as I have been, with no profession—no means of making a living, I could never support myself, much less a wife."

"Give her up, then," was the sharp, fierce response. "I offer you an alternative."

"But how terrible an alternative. Rose loves me ; she will break her heart if I desert her. I should be wretched myself."

"You would not think of that other heart you have won, when you were dashing headlong to your own ruin ; but I think of it, and I will do all that man can to give back to Agnes the worthless ingrate she is so unfortunate as to have fixed her affections on. I have named the only terms on which I will forgive this disgraceful episode in your life, and it rests with yourself to reject, or accept it."

"But, father, would Miss Willard accept me, when she knows what has occurred ? Even if I consented to play the villain to my wife, you could never induce so proud a woman as Agnes to forgive the infidelity of which I have been guilty."

"Leave that to me. Only consent to be freed from the shackles that bind you, and I will answer for the rest. Agnes is not at home. She went with her father to Philadelphia, in the vain hope that the physicians there could benefit him ; I have just returned from a visit there to them, and Mr. Willard is no bet-

ter. They will remain in Philadelphia for better medical advice, but he is not long for this world. I was fretting about the delay in your marriage, but I can see now that Fate has managed affairs best for us all. Agnes need know nothing of the foolish escapade of which you have been guilty. The whole thing can be settled and you freed from your matrimonial yoke before she returns home. See how lenient I am to afford you that chance to retrieve yourself in my favor."

"But father, you think only of Agnes, and give no compassion to the poor girl you so ruthlessly condemn to be cast off by me. I entreat that you will see her and speak with her, if but for a moment. She is so fair, so bewitching a creature, that your heart will relent toward her—you will even be proud to claim her as your daughter, if you will only give her a chance to win you over. That is all I ask of you. Fortune is nothing to you, for you have enough and to spare. Rose is of good family—of gentle breeding, and—and—I adore her."

The unhappy young man made this plea in as firm a voice as he could, but his father was unmoved by it. He cynically replied :

"I understand all about that. Such men as you love madly, blindly, for a few brief months ; then the object of the passion is cast aside as carelessly as a faded flower is trampled under foot. If you should be unwise enough to give up my favor, together with your own inheritance, for the sake of this girl, you would soon learn to hate her for the sacrifice you had made. There can be no happiness for *her* in this ill-omened union, and still less for yourself. You can provide liberally for her—I will not object to that ; but as to

receiving her as my daughter, it is out of the question. Place yourself in a position to redeem your pledges to Agnes Willard, and I will ignore the late events of your life. Refuse, and, as I before said, you may this night go forth a beggar, and what is worse, a helpless, fastidious beggar, with no hope for the future; for I solemnly swear to you that *nothing* shall ever induce me to see you or assist you while you remain true to the obscure creature you are so anxious to thrust upon my favor."

The cutting emphasis with which Col. Thorne spoke convinced Walter how deeply in earnest he was. He knew better than any other how inflexible his father's nature was—how ruthless in his purpose he could be—and his heart sunk like lead in his bosom. He faintly said:

"You speak of a divorce, sir, as if it were a thing easy to be obtained, I—I do not know on what ground I could ask for one, for I have voluntarily chosen my wife, and thus far we have been very happy together."

"Ah, bah, that is casily managed. You are a very young and unexperienced man—you have been entrapped into a misalliance that will destroy all your prospects in life. Those facts, backed by my influence and money, can accomplish what I wish. I observe that you already speak in the past tense—you say you *have been* happy with your charmer; very good—live henceforth on the memory of that, and do not insist on clinging to a dead passion when all its glamour has passed away. Withered flowers have only a sickening odor, and they are not worth the price that, in your case, will be exacted for them. Tell me now, upon your honor, do you value this girl above fortune, posi-

tion, above the happy and prosperous future I have arranged for you?"

Walter reflected a few moments before replying. He confessed to himself that he had begun to weary of Claire—of the demonstrative affection she so exuberantly lavished upon him; and he felt that to relinquish for her sake all that he most highly prized, was a sacrifice he was incapable of making.

He had almost forced her to his arms, and now he was preparing to cast her from them at the bidding of his implacable father. Yet in justice to him it must be told, that it cost him many bitter pangs to give her up—to blight her beautiful dream of happiness, and leave her in the opening dawn of life wrecked and hopeless.

It was better, he argued with himself, that *she* should be the sacrifice than that *both* should be shattered on the desolate strand of life; for he possessed neither the power nor the will to make a future for her. He was at that moment reduced almost to his last dollar, and he dared not risk being cast out from his luxurious home with no dependence for the future. Claire might even, in time, reproach him for the poverty into which they must inevitably sink, for he knew that his artistic talent, imperfectly cultivated and capriciously exercised, could not afford them bread.

Col. Thorne quietly resumed his cigar, while his son stood near him, balancing against each other love and fortune. He understood the nature of the man before him, and he felt perfectly confident as to the result.

With intense bitterness Walter finally said:

"It is not a question of a happy future, sir; for that is now a hopeless thing for me. If I consent to give

up the darling of my heart and carry out the plan on which you have so strongly set yours, you will be answerable for the wretchedness my union with Agnes Willard must bring to both her and myself. I never loved her, though I submitted to your will so far as to ask her to become my wife. Forced to accept her as such, after repudiating the woman I prefer, I shall hate her; I shall be guilty of that which will make me hate myself."

"I shall risk it, at all events," was the cool response. "I can see plainly enough that your passion for your darling, as you call her, has passed its heyday, and you are not willing to bury yourself in its ashes. So much the better for you; and as to the artful minx who has so sweetly beguiled you, let her take the consequences of her own folly. I shall have little care for her, beyond furnishing the means to pension her off when once you are fairly rid of her. Let us now settle the means of accomplishing that, if you have decided."

"Good Heavens, sir, will nothing move you?"

"Nothing—I am steel—marble—adamant, to any entreaties you may urge. Submission—or irretrievable ruin."

The two looked each other in the eyes, and the head of the younger man drooped hopelessly upon his breast. With a hard and contemptuous smile, Col. Thorne said:

"I see that you understand your position at last; and now tell me the truth—the marriage was clandestine—was there a license?—were any witnesses present?"

In a low, reluctant tone his son replied:

"There was neither. She trusted to my honor—to

the fact that we were united by a Catholic priest; and as Rose looks on that ceremony as indissoluble, she believed I felt the same. There was no time to obtain a license, for I took advantage of Father Jerome's consent to unite us, as soon as it was given."

"And the priest?" asked Col. Thorne, quickly. "Will he be likely to come forward as a witness, to prove that you were really married?"

"If he were living he would certainly do so; but everything seems to favor the iniquity you would force upon me. The old man's mind was failing him, I think, before he consented to unite us; and he was struck with paralysis soon afterward. I left him almost in a dying condition, and I should not be surprised if, by this time, he is dead."

Col. Thorne arose, threw away the stump of cigar, and decisively said:

"The affair can be settled easily enough then. The divorce will be a mere form, for there is really no proof of the marriage. I shall get one though, for I will have no shadow of a doubt on the validity of your union with Agnes. I will claim her as my daughter, or I will disown you as my son. That is my ultimatum."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE EXPLOSION.

COL. THORNE passed into the adjoining chamber, lifted the screen from the lamp and turned its light



on the face of his son, who had mechanically followed him. He had no feeling of compassion for the pallid anguish he saw written on Walter's agitated features: a man of iron purpose and pitiless will, he permitted nothing to stand in the way of a resolution he had once taken. He even refused to let Claire stay in the house one night, saying:

"I bid you remove her from this house without delay, for I do not recognize her right to enter it at all. The tie that binds you to her is not legal; at the proper time I shall prove that it is not; and what would be said or thought of me if I received one in her doubtful position, and permitted her to remain here even for a few hours?"

The speaker turned away from the writhing figure of his son, and started back at the apparition that stood in the doorway; a girl as colorless as the dead, draped in deep mourning robes, stood as if rooted to the threshold, with an expression of such wild agony and doubt on her white face, that even that hard man shrank back appalled as he read its meaning. Her eyes were fastened on the cowering form of her husband, and she almost disdainfully said:

"Come, Walter, let us go—I see that I am not wanted here. But what does *he* mean by saying that our marriage was not legal? It was, I am sure, for Father Jerome would never have lent himself to a deception that would ruin me and render us both wretched."

At the sound of Claire's voice, Walter started up and turned toward her, but as he would have approached her his father stepped between them and mockingly said:

"So, young lady, you have not disdained to play the

part of the eavesdropper, and have proved the truth of the old adage, that they seldom hear any good of themselves."

A faint flush came to Claire's cheek, and she proudly replied:

"I came hither but a moment since in search of my husband. He left me so long alone, and in darkness, that I thought something must have happened to him. I followed the sound of voices, and came within hearing just as you uttered that cruel falsehood. I am his wife, sir, and until I was almost at your door I believed that you were waiting to welcome me most gladly as your daughter."

Though struck by the simple dignity with which so young a creature spoke, Col. Thorne was not moved by the pale loveliness of her face, nor by the tremulous anguish which thrilled in the tones of her voice. He coldly said:

"My son is an unprincipled deceiver where women are concerned. He did not ask my consent to marry you, and if he had done so, he knew full well that it would never have been given. He was not free to bestow his hand, for it has long been pledged to the girl I have chosen for his wife. He admits that some ceremony was gone through with, but it was unwitnessed; there was no license, and, therefore, I choose to regard it as illegal. It shall be set aside, for my son shall not bind himself irrevocably to poverty for the sake of a pretty toy of which he is already weary."

He uttered the cruel words without shrinking, though he read on her face the force of the mortal blow they dealt. Claire turned to Thorne and almost in a whisper asked:



"*Is this true?* The first I already divined—but the last cruel assertion must be false. Oh, Walter, leave me not to suppose that you already weary of the being you wooed so fondly to your heart! that some other woman held a place in it before you knew me! Be true to me, Walter—assert your own manhood, and let us go forth to face the world together, strong in our mutual love, and ready to bear the heaviest burdens life may lay upon us, provided they are borne together."

Claire held her hand toward him, but Thorne did not move to clasp it, and his father disdainfully broke in:

"Let us end this scene, if you please; I wish you to understand that *my* will is Walter Thorne's *law*, and I have already won from him the promise, that he will repudiate the flimsy tie that binds him to you, and return to her who has the best claim upon him. Look at him as he shrinks and cowers there and give credence to my words."

Thorne had again thrown himself upon a seat, his head bowed, and his face covered with his hands, unwilling to look upon her he was preparing himself to renounce. He felt that the angel with the flaming sword had entered their Eden, and driven them forth, never to re-enter it again; his heart impelled him to spring to the side of his helpless wife, and sustain her against her pitiless antagonist, but the dire consequences to himself arose before him, and he dared not.

Claire made a few steps towards him and faintly said:

"Walter, I have but you: are you so false to the vows

you have pledged to me, that you are ready to give me up at the bidding of your father?

At this appeal he cast a despairing glance toward her, and then cried out:

"Oh Claire! what other choice is left me? I cannot work, to beg I am ashamed, and you see you have heard for yourself what the will of my father is. What can I do but submit to it?"

A faint cry issued from her colorless lips, so full of anguish that it penetrated even to the callous heart of that haughty old man, but he repressed the emotion as a weakness, and listened to the words she was, with effort, speaking.

"Oh, Walter! I have trusted you, so implicitly; believed in you so fully, yet you can so ruthlessly tread upon my poor heart. You have crushed the life out of it this night; and henceforth it is dead—*dead*."

She turned and swiftly left the room.

"I must follow her," cried Walter, and he rushed madly in pursuit of the flying figure. In her present frame of mind he knew not what desperate resolution might enter Claire's stricken heart, and he acted on, before she had time to think of the enormity of the crime of self-destruction.

Col. Thorne made no effort to detain him, for something in the face of the unhappy creature, so suddenly torn from her dream of love, and hurled into the depths of despair, had frightened him, cold, and harsh as he had shown himself.

The moon was shining brightly, and by its clear light, Thorne discovered the outline of a dark-robed figure just disappearing beneath the shadow of the trees in

the direction of a narrow, but deep stream, which wound through the grounds.

With fleet steps he pursued, and gained the bank just in time to prevent her precipitating herself into the dark waters. Claire struggled frantically, crying out:

"Let me go—let me go. I will not live to be forsaken, and disgraced. *You* will cast me off, and no one else would then receive me; death is my only refuge."

Thorne held her firmly clasped in his arms, and uttered every protestation that could calm and reassure her in that fearful moment. But she was wild with anguish and resentment, and she replied to them by the bitterest reproaches for bringing such insult and humiliation upon her as she had lately borne from his father. All the fire in her nature was aroused, and her outraged love seemed to him to have died as sudden a death as even Col. Thorne could have wished.

Finding how useless her efforts were to escape, Claire submitted to be removed from the brink of the stream, and after a few moments she imperiously said:

"Take me from this place in which I have been so bitterly insulted; where I have learned that there is no faith to be placed in man. I have seen that you are ready to yield me up to the desolate future that must be mine, after taking so fatal a step as our marriage has proved to me; but I warn you that I will not be cast off without seeking—seeking forever till I find the means to avenge the dastardly wrong you are ready to consummate towards me. I am helpless, and at your mercy now; but it will not always be so. Were you worthy the name of man, you would stand by me at all hazards; labor for me, make a future for us both,

as the toiling millions of earth do for the mates they have chosen. But *you*, lapped in luxury, steeped in selfishness, you throw a young and helpless creature upon that world you have not the courage to face yourself, and, worse than that, you are ready to stain her name with the assertion that the tie she believed the golden link that bound her to peace and happiness, was but a sham—a shameless lie—yet such it was not, well you know, though you will, with the power of that bad old man to aid you, make it so appear to others.

"*You*, as a professing Catholic, know that *no* secular tribunal can sever the bond that unites us; yet why should I appeal to the religion I now know you only professed to gain an end. False in that, as in all the rest, I find you utterly unworthy of the adoring love I have so blindly lavished on you."

Claire spoke with such rapid and fervid utterance that Thorne found it impossible to interrupt her. His half-awakened remorse was stifled by this torrent of reproaches; he writhed beneath the truths so plainly spoken, and when she at last paused, he coldly said:

"It is as well that the disenchantment should be mutual. We have played out our pretty little farce of married felicity; you cannot say that I did not make you supremely happy for one halcyon month, and I admit that you rendered me so too. I am not ungrateful, though I may seem so now. We can both look back to that blissful interlude in the monotony of life, and have the sweet consolation of knowing that we have been blest, let fate bring us what it may in the future."

"As if the brightness of those days will not darken

all that are to follow them," she bitterly replied. "I did not ask for a glimpse of Eden: the 'sober certainty of waking bliss' is infinitely more to my taste, yet wo is me! it can never—never now be mine."

"You are too young to despair of anything, Rose. Let us endeavor to forget our past, and try to find contentment, at least, in the days that are to come. We have both been rudely awakened from our love-dream. You have found a deceiver and a villain in the hero of your fancy, and I have found a termagant and a bitter scold in the goddess of mine: thus we are quits. Let us part as friends, since my father has decreed that part we must."

There was much of his father's cynical hardness in his tones, and Claire recklessly replied:

"Yes—let us part; but not for ever. Break the bond that unites us; but you shall yet find that faith and truth to me had been better for your own prosperity, as well as for your happiness. Take me from this place, I say—remove me as far away as is possible, for the very air seems to stifle me. There is a town not far way; take me there, and give me time to think over all that has so suddenly come upon me."

Thorne led her back to the carriage, placed her in it and drove slowly toward L—. She supposed he was going to a hotel, but he turned off from the principal streets after entering the town, and presently drew up in front of a handsome gothic cottage, almost embowered in trees.

## CHAPTER XIX.

ADA DIGBY.

CLAIRE sat too much absorbed in her own wretchedness to care whither she was removed, provided she was taken from the home from which she had been so ignominiously thrust; but when Thorne drew up in this secluded spot, she looked up and haughtily asked:

"To whom are you now taking me, Mr. Thorne? A public house is the only one that should receive me; and if the landlord of that knew all that is soon to befall me, he would not consent to admit beneath his roof one whose fair name you are getting ready to assail before the tribunals of your State. You will get a divorce, under what pretext God alone knows, and I shall hide my face in shame, not for myself, but for the man I have believed among the noblest and best of his kind."

"Hush—hush, Rose; we have had enough of that. I have brought you to a relative of mine, who will receive, and succor you in every possible way. Miss Digby was my mother's cousin—she is no longer young, and her character and position are such that no one will dare assail anything she may do. I do not wish our unhappy story to become the theme of public gossip; therefore I cannot remove you to the hotel. Ada Digby is not over fond of me, but she is a just, and generous woman, and she will do what is best for both of us. You may rely on her advice, for she has a clear head, and warm heart; I can do her that much justice, through I know I am no great favorite with her."

Claire was thankful to escape from the publicity of the hotel, so she only said in reply :

"It is all the same to me. Shelter for a brief season is all I ask, and then I will go upon my lonely way to seek what I shall surely find ; the means of bringing to you retribution for your false, and shameful conduct to me."

"Don't threaten me, Rose ; you will gain nothing by it."

"I have already received at your hands all that I am likely to accept from them," was the haughty response, and she stepped from the carriage refusing his assistance.

Thorne opened the iron gate, and they crossed a yard filled with shrubbery, and evergreens. He rang at the door of the cottage, and after a few moments' delay, a light flashed into the darkened hall, and a clear, even-toned voice, asked :

"Who is there, asking admittance at this hour of the night ?"

"It is I, cousin ; Walter Thorne. Pray open your door, for I must speak with you to-night."

The bolt was withdrawn, and a tall, fair woman, with black eyes, and hair of raven darkness, stood before them.

Miss Digby courteously welcomed her young kinsman, and glanced with some surprise at his companion ; but she hastened to lead the way into the apartment she had just left, which was fitted up as a kind of laboratory.

Claire sunk into the seat offered her, vaguely wondering by what name her husband would introduce her. He glanced uneasily at her white face, and drawn brow, and after a moment's hesitation, said :

"Cousin, I have taken the liberty of bringing my wife here to-night, because my father is in one of his worst humors, and has refused to permit her to remain at Thornhill. I entreat that you will receive her, and for the present keep our union a secret from the outside world."

Miss Digby regarded him with unmingled surprise, and she glanced compassionately at the bowed face of the poor girl. She replied to Thorne in a subdued voice :

"Your wife, Walter ! wedded clandestinely, and you on the eve of marriage with another ? Oh ! false, and fickle nature, who can ever put faith in its possessor ? Wo to this unhappy creature who has placed herself between you and your ruthless father."

Thorne seemed to quail and shiver beneath the reproach of her words. In the same tone he replied :

"Yes, it was a sad hour for her and for me, when we met. I have been mad, that is all. I do not ask you to receive this poor child for my sake, but for her own. You never refuse to do a kind action, and this favor will be the last I shall ask at your hands."

"Of course I will give Mrs. Thorne shelter, and such support in her difficult position as I can ; but how will you answer to the colonel for what you have so imprudently done ?"

"I have already seen him and Claire was turned from his house. I will leave her with you, and return to make such efforts as are possible to appease his wrath. But you must watch over this poor girl ; the shock of what has happened to-night has made her wild, and unmanageable. Be gentle with her, but keep a constant watch on her, I entreat."

Miss Digby turned to her pallid guest, and removing her bonnet, kindly said :

"You are very welcome to my quiet home, my dear. You shall find that all of Walter's relatives are not as harsh and cold, as the father from whom you have met such treatment to-night. You shall stay with me till Col. Thorne has recovered his sense of right, and is ready to receive you with the welcome due to his son's wife."

With a dry, hard glitter in her brilliant eyes, Claire replied :

"Thank you, but my visit would be a very long one, if it only ended when I am received at Thornhill. I shall never go there again, till I enter it in triumph to put my foot on those who have this night so bitterly insulted me. Miss Digby, that man there is my husband ; till to-night he was my adoring and obsequious slave. *Now*, at the command of his brutal father, he is ready to throw me off ; to deny even the validity of the vows he has plighted to me. I speak freely to you, an utter stranger, but I cannot accept your hospitality without stating my actual position. If you will let me remain with you now, I shall be very grateful for shelter for a few hours."

Miss Digby impulsively replied :

"You shall stay with me a year if you choose, my poor, deluded child, and I will help you to sustain your cause. Of course you will not permit yourself to be so fatally wronged without a struggle to retain your position. Oh ! Walter, I could not have believed this, even of so reckless a being as you have ever been."

Thorne was about to make some deprecating reply, when Claire passionately broke in :

"No—they shall not wrong me without a struggle to right myself, which will cover with infamy the man who attempts it. I have friends who will stand by me, and I will summon them to my side. The good priest who united us will come at my bidding to prove that I am a lawful wife. But it is only for my name's sake that I would defend my cause ; the love I so lately cherished for that false craven, has died a death so violent and sudden, that nothing can ever resuscitate it again."

She sank back, exhausted by her own excitement, and seemed on the eve of fainting. Miss Digby hastened to offer a restorative, which she poured from one of the bottles on her shelves, and Thorne gloomily said :

"Our marriage seems to have been a great mistake on both sides, Claire, and the sooner it is dissolved, the better, perhaps, for both of us. I make no effort to deny it, you see, for in the presence of my cousin, I admit that you are my wife. I shall never seek to blacken your fame by denying the fact of the ceremony having been gone through, but it was informal, and my father believes he can easily have it pronounced a nullity. Since we have so bitterly quarrelled, it will be best so, I suppose. I believed you to be an angel of sweetness, and I find you a perfect shrew. You thought me a demi-god, and you find me a selfish commonplace mortal. After what has passed to-night, the sooner we are quit of each other, the better for both of us."

A faint color came to Claire's white cheeks, her eyes flashed, and with an attitude of superb disdain, she pointed to the door, and said :



"In your turn, you are commanded to go, and I never wish to set my eyes on you again till the hour arrives in which I can bring to you such retribution for the wrong you have done me as will wring your heart. You have not broken mine, though you have killed it; and I shall live to make *you* as bitterly rue the day we met, as *I* do now."

A scornful smile came to Thorne's lips as he said:

"This is a poor return for the adoring love I have lavished on you. I hoped and believed that my father would relent, and receive you, or I should never have brought you to his house as I did."

"*Love!* is the feeling you dignify with that name worthy of it? You *forged* letters assuring me of Col. Thorne's consent to our union; you led me to believe that I should be gladly welcomed to his house, and you took me there to meet insult and contumely. You cowered before your imperious father, and made no attempt to sustain me in his cruel presence. I no longer ask, nor will I accept protection from the man who failed me in the hour in which I most needed it."

"So be it," replied Thorne, sullenly. "I might have used efforts to bring my father around, but you have rendered that course useless. Farewell, Claire; I shall not intrude on you again, though I shall take such measures as will ensure you a sufficient support."

She haughtily replied:

"You need not trouble yourself about that, sir; for I would sooner starve than touch a morsel purchased by *your* money."

The door closed on him as her last words were uttered, and the overwrought creature fell back into violent hysterics. Miss Digby hastened to afford her such

assistance as she needed; and when the first violence of the paroxysm had subsided into low moans and long sighs, that seemed to rend the poor heart from which they issued, her hostess succeeded in conveying her to an adjoining room, which was daintily fitted up as a sleeping apartment.

Miss Digby placed Claire upon the bed, and sat down beside her, endeavoring to soothe the lacerated heart, and bring the forlorn creature to speak and think more calmly. She had known Walter Thorne from his infancy, and she had little faith in his stability or principles, though she was attracted, as others were, by his brilliant endowments and handsome person.

Until this night she had not believed he would have risked the favor of his father by violating his pledges to the betrothed Col. Thorne had chosen for him; much less did she suppose he would have had the moral courage to bring the rival of Agnes Willard to the paternal mansion, in the mad hope that she would be received as he had led her to expect. Walter had evidently done a foolish thing, in his own estimation; and he had played a desperate game, in the hope that he might win without a single chance in his favor.

As Miss Digby looked on the pallid face before her, she thought if ever man had a fair excuse for such folly this high-strung and most beautiful creature afforded it—yet she pitied her from the depths of her heart. She knew Col. Thorne too well to believe that anything could induce him to accept any other as his daughter-in-law than the girl he had himself selected; and after what had that night passed between the craven husband and outraged wife, she believed a reconciliation would be impossible.



She asked herself what was to be the fate of this young creature, with her marvellous loveliness and fiery nature, when cast into the valley of humiliation, and left to struggle throughout alone? She was most anxious to learn all the particulars of the marriage, that she might afford such advice and assistance as the unfortunate being thrown on her kindness so sorely needed; and she ministered to her guest in the hope that with returning composure, she would speak freely to her as to a friend in whom she could confide.

After a few hours of intense suffering Claire recovered sufficient self-control to speak composedly. She faintly said:

"I fear that I am giving you too much trouble, Miss Digby; and I have no claim on you. I hope I shall be better to-morrow, and then I will go away from here, shaking from my feet the dust of this place, which I should never have entered. Ah! wo is me, that I ever listened to the false tongue that so sweetly beguiled me."

"My dear," replied Miss Digby, gently, "I cannot think that the heart which prompted the tongue was utterly false. Walter Thorne has great faults, but he has some good in him; and I am unwilling to believe that he intended to wrong you. He has certainly acted unwisely and not very honorably toward his betrothed bride, in giving her a rival in yourself, but I think his excuse is that he loves *you*. Try and compose your mind, and relate to me, as concisely as possible, how all this has come about. I may be able to help you—and I am most anxious to do so."

Claire feebly shook her head.

"If Walter Thorne had truly loved me he could

never have deceived me as he has done. He led me to believe that his father was so anxious to see him married that want of fortune on the part of his bride would be of no consequence. I did not dream that another woman was in existence who has any claim on him.

"To-night, when I came unbidden into the presence of that harsh old man, Walter suffered him to speak such words to me as I can never forgive, and he made no effort to defend or sustain me. He made no response to my appeal; and then—then—God help me! I would have sought oblivion in death. I fled to the stream I had noticed as we passed through the grounds; and if he had not followed me very quickly, I—I should have thrown myself in.

"Walter forced me away and brought me here. But *now* there is no danger that I shall attempt suicide, Miss Digby. All the great love I felt for him seemed to die out of my heart, as he held me struggling in his arms, and talked in his old deceitful way; in its place surged up a feeling of bitter hatred and repulsion; and in those moments I could have stabbed him fatally."

"My dear, this is terrible. Do not speak thus."

Claire imperiously went on:

"Yes—I could have killed him then; and later, when I sat beside him in the carriage that brought me hither, I felt the same impulse, and nothing saved him but the lack of a weapon. I feel no softer to him now; and the only safety for him is to keep himself as far as possible from me. I am very wicked, I know that; but till to-night I thought myself good. I have hitherto known nothing but love and kindness; and until such bitter wrong came to me, I never suspected what

serpents of wrath lay coiled in my nature, ready to spring into venomous life."

"Dear child, it is terrible to hear so young a creature speak thus. You are in the gall of bitterness now, but a few hours hence you will feel differently. I possess some influence with Col. Thorne, and I promise to use it to bring about a reconciliation. If he consents to receive you as his son's wife, *you* can surely consent to forgive what has passed to-night. Walter has never been able to withstand his father; and he is entirely dependent upon him. You must remember this in excuse for him."

With undiminished bitterness, Claire replied:

"*Nothing* can excuse him to me. His false and cowardly nature came out too clearly to-night, and I saw the idol of my imagination stripped of all the illusions I had thrown around him; he showed not only the feet of clay, but the whole man is of material no less base. Had our positions been reversed, I should have thought only of *him*; but *he* thought only of himself, and what he should lose if he remained true to the vows he had plighted. Col. Thorne must not be asked to receive me, for I will never enter his doors on sufferance. In that house I will reign as a sovereign queen when I am accepted as its mistress."

"But," remonstrated Miss Digby, "you must concede something, if you would not ruin your life. You can win your way to the old man's heart, and make him proud to acknowledge you as Walter's wife; and if the chance is afforded you, it is your duty to do this."

"It may be, but I shall make no such effort. After the indignities of this night, *I* must be lured back,

for I will not bow down to those who have insulted and injured me."

Finding how impracticable she was in her present mood, Miss Digby asked:

"Are you calm enough to give me a history of your marriage, and how your friends came to allow so young a creature as you are to bestow her hand upon a stranger without inquiring into his antecedents?"

Claire burst into tears—the first she had shed that night. "Oh! they did not—they did not. Mamma would have saved me from this misery, but I was wilful and disobedient. I took my fate in my own hands, and consented to marry Walter clandestinely. I was too young and ignorant to know what might hereafter be necessary to prove my marriage; and until to-night, I never dreamed that its validity could be questioned. I heard that terrible old man say to Walter that he would have it set aside, and he never opened his lips to protest against such indignity."

"I will never forgive him, never! For one little month he treated me as a goddess, and made me as happy as any mortal ever was; and to-night he had the cruelty to say to me that a few brief weeks of perfect joy are more than are vouchsafed to most human creatures."

"My husband surrendered my rights to his father, Miss Digby, and he will let him work his will; but I will repay him. I have vowed within myself to do so, and I shall certainly find means to bring home to him every pang of humiliation and outraged love he has made me suffer."

"But, Mrs. Thorne, it is wrong to cherish such feelings. It is contrary to Christian principles, and——"

Claire hastened to interrupt the impending lecture:

"Don't call me by that name—call me Claire, for that is my name. They will take from me the right to bear Walter's, nor do I wish to claim it now. I am Claire Lapierre, and harder than a stone will he find my heart when the day arrives in which he shall appeal to it in the name of the love I once felt for him. Oh! Miss Digby, pity me, and pardon my violence. My heart is crushed beneath a weight of woe I did not lately believe it could have borne; but I will try and calm myself, and give you a clear history of what has happened to me during my short life."

Miss Digby saw that this was not the time to reason with the wretched and half-distraught creature, who so kneely felt the awful change in her life, which had fallen like a thunderbolt upon her. She thought it natural that Claire should resent the facility with which her weak husband had yielded to the arbitrary will of his father, and she felt the tenderest sympathy and compassion for her.

She gently said:

"Tell me all, my child. Let me understand your exact position, that I may seek and find some remedy for all this evil."

"That will be hopeless," was the gloomy response; but Claire went on to give the desired relation. At its close, Miss Digby soothingly said:

"Thank you, Claire, for so fully confiding in me. I see nothing in the way of a happy ending to all this, except Col. Thorne's insane desire to make Agnes Willard his son's wife, in spite of every obstacle to its accomplishment. In birth and breeding you are quite equal to Walter, and the want of fortune is of tri-

fling importance; there is money enough and to spare, with only one child to inherit it. You must sleep now, and when you awake, the bitter resentment you naturally feel will be softened, and you will be more inclined to listen to reason. Hope for the best, my child, for I think I can induce Mr. Thorne to do what is right by you and Walter."

A wistful look came into Claire's eyes, and she impulsively said:

"Oh! if you could—if you could, I might consent to forego my vengeance, in spite of all the hard words I have uttered. We might regain a faint shadow of the happiness we have lost, and—and—and I don't know—I might learn to love Walter a little yet."

"You will learn to love him a great deal, and to regret the bitterness with which you have spoken tonight. There, my dear, take these drops; they are a strong sedative, and by morning I think you will be calm, and amenable to reason."

Claire swallowed the potion, and with a sudden look of pain sank back, moaning:

"Oh! what a difference in my life a few hours have made! As we came hither this afternoon, all the sunny confidence of love and hope were in my heart; *now* there is only the night of despair. Leave me alone to wrestle with my sorrow, good friend, for I must fight my battle without help."

Miss Digby kissed her, turned down the light, and left the room. Several times during the night she came to the door; but when the sound of her light footfall was heard, the poor sufferer stifled the moans that rose to her lips, and lay with staring eyes and fe-

vered frame, living over again the brief bright dream of love, ending in such blank despair.

By morning she was tossing in fever, and raging in the wildest delirium. In this condition was she found by her hostess, when she entered her room to inquire how she had passed the night.

Miss Digby had devoted much of her lonely life to the study of medicine, though she did not practice it as a profession, nor had she received a diploma from any of the schools. But she possessed the fine instinct and subtle power of judgment which belongs to eminently successful physicians, and the first glance she cast on the dilated eyes and flushed face of her young guest, assured her that the terrible shock of the previous night had produced brain fever.

She lost no time in applying such remedies as she knew were necessary, but the patient grew steadily worse; and, afraid to trust to her own skill, Miss Digby summoned other medical assistance. She had to parry the inquiries of Dr. Brandon as well as she could, as to who this young stranger was, and how she came to be under her roof. She coldly replied to the queries of the inquisitive physician, by saying:

"This young lady is a connexion of mine. She came to me only yesterday, and it is unfortunate that she should have fallen ill so soon after her arrival. I hope that you will be able to do more for her, doctor, than I have."

Dr. Brandon shook his head.

"Where *you* fail I shall scarcely hope to be successful, for your skill is quite equal to that of the best of us. This young creature is extremely ill; she must lately have undergone some terrible shock to bring

her to such a pass as this," and he looked inquiringly at Miss Digby.

She remembered her promise to Thorne, and with impassive gravity, replied:

"The cause of her illness is not what we have to consider—the means of cure are of more importance just now. Since you approve my course, all I have to do is to persevere in it and bring her through by careful nursing."

The baffled inquisitor bowed, and stiffly replied:

"I can recommend no better course, Miss Digby. I wish you a very good morning, but if you should need me again, of course I shall be at your command."

Left alone with the patient, the kind-hearted nurse stood many moments looking down upon the fair face which had already begun to wear a pinched and worn aspect, and the widely opened eyes had in their depths an expression of fathomless woe that was pitiful to behold. Her long brown hair was thrown in disorder over the pillow, and mechanically Miss Digby began to wind one of the shining braids around her finger.

The sick girl jerked her head away and muttered:

"They are *his* curls—he loved to dally with them—and no one else shall touch them. Oh, Walter, Walter, where are you? why do you not come to me? Oh, you have killed my heart! it is dead—dead—*dead!*"

Many times before had she repeated the last words, and a paroxysm of insane fury always followed them, in which she uttered most appalling threats of future vengeance against the recreant lover who had worked her so much woe. The same result ensued now, and her friend was forced to use every effort to bring her back to calmness.

Miss Digby watched and waited for some communication from Thorne, but the hours of that long day passed on and none came. A second, third and fourth went by with the same result; and indignant at his neglect of the being he had left on her hands—probably to die—she wrote a few curt lines to him, informing him of the condition in which his wife lay.

The note was answered by Col. Thorne, in a characteristic manner:

“THORNHILL, October 11th, 18—.

“MY DEAR ADA :—As my son is not at home, I took the liberty of opening your communication to him and take it on myself to reply to it.

“I have sent Walter away that no further meeting should take place between him and the young person under your charge. Your own good sense must show you that her claims on him can never be allowed—they have both played the fool, and now they must pay the price of their folly.

“I am sorry to hear that the girl takes the affair so much to heart, as to become seriously ill because her Walter is banished from her presence, but I wish her to be made to understand that another meeting between them will not be permitted. I have sent Walter to pay his devoirs where they are due, and to assist his betrothed in watching over her dying father.

“I have already taken the preliminary steps toward dissolving the flimsy tie that binds him to the obscure creature whose beauty so fatally ensnared him. You may well believe that a hard struggle was necessary to win from him his consent to obey my commands, but *it was won.*

“Of course I conquered, for Walter is one of those men designed only for ornamental uses, and the alternative of being left to battle alone with life sufficed at last to bring him to reason. I made him see that I was in deadly earnest, and his unstable nature gave me the victory.

“It was well for him that such was the result, for if he had persisted in his defiance of my wishes, I should have cast him off and never lifted my finger to aid him, though I had seen him brought to the most abject state of destitution. You think me very hard, no doubt, but I have ventured all my hopes in my son, and you best know why I have nothing else to live for.

“I have equally set my heart on claiming as my daughter the girl I have selected for his wife, and Walter shall certainly marry her as soon as he is free to do so. As to the young simpleton who thought to win her way to my favor through her beauty, I do not wish to be hard on her. I am ready to provide suitably for her; and as an earnest of my intentions, I enclose two hundred dollars to cover such expenses as may be incurred through her illness. When she is well enough to return to the secluded valley in which Walter unfortunately found her, I will advance what may be necessary for her traveling expenses, and furthermore settle on her the sum of four hundred dollars a year, to be paid semi-annually.

“I think that is acting with great liberality on my part, but I wish you to impress on her that if she attempts to follow Walter up, or persecute him in any way on account of his midsummer madness, I will withdraw all assistance from her.

“Your kind heart will suggest to you the best way

of placing before this young person the true state of affairs.

"Respectfully, your friend, W. THORNE."

Miss Digby read these lines beside the couch of her patient, who was then lying in a death-like sleep, and she knew that on her awakening depended her fate. She might sink into the arms of death, or recover to face the blighted existence that lay before her. Miss Digby scarcely thought she would die, for she was young, and her constitution was unbroken—though, as Claire had so pathetically declared throughout her delirium, her heart was dead.

"I will wait till her fate is decided, and then, if she lives, go to Col. Thorne myself," thought the faithful nurse; "should she recover, I will use the influence that I alone possess over this hard man, and try to bring him to feel compassion for those two imprudent young creatures. Yet Walter must be the true son of his father to go away even at his command, without coming here to see his wife before parting from her forever."

The violence of the fever had impelled Miss Digby to cut off the hair of the sick girl, and the long bronzed locks lay on a table beside her. Twilight gathered in the silent room, yet Claire slept on, though her breathing was more regular, and a faint dew began to appear on her fever-parched skin. At intervals Miss Digby moistened the lips of the sleeper with some cooling liquid which was at hand, and sat awaiting the crisis that would give her back to life or end in the sombre darkness of the tomb.

The room was buried in shadow, for the fire had burned low and no light had yet been brought in by the

servant. The silent watcher was suddenly startled by a deep sigh—almost a sob—that broke the stillness; and she arose and turned toward the door which opened into the adjoining apartment. Before her stood Walter Thorne, looking wild and haggard! and, in spite of her warning motion to keep back, he came swiftly forward and drew near to the bed on which the wasted shadow of her he had so fatally wooed and won was lying.

He hoarsely asked:

"Is she dead? Have I killed her by my cruel desertion. Oh, Ada, have some pity on me, and say that life is not extinct in the heart I have so basely tortured."

"Come with me," said Miss Digby, in a low tone, but one of such authority that Thorne felt forced to obey her. "She is not dead, but to awake from this saving sleep and find you beside her will certainly destroy her."

He followed her into the next room, in which a lamp was burning; and closing the door behind her, Miss Digby coldly asked:

"Why are you here, Walter, when your father believes you to be on your way to Philadelphia? Since you have pledged your word to him to give up your poor young wife, you have no right to come hither."

He almost humbly replied:

"I know that, Ada, but I could not keep away. I felt sore and bitter toward my darling, because she spoke such harsh words to me the night I brought her hither, and I yielded to my father's exactions. But when I had gone some distance on my journey, I could no longer hold out against her; I felt as if I



*must* return and obtain her forgiveness for the wrong I am compelled to do her. Yes, *compelled*, Ada, for I cannot bring her down to the depths of poverty—steep myself to the lips in its bitter waters. We must part, but we can at least carry with us a less painful sting than the memory of that last meeting would be if nothing further passed between us.”

Miss Digby replied with some excitement :

“You are very weak, Walter, and untrue to every pledge you give. For Heaven’s sake, choose a line of action and adhere to it, but do not vacillate in this manner. You have elected to give up this unfortunate child, and accept the bride your father has chosen for you, yet you turn upon your journey to *her* to come back here and arouse a deeper sense of wrong and anguish in the heart of the girl you have forsaken. She cannot endure much more—the sight of you when she awakes from that death-like sleep—if she ever does awake—would be fatal to her. She can bear no emotion in her present weak state.”

“Oh, Ada, my cousin, pity me and help me, for I am the most wretched of man. I have wrecked that young life, when I meant to make it happy ; I am, as you say, weak as water ; I have no strength to contend with fate—and that is against us.”

With some scorn, she said :

“It would not be if you possessed the self-respect and energy of a man, but I excuse you thus far that I know how useless you have been reared. You have fine æsthetic tastes that must be gratified at the cost even of honor and happiness. You have from your infancy been lapped in the soft delights of life, and therefore you are unfitted to face its stern requirements

should your father carry out his threat of disinheri-  
tance. I comprehend all this, Walter ; but above all, there is something wanting in yourself. Had there not been, you, in your selfish passion, would never have subjected that unfortunate girl to the wretched ordeal through which she must pass. You were guilty of the crime of forgery to win her consent to a clandestine marriage, and now you give her up at the command of as flinty a heart as ever beat in a human bosom. Go upon your way, and leave her to scorn and hate you, for that will be her only salvation in the years to come. Your self-love may be wounded by the thought that she will do so, but for *her* it will be better than any tender or kinder feeling toward him who has wrought her so much evil.”

Thorne shrank beneath her pitiless tones, and deprecatingly said :

“You have little mercy, Ada. You feel only for her—and God knows that I too suffer deeply in giving her up.”

“*Your* sufferings will be easily forgotten ; you will console yourself with a rich wife ; and surrounded by the luxury you value far above this poor victim of your selfishness, you will soon cease to feel even remorse for her broken life and soiled fame.”

“You have no mercy, Ada : yet I swear to you that if it were possible, I would cling to Claire in spite of the bitter words she used to me, in your presence, when I brought her hither.”

“Yet you have permitted your father already to take measures to break the tie that binds you to her. I have his own assurance that such is the fact. Court is now in session in this town, and before it adjourns

Col. Thorne's influence and money will secure the decree that frees you. There will be no one to speak a word in opposition; no voice will be raised to defend the cause of this friendless and unknown creature. I know with what facility divorces are granted in this State; and no opposition will be made to this one. *You* go away to avoid the scandal, and Claire will rise from her sick bed to find herself a blighted outcast. The friend who took her in at her father's death may refuse again to receive her; and I ask you what is then to be her fate?"

Thorne eagerly replied:

"She shall never want while I have a dollar. Don't think me so base as to leave her without a provision: *that* was stipulated for when I yielded to my father's demands."

Miss Digby disdainfully replied:

"I know—money, the grand panacea for all ills, in the estimation of such men as you and your father, is to be offered her; but if I read aright the proud and fiery nature of this young girl, she will never accept it from either of you."

"What then am I to do? I have pledged my word to my father to give Claire up; the petition for a divorce has already been presented; for he lost no time in preparing it; and you know how skilful a lawyer he is. He will carry it through without delay; and should I run restive then, he will be more implacable than ever. Claire *must* accept what is offered her. You must find means to induce her to do so. I should be wretched if I could not force on her some atonement for the suffering I have caused her."

"There is but one atonement she would accept. If

I mediate with your father perhaps he will relent. Should I undertake to do so, would you gladly and willingly take your wife to your heart again, Walter?"

"I would—I swear it before Heaven. I would try to make her forget the wrong I did her; I would cherish her as the darling of my life. Oh, Ada? if you can accomplish such a miracle as that, I shall owe you eternal gratitude."

Miss Digby earnestly regarded him, and then said:

"I will then make the attempt. My charge will not awake for at least an hour yet, and I can leave Barbara to watch over her while I am gone."

"I scarcely know how to thank you, Ada; but do not call Barbara; I will sit beside her, and I swear to you that I will make no attempt to disturb her."

She hesitated a moment, and then impressively said:

"I will grant your request if you will promise to be perfectly quiet, and should Claire move or show symptoms of awaking, that you will at once leave the room and send my servant to her. Barbara will know what is to be done for her; on opening her eyes the shock of finding you near her would defeat all my efforts to save the life that hangs on a hair as slender as that which upheld the sword of Damocles."

"You may trust me. I pledge you my word to obey your directions implicitly."

Miss Digby unclosed the door which gave into the room of the sick girl, and the two passed noiselessly into it. The pallid form lay upon the bed in the same position in which they had left it, the lips partially unclosed, and the heavy eye-lids folded in the sleep which might be her last. The faithful nurse bent over her a few moments, and then whispering a few directions to

Thorne, she left the apartment to go on the errand from which she hoped some good might result.

Walter Thorne sat down in that darkened room to watch for a brief season over the stricken being who, so short a time before, had been the radiant embodiment of youth and joy. As he beheld Claire thus, all his passion for her returned, mingled with remorse for his late conduct to her, and for the first time in his life he fervently prayed. He petitioned for her restoration and for success to the mission on which Miss Digby had gone; but even while he prayed he had little faith in her efforts to serve him, however well meant they were.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### COL. THORNE'S SECRET.

AS Miss Digby walked rapidly toward Thornhill, the clear autumn air fanned her cheeks and brought to them a faint color, which in some measure relieved the look of lassitude and care that many nights of watching had brought even to her strong and elastic frame.

She passed through the town and moved toward the stately pile which crowned an eminence about half a mile distant from it. Years had passed over her head since she last stood beneath the portal of that house, and she had not thought that any inducement could be offered her to enter it again while Col. Thorne remained its master.

Ada Digby was a cousin of the deceased Mrs. Thorne,

and for many years had been an inmate of her family. She was then young, beloved and gay; and now she was a sad-eyed woman who had drank deeply of the cup of sorrow mixed for her by the hand of the man from whom she was about to solicit a favor.

Col. Thorne had wrought dissension between herself and the object of her affections, that he might win her himself to fill the place of the wife he buried when Ada Digby had attained her twentieth year. A short time previous to that event she had given her troth to George Balfour, in spite of the opposition of her guardian, who refused his consent on the score of inequality of fortune. Miss Digby possessed an estate that yielded her an ample support as a single woman, but her lover had nothing.

Goaded by the sarcasms of Col. Thorne, Balfour bade his betrothed farewell, and emigrated to a warm and unhealthy climate in the hope that the facilities for making money there would enable him to return in a few years rich enough to claim his bride. The lovers were to correspond regularly, but not a single letter was allowed to reach its destination. They were carefully intercepted, and in a moment of outraged pride Balfour offered his hand to the daughter of his partner and was accepted.

The pride of Ada Digby sustained her through this ordeal, and, deceived by her outward calmness, Col. Thorne believed that he might venture to speak of his own hopes. A year had elapsed since the death of his wife, and he considered that quite time enough to consecrate to the memory of the woman who, for years, had not held the first place in his heart. Unconsciously to herself, Ada had won, and held that position, and when

her guardian spoke of love to her, she shrank from him almost with repulsion, and refused to become the mistress of his splendid home.

In his fierce anger at her positive rejection of his suit, Colonel Thorne taunted her with the desertion of her lover, and betrayed that to his hand she owed the slight she had received. He was unwise enough to assert that he had withheld the letters, and still had them in his possession. She demanded the proof of his assertions, and it was finally given by producing four letters written by Balfour, and two by herself.

Grasping in her cold hand these evidences of his base treachery, Ada left the room in which she had received him, commanding him never again to appear in her house. After the death of Mrs. Thorne she had taken possession of her early home, accompanied by a widowed and childless old lady, who had been the friend of her mother, and she found her income quite sufficient for the quiet style of living she preferred. She gave herself up to the studies that fascinated her, and permitted no other lover to approach her; but every year, by letter, Colonel Thorne renewed the offer of his hand in formal terms.

He had refused to obey her prohibition to seek her presence, and a tacit reconciliation had been effected; but she steadily refused to receive him in her own home, and vouchsafed no reply to the proposal which annually came. For seven years this singular farce had been enacted with what hope of success it would have been difficult to discover; but Colonel Thorne was a man who never relinquished any scheme on which he had set his heart, and he always asserted that perseverance would win success in any undertaking.

Now, to this hard, and unscrupulous man, Miss Digby was about to appeal to show such mercy to his son as he had never manifested toward any human being. She did not slacken her pace when she had entered the grounds which had once been so familiar to her, for she had an object to attain, and she feared to lose a moment of time lest the invalid should awake in her absence, and some imprudence on the part of Walter betray his presence near her. Her mind was too intently occupied with the intention that brought her there to allow her to think of herself, and she moved toward the house as calmly as if about to make an ordinary call.

On the lofty portico sat the master of the mansion, enjoying his evening smoke in the open air. Colonel Thorne was a well preserved man of fifty, and in the twilight he seemed scarcely older than his son. His figure was still slender and debonaire; his hair slightly sprinkled with grey, though it had grown thin on the temples, and across the broad brow. His face was that of an intellectual gladiator; clearly cut and strongly marked features, with deep self-scintillating eyes, an aquiline nose, and a mocking, sarcastic mouth made up the *ensemble* which rendered the eminent lawyer a terror to his antagonists in the arena in which their forensic battles are waged.

He rarely lost a cause, and he boasted that he carried more law in his brains than other men found in extensive libraries. To the tenacity of the man as much as to his ability, had his success in life been due; for it was his chief characteristic that what he had once determined to accomplish should be achieved at any cost. But once had he been baffled, but he

had not given up the contest. Ada Digby had refused to become his wife, but she should yet be mastered by his indomitable perseverance, and accept the fate she had disdained in the heyday of her youth and beauty. This conviction was strengthened when Mrs. Hinton, her friend, died the previous year, and left her without companionship; and as he saw Miss Digby's well-known figure ascending the winding walk toward the house she had so long refused to enter, Col. Thorne uttered a low mocking laugh, and whispered to himself:

"At last!"

He threw away his cigar, arose from his seat, and with a grace of manner he could assume at will, moved forward to receive his guest. He cordially said:

"My dear Ada, I am sure that my lucky star must be in the ascendant this evening. I have been dreaming here in this lovely twilight of the happy change in my destiny your presence in this house would make, and lo! the goddess of my thoughts comes visibly before me, making my visions real."

He took her hand, which she did not refuse to him, for she remembered that she had come there to conciliate this fair-spoken tiger, who knew how to veil his ruthless claws under velvet softness when he had a point to gain. But when he would have led her into the house, she quietly said:

"I have a few words to say to you, Col. Thorne, which can be better said here than elsewhere. I will sit here, if you please."

He drew forward a chair, as he said:

"If you prefer it, of course I must yield; but when I saw you coming, I indulged the hope that you would at last enter once more the home that was once

yours—that I am only too anxious to restore you to as its legitimate mistress."

With chilling, and stately courtesy, she replied:

"I considered that question as finally settled long ago. I did not come hither to listen to speeches that mean nothing, Col. Thorne, but to prefer a petition of my own."

"Can I refuse anything you may ask, my fair cousin?" was the reply uttered in his most suave tones. "I shall be only too happy to concede anything to you that you can demand, provided your request concerns *yourself* alone."

"Why limit it in such a manner?" she impatiently asked. "You well know that your words are equivalent to a refusal, for I am not likely to ask anything from you for myself."

"And why not, Ada? No one would so gladly serve you as I. Through all these years of lonely turmoil, I have steadily looked forward to the day in which I should retire to the *otium cum dignitate* of my own estate, with the only companion who could make retirement from active life tolerable to me. Perseverance should win its reward, and mine surely deserves success."

"Do you think so, Col. Thorne? In *this* case, at least, I think it merits something far less agreeable. We will not discuss the past, if you please, nor refer to myself in any way. I come hither as the ambassador of your son; as the mediator for the unhappy child who is now lying in my house almost at death's door, brought there by your cruelty. Nothing less than a matter of life and death could have brought me as a petitioner to your presence."

The deep-set eyes emitted a single flash, but it was ominous of what was to follow, though he spoke as softly as before.

"I regret that you should have undertaken to interfere in my family affairs, Ada. I am accustomed to manage them without advice from others; and so far as Walter is concerned, his fate has long been settled. He was well aware of that fact, and he should never have entangled that pretty creature in the web of deception which has produced such disagreeable results. If you hope to induce me to accept that obscure young person as my daughter, I shall be reduced to the painful necessity of intimating that such a thing is not within the bounds of possibility, except on—one—condition."

The last words were spoken with peculiar emphasis, and with a distinct pause between each one, while his glowing eyes were fixed upon her face.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

WITH a slight eagerness, Miss Digby replied to Col. Thorne's suggestion, as made at the close of the last chapter:

"Then there is a chance for these unhappy young people. I do not offer any apology for this appeal, though you seem to consider one necessary. I feel that I am simply doing my duty by two helpless creatures who are entirely in your power. What con-

cession can they make which will soften you in their favor?"

"The concession will not be demanded of *them*, Ada."

Miss Digby lifted her face to his, for he was still standing in front of her, and she shivered slightly as she caught the expression of his eyes. Less firmly than she had hitherto spoken, she asked:

"From whom, then, can it be required?"

"From *you*. Since you have taken it upon yourself to mediate between myself and my disobedient son, I am free to name my own terms. I did not believe that anything could induce me to give up the marriage I have settled for Walter, but I will even do that, and permit him to bring hither that verdant young girl as his wife, if you will consent also to come to Thornhill as mine."

At these words, Miss Digby arose from her seat, and haughtily said:

"You have no right to exact from *me* the price of your son's happiness and respectability. It is one I shall not pay, as you knew before you made the proposal. In yielding my assent, I should sacrifice my own self-respect, as much as Walter will lose his, in being forced to give up the being he has solemnly promised before Heaven to love, and cherish. I did hope, Col. Thorne, that I could influence you to act rightly, for right's sake; since I was mistaken, I have no further business here, and I will bid you good evening."

He laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"You will not go quite yet, Ada. Since we are at last alone together, pray indulge me with a few more moments. Let us have this matter out."



She sank back on her seat, coldly replying :

"As you will, I shall be glad to put an end to the absurd persecution I have so long borne from you."

"There is but one thing that will end it," he said with provoking calmness, "and that is your union with myself, or another. Do you know that your ideal of constancy to a man who has a wife and children of his own, is even more absurd to me, than my own persistent pursuit of you is in your eyes. I did you a wrong once, but it was because I loved you, and I thought myself better suited to a woman of your sense than Balfour was. I believed that I could atone to you for bringing about a separation between you, but you are as unreasonable as the most commonplace of your sex, and you persistently shut your eyes to the advantages of becoming the wife of the man with such endowments of mind and fortune as I possess. You curl your lip at my vanity, I perceive, but that is not the name for it. It is self-appreciation, and who has a better right to it than I? I have won high professional success; my political career has been brilliant, for I have served with distinction in Congress. I shall certainly be the next Governor of my State, and it is my most earnest wish to see you doing the honors of my home when I attain my new dignity.

"Reflect how much better suited to such a woman as you are, is the distinguished future I offer you, than the obscure life you live down yonder; passing your days in concocting messes for those who are too poor to employ a regular physician. Before Heaven! it is a shame that so rarely endowed a creature as you should be content to bury yourself in the dull round of daily duties as you do. Others may think such

self-abnegation very fine, but to me, it is the supremest folly that ever a human being was guilty of."

Miss Digby listened to this long tirade with perfect calmness, and at its close steadily said :

"Not such folly as marrying a man who has forfeited my respect, would be. Neither your wealth, nor your greatness, Col. Thorne, can weigh with me against the memory of that deadly treachery which took all the gladness out of my life, and, for a season, made me unjust to him who was as deeply wronged as myself. Don't misunderstand me; my refusal to listen to your proposals does not spring from the love I once bore poor George. *That* died out when I believed myself deserted by him, and it is not likely that the knowledge of what you have done to separate us, would relume it, when I knew him to be the husband of another woman. I cherish now, only a tender friendship for my former lover, but to *you* will never be given the lees of such love as I may still be capable of feeling. I wish earnestly that you could be made to understand this, and cease annoying me with prof-fers of affection that are odious to me."

His eyes twinkled maliciously, and he said :

"Time is going with us, Ada. We are neither of us so young as we once were, though I am many years farther on in the three score and ten allotted to us than you are. In women of your intellect, the age of ambition dawns when that of romance is past. You must, sooner or later, find the bounds of your present life too narrow for you. When that time arrives, and it cannot be very far off, you will take the hand that is stretched forth to draw you from the insignificant nothings with which you seek to occupy yourself. I

am waiting—I can afford to wait, for my reward will come.”

There was such calm assurance in his tones that she was vexed, and curtly replied :

“Wait on then ; if you choose to deceive yourself in so absurd a manner, I cannot help it, but from *me* you will gain nothing.”

“Ah, bah ! don’t get excited. I am a man of strong passions, but I don’t flare up without good cause. I *shall* wait, and my will shall conquer yours yet. Don’t you think now, that it may be as well for you to yield the consent I am sure I shall ultimately win, and purchase with it the happiness of these two young fools ? You seem deeply interested in the girl, and you have always been kind to Walter. I leave their fate in your hands. I will forgive him, and accept Mrs. Thorne, Junior, if you will consent to become Mrs. Thorne, Senior, before another week goes over your head.”

“Will nothing else move you in their favor ?”

“Nothing, for you I will give up Agnes, though I know how tenderly she is attached to my ungrateful son ; but for nothing less will I make the sacrifice you ask.”

“Then my mission is hopeless, for I can never become your wife. It is a strange think to ask of me ; but you are a singular man. If Agnes Willard loves Walter, the greater will be her unhappiness in the union you will force on him, for he will never be kind to the woman for whom he is compelled to give up the choice of his own heart. It is wrong, it is cruel to act toward him as you are doing. You have made him dependent on yourself ; you have given him no profession

by which he could earn a living ; and now, with a hand of iron, you crush him into a subjection that is dishonorable ; you dictate to him a course which must destroy both happiness and respectability. I bid you pause, and with your usual acumen, judge of the results likely to follow to him.”

“You plead well, Ada, but Walter is scarcely worth the trouble you take. He is his mother’s son, full of fancies and nonsense, and he never knows two months at a time what he really wishes. It was not my fault that he had no profession. I tried to make of him a lawyer, but his confounded artistic tastes disgusted him with study ; and the pretty meaningless things he daubs on canvass will never give him either fame or money. I let him alone, because I could do no better. He will have enough to enable him to indulge his fancies, without drudging, as I have done to gain it ; that is, if he does my bidding. I selected Agnes Willard for his wife because she has sense and spirit ; she will make him of some account ; but the pretty doll he has lost his head about has nothing to recommend her. The father was a poverty-stricken Frenchman, and she is in no respect a suitable match for him. If I yielded to your wishes, and permitted Walter to bring her hither as his wife, in six months he would be sick of his bargain and be ready to curse his own folly. I know him better than you do, and I tell you there is no stamina in him. Nature has gifted him with fine artistic tastes and gentlemanly instincts, but she has denied him genius. His productions always lack that indescribable something which strikes a chord in the common heart of humanity, and makes a man famous for all time. He has neither brains nor perseverance

to accomplish much for himself and he should bless the fate that gave him a rich father. If, like Esau, he throws away his birthright, it will be so much worse for him."

"Then you would really and truly cast him off? He is your only child; there is no one else to whom your hard-earned wealth can descend."

"I shall take care of that," he quickly replied. "The day Walter defies me I will make my will bequeathing every cent I possess to the girl he treated so badly. For years he has made Agnes believe that she is to be his future wife, and for a passing fancy he has thrown her by as a worthless flower. He even had the daring to bring the rival he has given her beneath my very roof, in the mad hope that her beauty would fascinate me as it did himself, and induce me to forgive them. She merited no better treatment at my hands than she received, although I did order him to remove her from my house at once."

"Are you aware that this unfortunate girl believed that she was coming hither as your son's wife with your full consent," coldly inquired Miss Digby.

"So she may have asserted to you, but it is untrue, as many other statements she makes about herself undoubtedly are. A girl who would run off with a strange young man cannot be trusted in anything she says or does."

"*This* one can, I am sure. I am no mean judge of character, and the pride of this young girl is so great, that she would never have given herself to Walter without the assurance under your own hand, as she believed, that your anxiety to see your son married was so great that you were willing to accept a portionless bride for him."

"Then she must be a very credulous person, or Walter's powers of persuasion are greater than I supposed."

"She very naturally believed the evidence of her own eyes," replied Miss Digby drily. "A letter purporting to have been written by you, was shown to herself and friends, in which you expressed your approbation of the marriage. The lady who had adopted Claire refused her consent on account of her protégée's extreme youth, and she eloped with Walter."

"So the young villain has added forgery to other accomplishments, for I never wrote such a letter in my life."

"So Claire believes now; and that, I think, struck as deadly a blow at her heart as the inhuman treatment she met at your hands."

"You are not complimentary, Miss Digby," he said, with a curt laugh, "but I forgive you. Knowing that, I am surprised that your fair patient should be willing to trust such a man as Walter again. Hard as she may think it now, she will be better off without him as he without her. Since I had nothing to do with the manufacture of that letter, I can scarcely be held responsible for what resulted from its false contents."

Miss Digby looked at him in the fading twilight, and rightly interpreted the expression of hard mockery that rested on his face; she arose and said:

"My intercession is vain, I find; so I will return to the unhappy creatures who await me; one of them in trembling suspense, the other too ill to know of my errand hither, or to be shocked anew by its failure."

A flash of keen anger came from the eyes of Col. Thorne, as he furiously cried out:

"What is that you say? Has Walter dared to turn back upon his path, and seek the presence of that girl again, when I sent him to make his peace with the other?"

His visitor calmly regarded him as she said:

"Keep your anger within bounds, for little harm will be done. Walter's deserted wife is insensible to his presence, and it is doubtful if she will ever arise from her sick bed again. He came to bid her a last farewell; and moved by his anguish I offered to mediate with you. My errand has been fruitless, and I will return to send Walter on the dishonorable path you have marked out for him. He is too much afraid of poverty to risk sharing it with the one he loves best, so you need have no fears as to his choice of action."

With an air of superb disdain Miss Digby swept past him and descended the steps. Col. Thorne called out to her:

"Be sure to tell him that you could have made peace between us, and you would not. And you may furthermore say to him that if he is not far on his way to Philadelphia before this time to-morrow, I will draw up my will cutting him off with a shilling, which is far more than such a scapegrace deserves from me."

His visitor vouchsafed no reply, and she heard his taunting laugh following her as she moved with rapid steps down the avenue.

But for the anomalous position in which Claire would be placed by the desertion of her husband, Miss Digby thought it as well for her happiness that she was refused recognition in that family, for the Thornes were not agreeable men to live with. From father to son, for generations, they had lived in a turmoil of their own making, both abroad and at home.

Ada Digby remembered the wife of the man she had just left, as a gay and brilliant girl, when she herself was a young child. Attracted by the rising fame of the young lawyer, Laura Digby had given him her hand, but her light butterfly nature found no congeniality in his hard and sarcastic one, and the life they lived was one long attempt at resistance on her part and systematic crushing on his.

Ada had witnessed the protracted struggle, for she was an orphan left to the guardianship of her cousin's husband, and her only home was Thornhill. Before she attained her thirtieth year, Mrs. Thorne died, prematurely old and broken down in spirit; yet this man, whose harshness to his wife Ada had witnessed, soon made proposals to her, asserting that nature had formed them for each other and he could make *her* happy, though he had made no effort to render the mother of his son so. She recoiled from him then with all the strength of her nature, and she now shuddered when she recalled the alternative which had so lately been proposed to her. She sighed heavily as she murmured:

"I have done all that I could, and Walter must accept his fate, or battle against fortune. His father will do what he said, for Col. Thorne never threatened evil that he did not make his words good. I am sorry for those unfortunate children, but I can do no more. Walter will give his wife up—nay, he has virtually done it already—and, if she lives, she must accept the dreary fate decreed her. Oh! this is a weary, weary world!"

She regained her own door, and noiselessly entering, laid aside her hat and shawl and went into the sick

room. A faint stream of light from the lamp in the adjoining apartment penetrated into it, and Miss Digby saw that Thorne was sitting motionless beside the bed with the tresses that had been cut from Claire's head pressed to his lips.

At the sound of her light footfall he started up and eagerly regarded her. She softly said:

"Not here, Walter; no noise must be made near her. Go into the next room, and I will come to you immediately."

There was something in the tone of her voice that struck to his heart, but he silently obeyed her, taking with him the long shining tresses which he had so often caressed when they waved and glittered on the head of his beloved.

Miss Digby carefully examined the condition of her patient, and found that she still slept calmly, though there were some symptoms of a speedy awakening to what was going on around her.

"Life will come back to her," she thought, as she bent over the white face on which, even in sleep, lay an expression of pain. "Yet what has life to offer her now? Better, perhaps, it would be for her to die in her sinless youth than to live to suffer, to grow hard and unforgiving, till the proud nature so sorely crushed may turn and rend the author of her ruin. Who knows what her future may be? But God is good, and if he suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without notice, he will surely extend his loving and saving hand over this unfortunate one."

She moistened the pale lips, and then went out to the anxious man in the next room to take from him the faint hope she, herself, had aroused. Thorne

turned eagerly toward her, and in a suppressed voice said:

"You have seen him, and—and, he was inexorable. I read it in your manner—I see it in your face."

"Yes—your father was immovable. He will disinherit you if you refuse implicit obedience to his commands. If you have elected to give up your wife, you must leave her at once."

"And was there no alternative? Yet why do I ask, for he was plain-spoken enough to myself."

"There was an alternative offered, but *you* were not concerned in the sacrifice demanded."

"Thorne looked at her in some surprise, and then exclaimed:

"Did he ask you to purchase immunity for me by giving yourself to him, Ada? And you—well, of course you refused, for what claim have I on you? But oh! if you could! if you *could* do it, Ada, I should be the most grateful and affectionate of stepsons to the noble woman who stepped between me and wretchedness."

Miss Digby regarded the speaker with a faint smile in which contempt and pain were blended. She coldly said:

"You shrink from suffering the penalty of your own imprudence, Walter, and yet you are willing to accept a victim in your place. Such are my feelings toward your father, that I would sooner lay my head upon the block than pillow it upon his breast. Judge then if I can accept the position of your mother-in-law. You must fight your own battle now, and decide your own fate, for I have done all that lay in my power, and have gained nothing."

Thorne paced the floor several moments, and then turning toward her, abruptly said :

"You could have saved me, and you would not. You prefer this poor and common-place life to the brilliant one my father can give you. Are you as mad, Ada, as I was when I risked his displeasure by taking a wife I might have known he would refuse to receive? Oh, cousin, if you could, if you only would reconsider your rejection! It is not too late, for my father would grasp your hand over the widest gulf, if it were only extended to him. He thinks you the only woman in the world worthy to share his success."

And I think him so harsh and cruel a man, that nothing could induce me to trust myself in his power. Go, Walter; your words prove to me that you will sacrifice the wife that trusted you, sooner than relinquish fortune. She will live, I now feel assured, so your father may get the divorce as soon as he or you may desire. Make your own fate, but do not break the heart of poor Agnes by avenging on her your own lack of faith to another."

After a painful pause, Thorne slowly said :

"I *will* go, for nothing else is left me now. But—but—may I not look once more upon her I may never see again?"

"No, Walter; it could do no good to you, and might result in harm to Claire. You have elected to give her up, and you shall see her no more with my consent."

He moved forward as if he would enter the next room in spite of this prohibition; but apprehensive of some violence on his part which might result fatally to the sick girl, Miss Digby placed herself in front of the door and warningly said :

"Leave this house without noise, Walter, or you may have a human life to answer for. By this time my patient is beginning to arouse from the lethargy in which she has so long lain, and the sight of you would be fatal to her. Do not force me to regret having endeavored to aid you. Claire is nothing to you now, and you should be man enough to abide by your own decision and accept the alternative you have chosen, without this weak clinging to the being you have made up your mind to desert."

"You are merciless, Ada!"

"No—I am only just. Defy your father, or obey him. Both courses are open to you; decide quickly, for it is time for me to return to my charge. You shall enter this room only as her protector through every chance and change in life, or you shall not again approach her."

Thorne sank down upon a chair, seeming utterly unnerved; after a few moments of gloomy thought he arose and said :

"You are right. No good can come of another sight of that pale creature in there. I will leave her to such a peace as she can find, but I shall never forget her. I go hence at my father's bidding, to woo another to my heart, but she will find it ice to her. I shall sell myself into bondage, but it will be a fitting fate for such as I am. Good-bye, Ada. Take care of my poor deserted darling, and don't let her hate me too deeply. Above all, make her accept the provision my father has promised."

He seized his hat and rushed from the house, and Miss Digby saw no more of him for months. She turned, and sighing heavily, went into the darkened



room in which Claire lay. A faint voice spoke from the bed:

"Who is that—where am I?"

"You are with those who will take the best care of you, my poor child," was the gentle response. "You have been very ill, and you must not try to think at present. Here are some drops which you must take now."

Claire was too weak to object, and after swallowing the potion, she lay back on her pillows in that dreamy state which is neither life nor death. From that hour the vital powers slowly reacted, but her nurse kept her under the influence of narcotics for many days afterward, dreading the return of perfect consciousness till the weakened physical powers had regained strength to struggle with the wretched memories that must arise as soon as she was permitted to do without them.

The result proved that without such precautions all her efforts to save this saddened life would have been vain, for when Claire at last recalled what had preceded her illness, she yielded to such a torrent of despairing anguish that, under less careful treatment, she must have died.

As it was, she relapsed, and it was late in the winter before she was strong enough to move about the house or attempt to occupy her feeble hands with any employment.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## CLAIRE'S RESOLUTION.

LONG before Claire passed through the first stage of her convalescence, the divorce asked by Colonel Thorne had been granted. There was no voice raised to state the wrong that had been done to the helpless wife of his son. It was sufficient for the packed jury that the heir of a man in high position, and great wealth had been entrapped into a misalliance with an unknown and friendless girl; and the impression was furthermore given them that Walter Thorne was intoxicated with something less ethereal than love, when the informal ceremony of marriage was performed.

Col. Thorne explicitly stated that he considered the union illegal, but to free his son from even the shadow of a claim on the part of the young woman in question, he had thought it best to seek a dissolution of the tie that bound him to her. Wingate, struck with remorse for the part he had acted, made a feeble effort to move Col. Thorne from his purpose, but he was speedily silenced by a threat from him to prosecute him for the letter he had forged in his name—a fact which Walter had been indiscreet enough to allow to be drawn from him by the cross-questioning of the astute old lawyer.

From that moment, Col. Thorne had Wingate in his power, and the only friend who might have stood up in Claire's defence, as an atonement for his culpable conduct, was compelled to consult his own safety by allowing the affair to take its course.

The result was communicated to Miss Digby by a note from Col. Thorne containing the following lines:

“ THORNHILL, November 27th, 18—.

“ MY DEAR ADA :—Why did I put *my* at the beginning of my address, I wonder—it is the force of habit, I suppose, for I *will* consider you as in some sort belonging to me, though you so persistently refuse to ratify my claims, you most obstinate and self-dependent of women.

“ I wish you were less so, but then you would not be the Ada I admire and respect so highly. You are as much superior to the rest of your giddy sex, as I am to the common herd of men—we are kindred spirits, though you will not see it. It is much the worse for both of us.

“ I wonder it never occurred to you that a part of your mission on earth is to soften and humanise me. If I had you ever at my side I should be a better man, and I scarcely think that my influence on you would make you a worse woman.

“ But I did not take up my pen to write another offer of marriage to you—in fact it was to announce to you the dissolution of the one my son has so foolishly contracted. The decree has been gained with very little difficulty, and Walter is free to obey my command to give his hand to Agnes Willard, as soon as she is ready to bestow it upon him. I have already written to him to have the affair over if possible before the death of her father.

“ Your young protégée must bear the fate she has brought on herself with such equanimity as she can command. I have only performed the duty of a care-

ful father toward my boy, and her fate may be a warning to other ambitious young damsels who clandestinely attempt to win a position to which they are not entitled to aspire.

“ If Miss Lapierre is wise she will accept the annuity I am ready to settle on her, and retire to the obscurity of the secluded valley in which Walter was so unlucky as to find her. She has friends there, I believe, and they may be willing to receive her again, if she does not return to them empty-handed.

“ After all, lack of money is the greatest evil in life, and I am ready to provide for the discarded one as much of that as one reared as she has been is likely to need. Of course she will accept my bounty when she knows that she is likely to gain nothing by refusing it. You will know how to set the case clearly before her, and to make her understand that any further appeal to love or law will be useless.

“ I have the honor to be your most devoted servant to command,

“ W. THORNE.”

When Miss Digby received this note, she was with Claire, who had been permitted to sit up for that day for the first time. A bright fire burned in the grate; and in front of it, in a large cushioned chair, reclined the shadow of the bright creature who had won the fickle love of Walter Thorne.

“ Wasted, pallid, and weary-looking, her large bright eyes, seemed to rest on vacancy, and she sat still and nerveless, except that the restless motions of her thin fingers displayed the disquiet within. It was painful to look on that young face and read in it the fierce

struggle through which Claire had passed—to behold there the sad record of a life blighted in its opening prime.

She wrestled fiercely against the tender memories of those halcyon weeks that she had believed only a prelude to the life of love and splendor which was opening before her. Claire's love for her deceiver had died a violent death, but her resentment against him only deepened and intensified with every passing hour; and to find the means of striking him in his turn was now the one thought that had power to keep alive the flame of life which had long burned so feebly.

When Barbara, the middle-aged servant, came in with Col. Thorne's note, Claire glanced wistfully at it, and asked:

"Are there no letters for me? Have none arrived during my illness? I have not surely been permitted to lie here so long without a single inquiry being made for me by—by *some one*."

Miss Digby looked kindly at her, and after a brief hesitation, said:

"There is a letter for you, my dear, but I have not thought you strong enough to bear any emotion. That is why I have withheld it so long. It came soon after you were taken ill."

A bright gleam of color flashed into the wasted cheeks, and Claire eagerly exclaimed:

"Oh, give it to me at once, if you please. I am so much better now that I feel strong enough to bear anything but the wretched suspense that is devouring my poor heart."

"My child, it is not from *him*," said her friend gently. "It is from your old home."

"So much the better—it is from mamma that I am most anxious to hear. The one who has brought me to this pass can have nothing to say to me to which I would listen till I find the means to offer to his lips as bitter a cup as the one he has forced me to drain to the dregs. Dear friend, bring me my letter, and I will read it while you do the same with yours."

Miss Digby arose and took from the bureau drawer the letter written by Mrs. Courtney so many weeks before. Claire looked at the address, shivered, and then broke the seal. She read its contents without shedding a single tear, though she became even paler than before when she learned from it that Father Jerome was dead. She put her hand to her brow, and sat many moments trying to think what the result to herself would be; when she looked up again, she saw that Miss Digby was attentively and compassionately regarding her.

Claire tried to speak with steadiness:

"This is from mamma; she is kinder to me than I deserve; but she communicates to me a piece of news which may have an evil influence on my fate. The priest who united Walter and myself is dead, and there is now no proof of our marriage save the statement made by Father Jerome to Mrs. Courtney, that he performed the ceremony on the night he was struck with his last illness. I know nothing of law, but will not that suffice to prove that I am the lawfully wedded wife of Walter Thorne?"

"Do you wish the tie to be irrevocable, Claire?" asked Miss Digby. "Would you, after all that has passed, consent to be acknowledged as Walter's wife?"

"Yes—to be acknowledged, but not to be claimed

by him. I am not ready to win him back yet, though I mean to do so in my own good time. All I ask now, is to prove to the world that my honor is untainted—that I am really his wife.”

“Then you will not be wounded by the information this note brings me. Your position as a wife has not been denied. It was thought enough of to be repudiated, for Mr. Thorne has obtained a divorce.”

The eyes of the listener flashed with something of their old fire, and she cried out, in excited tones:

“Divorced! By what authority? No secular tribunal has power to set aside a marriage that has received the sanction of the church. Walter became a Catholic before he married me; and he is as much bound to me as I am to him, in spite of the decree that may have been given against my claims on him. I *know* it is so, Miss Digby.”

“On you, Claire, those vows may be binding; but not on a man who has evidently entered your church only to enable himself to consummate his treachery to you,” was the reluctant reply.

Claire half arose from her chair, and then sank down again helpless, and struggling for breath. In hollow tones, she presently asked:

“Would he—would Walter dare, with those fetters clinging to him, to act as though they do not exist? I cannot believe it of him, badly as he has treated me.”

“My dear child, do not forget that the sacrifice poor Walter has made, at the command of his imperious father, would be valueless to him unless he obeys the will of Col. Thorne to its utmost limit. He gave you up to save his inheritance; but the sacrifice will be incomplete and useless to him, unless he gives his

hand to the girl to whom he was betrothed before he saw you.”

“And he will *marry* her! Oh, Heavens! that is impossible? It will not be lawful for him to claim another wife while I live. She should know this. What is her name?—where is she to be found?—for I must appeal to her to save herself from such a fate.”

“My dear Claire, pray compose yourself, and listen to me. I shall not tell you the name of this young lady, because it is now too late to interpose, and it is doubtful whether she would listen to you, or take the same view of the case that you do. She has for years, been passionately in love with Walter Thorne, and she would not listen to the voice of an angel if it accused him of wrong. She is far away, and the knowledge of what has lately happened here, has been carefully kept from her. It is even possible that she may already have become Mr. Thorne's wife.”

“And I—I—what am I?—betrayed, deserted, thrown as a worthless weed upon the tide of life, to drift to destruction, for all he cares. Yet he seemed to love me—aye, to worship the very ground I walked on. Oh! Miss Digby, it is well for you that you have not trusted your life to the treacherous hands of any man. Henceforth I live but for one object. Feeble girl that I am, I will yet seek and find the means of returning to him the anguish and bitterness which have broken my life and buried beneath the wreck every merciful or tender feeling. I shall find my revenge yet, be sure of that.”

Claire seemed wild with excitement, and her friend was both shocked and alarmed at her words and appearance. She bitterly regretted her own imprudence.

in speaking so freely to her in her weak condition; but she had thought it best for the unhappy girl to be aroused from the apathy into which she was falling, by the knowledge of the truth, however bitter it might be.

She took the thin hands of the invalid in her own and solemnly said:

“‘Vengeance is mine,’ saith the great ruler of fate. Remember those awful words, Claire, and do not seek to take its burden upon yourself. You are but a child in years; you are freed from the false man who gave you up sooner than lose the wealth he so highly prizes. Let him go upon his way, and seek not to cross his path again. A useful and contented future may be yours, even if you may not consider yourself at liberty to choose another as the companion of your life.”

She shuddered, and hastily said:

“I could not do that, even if I believed it no sin. No—Walter Thorne is mine and I am his; and the day shall come in which he shall gladly take me back. I will yet enter that house, from which I was so ignominiously expelled; and, as its mistress, become the spirit of evil to him who will then be its master. You shall see—you shall see, if you live so long.”

Miss Digby gravely said:

“You are too much excited now to understand the meaning of your wild words, Claire. Such a thing as you hint at is impossible, you will find too many obstacles in the way of its accomplishment. You must turn yourself into a demon to carry out your evil threats.”

“I am only what that false man has made me,” she panted. “I can wait, for my hour will surely come.

I feel that it will; and then, woe to him who has so ruthlessly wronged me.”

She sank back half fainting, and Miss Digby hastened to offer her a composing draught, which, with some difficulty, she was induced to accept. Claire lay back in her chair, and after a long silence, said:

“What is to become of me if mamma refuses to forgive me, and receive me again? I was mad just now, Miss Digby; pray forgive my hot words and try to forget them. I have been a great trouble to you, and I cannot see how I am ever to repay you, or rid you of the burden you have so kindly assumed. I must begin to think of some plan of life for myself, if Mrs. Courtney should cast me off as my husband has done. I am her god-child and she may consider it her duty to protect me, but I have really no claim upon her after eloping from her roof as I did. She will be quite justified in refusing to receive me beneath it again.”

Miss Digby took her hand, and tenderly caressing it, said:

“You are quite welcome to remain with me as long as you choose, my dear. You are no burden to me, I assure you, and I would cheerfully do more for you than I have been called on to do. I am alone in the world, with sufficient fortune to render me perfectly independent, and it is my chief pleasure to assist the unfortunate. You will not be left unprovided for, and what is offered you by those who have so badly treated you, is justly yours. I have been anxious to tell you that Walter was not so base as to leave you without a sufficient support. Col. Thorne will settle on you an annuity, which will enable you to live.”

The white lips of Claire unclosed to ask, with passionate emphasis:

"Do they think that I will be trodden in the dust, and then accept gold from *them* as a panacea for the heart they have broken—for the pride they have so bitterly humiliated? No; if mamma refuses to take me back, I will labor for my bread sooner than degrade myself by accepting the alms they offer."

"But, Claire, this provision is legally yours. The law does not grant a divorce, without setting aside an allowance for the repudiated wife."

"It may be so, but I would sooner die of want than accept the means of living from them. I have one other resource that I had almost forgotten. I have a half-brother in France, who, I believe is rich. My father thought that Armand treated him badly, but, at the last, he was not unwilling that I should make an appeal to him if I found it necessary. Mrs. Courtney goes to Europe in the spring, and she will hardly refuse to let me be the companion of her voyage. I will throw myself on my brother's compassion, and afford him the chance to atone to me for the neglect with which he treated poor papa."

"But suppose M. Lapierre should refuse to receive you? An ungrateful son is not apt to make an affectionate brother."

"That may be; but I have the impression that the fault of the estrangement was not entirely with Armand. I will afford him the opportunity to justify himself at all events. I think I should like to live in France for the next five years. I could acquire accomplishments, and gain that grace, and distinction of manner which is even more attractive than beauty."

"And when that is attained, Claire, what is to follow?" asked Miss Digby, gravely.

A flash of bitter sarcasm came over her face, as she replied:

"Those who wish to be good, are told to put on the whole armor of righteousness. *My* armor is to be won, and won for a different purpose. I intend to become bewitching, entrancing, bewildering—everything that is irresistible, and *then*——"

A brilliant flame glowed on her cheeks, her eyes blazed with the fierce resentment that burned within her soul, but she suddenly sank back, and burst in tears.

"And then, Claire," repeated Miss Digby, steadily—"What then?"

"Dust and ashes—degradation and desolation," she faintly murmured. "I dreamed of the hour in which I should return and win back the recreant heart that has broken mine; but he will give me a rival, and unless death kindly steps in and removes the new wife he has taken to his false heart, I should even then have no chances of success."

"My dear child, you must lay aside such sinful fancies, or they will blight all that is sweet, and noble in your nature. Go to France if you wish it, seek a re-union with the brother who is your natural protector; acquire accomplishments, and grace, but dedicate them to a better purpose than the one you spoke of just now. Walter has proved to you that he is not worthy to be regained; leave him out of your future plans altogether and try to forget him. In doing so, lies your only chance of happiness."

"Perhaps so," replied Claire, listlessly. Then suddenly raising her dark eyes to the face of her companion, she imploringly asked:

"Will you tell me one thing, Miss Digby? Did



Walter leave me without seeking to see me again? Was he so hard of heart that he never once came near me while I lay so ill? If he had ever really loved me—if I had been more to him than a mere toy, to be cast aside when he ceased to care for it—he must have done so; yet I have no recollection of seeing him near me while I had the power to recognize him.”

Miss Digby had heretofore believed it best to withhold from Claire the knowledge of that last visit, and what resulted from it; as no good, she thought, could come from letting her know how bitter the struggle between love and self-love, had been in the heart of her faithless husband. But now a straight-forward question was asked, and she could not refuse to reply. She reluctantly replied:

“When all was settled between himself and his father Walter come hither to bid you a last adieu. You were in that long sleep in which you passed through the crisis of your fever, and I permitted him to enter your room, and take a last look at your face.”

Claire listened breathlessly, and rapidly asked:

“Was—was he much moved when he saw the condition to which his treachery had reduced me?”

Miss Digby coldly replied:

“Walter is a man who always acts from impulse, as you well know. Had you been in a condition to recognize him, I do not know what the result might have been, for he was very remorseful. But, Claire, even then, his penitence did not render him unmindful of his own interests. He had the choice open to him to surrender his birthright, and cleave to you, but he preferred obeying his father’s commands, though in doing so he knew that he was setting the seal to the

wretchedness of three persons. He went away to claim a new wife, whom he will never try to make happy.”

Claire broke in, in an excited manner:

“If you believe that, it is your duty to warn her of what is before her. I entreat that you will tell me the name of this young lady. She should be informed of his bad faith to herself, as well as his repudiation of me. It is simple justice to her not to permit her to rush into a union with him, since you believe he will not render her happy.”

The friend shook her head, and decisively replied:

“The warning would produce no result. The young lady I refer to is so deeply infatuated with Walter Thorne that she would turn a deaf ear to all that could be urged against him. Even if she should become aware of what has taken place here, she would listen to his explanations, and be won by his eloquent tongue to forgive his infidelity, and act as if she had forgotten it.”

Claire sighed wearily, and after a pause said:

“We will not talk any more on this subject now, if you please, Miss Digby. I must not excite myself, and retard my recovery, for I must get well as soon as possible, and go back to mamma. I shall answer her letter in person, and appeal to her for the protection a letter might fail to gain for me. She is the only person in this country from whom I am willing to gain assistance, though I can never be grateful enough for the kindness you lavished on me when I so dreadfully needed it.”

“Speak no more of that, Claire; I wish to claim affection from you, not gratitude alone. My life is very solitary, and if you could be contented to give up

your early friends, and remain with me as the child of my adoption, I should be very glad. I could afford you the opportunity of acquiring the accomplishments you desire; nay, I could assist you myself, for my education has been very thorough, and I am a fair musician. You seem to me a waif sent expressly to my arms, that I may rescue you from the rough paths of life, show you the safe and narrow one on which you should walk, and teach you resignation to the will of Providence."

Tears sprang into the eyes of Claire as she listened to these kind words. For one moment she was tempted to throw herself in Miss Digby's arms, and thankfully receive the sheltered home she offered her. She bowed her head and wept bitterly, but she presently faltered:

"My heart is full of love and thanks, but I can not, I cannot accept your kindness. I must go; I could never raise my head among these people to whom my painful story is known. I must work out my own fate. I see it dimly shadowed before me, too dark and lurid to be cast with yours. I have no vocation for goodness now, and I should only weary your patience, and wear out your forbearance. If I remained here I could not even try to forget the past; but in a strange land, with so much around me that will be new and interesting, I may, in time, lift from my heart the burden that has so sorely crushed it."

"I regret that you should feel thus, my child; and above all, it pains me to hear you say that you have no vocation for goodness. My dear Claire, no happiness is to be found without it, especially by one of our sex. Men may drown their sense of guilt in dissipation, and

still retain a foothold in society; but to us, that brings only unmitigated degradation. Keep your heart and life pure, and all else will be well with you. Ah! if I could only watch over you, and guard you from the evil that I see is gaining ground within you, I should feel far happier than to see you go out into the world, taking with you the sense of wrong that may yet bring forth such bitter fruit. You have great capacity for good or evil in your nature, Claire, and the next few years of your life will decide which shall gain the mastery. Remain with me and cultivate the better portion of your character; that is my advice, though I confess it is dictated by the selfish wish to claim you as my companion. You interest me deeply, and for my own sake, as well as yours, I would gladly detain you."

For a brief space the unhappy girl wavered in her decision, but the impossibility of living in the same town with Walter Thorne loomed before her, and she tearfully replied:

"I have no words to thank you, but I must go. I will never forget what you have this day said to me, and I promise you some time to come back. I will try and not let the evil promptings of my nature destroy all that is good within me, but just now I am afraid they are in the ascendant. Time may blunt my resentment, but the grace of God can alone turn my heart from the purpose that has grown stronger day by day. I will not tell you what that is now, lest you should condemn it as wrong and impracticable. But I shall accomplish it, something assures me that I shall. I am afraid I am so wicked that I would turn away from that which is pure and good if I thought it would

unfit me for what lies before me. Your kindness is appreciated, but fate is strong, and no human being can evade that which is written on its changeless record."

"Child, this is the worst form of fatalism—it might be made a shield for any crime. If you listen to its promptings it may lead you into an abyss of wrong and wretchedness from which there will be no escape."

"God help me then, for I have no will to resist the power that drives me on. My destiny is fixed, and I cannot escape it if I would. There!—don't look so severely at me, my dear friend. If my tempestuous nature could tame itself down to the quiet life you so delight in, I would make the effort to live here; but I should only become a torment to you, and something more than that to some of your neighbors. Walter will bring his new wife hither, and I leave you to judge if I could remain where I could see and hear from them, without losing my reason. I sometimes think it is tottering even now, and a change from the monotony of my present life is all that can save it. Make me well and strong as soon as possible, and let me go back to my own valley to find there the friend who will take me far away from this land and all the odious memories connected with it."

"Poor child! Is it indeed thus with you? Since such are your feelings, I will no longer urge you to remain with me; but, Claire, remember that my house shall always be open to you; my heart ready to welcome you whenever you wish to return. You will write to Mrs. Courtney to relieve her uneasiness, for it is a long time since that letter came, and she must think it strange that she has not before heard from you."

"What am I to write? Can I tell her that I am a rejected, heart-broken creature, indebted to an angel for shelter and care? Could I calmly sit down and write the history of what has befallen me? Oh, Heavens! it would madden me at once. I, who felt myself the queen of joy and happiness, in being crowned with Walter's love, have been suddenly cast down from the height of bliss to the darkness of despair! Can you expect me to tell mamma that? No—no—I can never—never do it!"

"Then permit me to write a few lines to your friend, informing her as briefly as possible of what has happened to you, and assuring her of your well-being under my care."

"It will be useless, for I must soon set out for the valley myself. I have money enough to take me back to my old home, and for my father's sake, mamma will not refuse to do all that I shall ask of her. I will accept nothing from Col. Thorne. He shall not buy from me the right to such retribution as I intend to compass. Tell him that I spurn his gold as contemptuously as he spurned me, when I went to his house, believing I should be gladly welcome as its mistress. Ah! such dreams of grandeur as I had!—such visions of love and pride! Was he ever kind to anything, Miss Digby? He looked to me like a man of iron, with no tenderness—no sweetness in his nature."

"I estimate Col. Thorne pretty much as you do. The men of his race are all unrelenting and harsh in temper. They trample on all that impedes their progress, and feel little remorse for having done so. Walter proved his descent by his treatment of yourself, though he has in him the vacillating fickleness of his

mother, which takes from him the firmness of purpose that is his father's distinguishing trait. He knew that he could not be happy in poverty, but he will find it equally impossible to be contented in the luxurious lot he has chosen, in preference to an humble life with one who loved and trusted him as you did."

"I am glad you think that. I would not have him contented without me. I would have him remember me in every hour of his future life; wish him to regret the past till all joy in the present is blotted out. I am revengeful, you will say, but I think that I am only human."

"Yes, my dear, and you prove the truth of the statement that the human heart is 'prone to evil, and desperately wicked.' For your own sake, Claire, I wish you to cast such things aside; they will only sully the purity of your own soul. You are young enough to outlive even such a blow as you have received, and in time, recognize the hand of God in its chastening."

Claire shook her head and drearily replied:

"That is impossible. So long as a drop of blood flows through my heart, it will bear with its course an indignant protest against the fate that has been awarded me. God himself has formed me thus, and I cannot be untrue to my nature."

In vain did her friend endeavor to combat such a belief. She found a strong-willed and unreasoning creature, where she had hoped to find a plastic and yielding one, and she finally thought it best for Claire to follow the bent of her own inclinations.

The result of that agitating conversation was a relapse, and Claire lingered through the long and dreary

winter, too inert to make an effort to regain her spirits—too hopeless to care whether she lived or died.

Nothing was heard from Walter Thorne, and the weeks rolled by till Spring began to open. With its first warm breath health began to return to the stricken Claire, for now she had an object to attain. She must regain her strength in time to reach the valley before Mrs. Courtney's departure, and with this incentive she began to rally from her deep depression and regain her wasted energies.

She steadily refused to see any of the visitors that came to the cottage, though more than one felt a warm interest in her fate. They were, however, enemies of Col. Thorne, and would have espoused the cause of any one he had badly treated.

His political enemies did not fail to make capital out of his domestic trouble, and Claire would have been still more deeply humiliated if she had known the use that was made of her name in the exciting canvass before the election of the new Governor. But Miss Digby carefully kept the papers from her sight, and she was spared this crowning shame.

The vituperations lavished on the popular candidate had little effect, however, for Colonel Thorne was elected by an overwhelming majority, and in the elation of success he again wrote to Ada Digby, offering to share his new state with her. The answer was the same unvarying refusal, and she wondered when her persevering wooer would cease to enact this farce.

Many times did Claire speak of the necessity of setting out on her journey, but her kind friend always found some unanswerable reason for detaining her longer, until she at last grew restive and determined to go without Miss Digby's knowledge.

Claire quietly collected the few things she wished to take with her, for the trunks containing Walter Thorne's lavish presents, which had been sent to the cottage, she resolved to leave behind her.

One night in April she disappeared, leaving the following note for Miss Digby :

"DEAR AND KIND FRIEND:—You would not let me go if I had warned you of my intention, but I must leave in time to see Mrs. Courtney before she embarks for Europe. I have set my heart on going with her, and I think she will not refuse to take me.

"Do not think me ungrateful, for I am not so. I shall never forget your kindness to the forlorn stranger thrown upon your protection, and I will write constantly and let you know what happens to me.

"I hope some day to see you again, but if I do I shall bring with me from my foreign exile the power to right my wrongs. If that is denied me I shall never seek my native shore after once leaving it.

"Beloved friend, adieu ! think kindly of me—pray for me, for I can seldom pray for myself.

"Your affectionate protégée,

"CLAIRE LAPIERRE THORNE."

Miss Digby was much annoyed and distressed at this unlooked for escapade, and she reluctantly came to the conclusion that any attempt on her part to reclaim Claire would be useless. The path she marked out for herself she would walk on, lead her whither it might. Her friend knew that the runaway could easily find her way back to the valley, as she had the means of defraying her expenses ; and in this country, even so

young a girl could travel with perfect safety ; so she came to the conclusion to allow Claire to pursue her journey without molestation.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DEATH-BED BRIDAL.

WALTER THORNE decided that no resource was left him but to obey his father's commands. After the scene with Miss Digby which has been described, he returned to the spot on which he had left his horse, inwardly raging at her firmness and cursing the fate that drove him from the girl of his choice, to ask another woman to assume the place from which she had been so ignominiously thrust.

It seemed like a dream to him that, in the space of two short months, he should have been married, parted irrevocably from his wife, and sent upon his way to assume the matrimonial yoke a second time. He had every reason to believe that the divorce which had been applied for would be granted without delay, and he had no hope that his father would consent to defer his second nuptials.

"I was a fool," he thought, "to imagine that I could influence my father to act like other men. He cares for nothing so much as his own will, and he would crush me as soon as any other, if I set myself in opposition to it. I feel that I am a miserable caitiff, unworthy of trust, yet I am about to consummate another deadly wrong, by claiming the girl who is the

cause of all my wretchedness. But for *her* I should have been permitted to choose my own wife as other men do ; but she, with her infernal sharpness, saw that to win my father over was the true road to success in securing me. And I, like the dollard I am, permitted my fate to be settled for me, never dreaming that I had so inconvenient a thing as a heart about me. Oh, my poor darling, it bleeds—it bleeds, though you will never believe it nor forgive me for giving you up to save myself from the bitter pangs of want and wretchedness. If I could have earned even a competence, I believe—I hope I should have acted differently. But, God knows, I am very weak and wavering—very unwilling to give up the easy, idle life I love, even for your dear sake. You had your visions of splendor too, and perhaps you would not have been better contented in obscurity than I should. Heigho ! perhaps it is better, after all, that we should part. But Agnes must not be too exacting, or I shall be no better husband than my father was before me.”

Thus musing he mounted and rode swiftly away, intending to take the stage for Philadelphia at the next town on the route—for it was before the day of railroads.

The keen air of the autumn night allayed the fever in his blood, the image of the pale creature he had so lately seen, almost at the gates of death, faded gradually from his mind, and he occupied his thoughts with her he was on his way to seek.

Had any busy-body written to Agnes of the events of the last few weeks, thus making it necessary to have a scene with her—perhaps to be refused after all ? But that view of the case did not afford him much an-

noyance ; if Miss Willard asserted the dignity of her sex and withdrew from the engagement, who knew what the result might be ? At any rate, he could remain free from any other tie, and the day might come in which he could renew the union so violently broken.

His father was mortal, and his repudiated wife was too rigid a Catholic to consider herself freed from the vows she had taken ; for, with her belief, death alone could sever the ties that united them. If Col. Thorne should die, leaving him master of his fortune, the wrong he had been forced to commit might be atoned for and Claire induced to forgive him.

Thus dreaming, Walter Thorne reached the small town in which he had hired his horse, and found that he had arrived but a few moments in advance of the stage-coach. The horn soon sounded through the silent streets, and he hurried out to secure his place, mindful of his father's last threat and most anxious to conciliate him by prompt obedience to his command to reach his destination as soon as might be.

With every mile that separated him from Claire, the memory of her pallid face—of her great wrong—grew less oppressive ; and with his usual lightness of nature, Thorne thought that all was for the best—that he had done well to grasp the brilliant realities of life sooner than cling to her who must have proved a millstone around his neck, sinking him down—down to depths of poverty which he shuddered even to contemplate.

The journey was a long and rather tedious one at that season of the year, but his spirits revived with every mile that lengthened between himself and the unfortunate object of his summer pursuit.



On the second night of traveling, he had settled himself comfortably for a good nap, and was almost in the arms of Morpheus, when there was a crash—a confused medley of outcries; and he found himself lying in the wreck of the shattered vehicle, with the horses plunging violently within a few feet of his head. Fortunately for him, the driver succeeded in cutting the traces before his brains were dashed out, and he was extricated from the ruin with a sprained ankle and a bruised arm.

The only other passenger beside himself escaped injury, and he assisted the driver to remove Thorne to a farm-house which was luckily in sight. He was hospitably received and everything done for him that was possible, but he was laid up there a month before he could stand on his foot or venture to use his limb again.

Thorne wrote to his father and to Agnes, stating the accident that had befallen him; and from both of them he heard before leaving the place of his detention. Col. Thorne informed him that he was again a free man, and urged him to set out for Philadelphia as soon as possible, as Mr. Willard was sinking from day to day; and if his son wished to regain his favor, he would have the marriage between himself and Agnes celebrated before her father's death.

Thorne had gradually brought himself to believe the late episode in his life had ended in the best manner for all concerned, and by this time he was quite ready to obey the mandate of his imperious father. With calm thought had come the conviction that Agnes Willard would hold him to his troth, in spite of all that had happened since they last parted. He had

loathed the thought of meeting her with words of tenderness upon his lips; but with the inconsistency of his nature, as he drew near her, the old influence she held over him began to revive, and he looked forward to their re-union almost with pleasure.

His journey from the place of the accident to Philadelphia was more fortunate, and by the time he was set down in the Quaker city, Thorne was eager to see Agnes and ascertain from her manner if mischief had been made between them.

He had never been in love with Miss Willard, but her stronger nature had established over him a power that had always moulded him to her will, and, in spite of himself, Thorne felt its influence, even before they again met face to face.

As he arranged his toilette for his first call on Mr. Willard and his daughter, Thorne ruefully surveyed himself in the mirror, and muttered:

“Agnes will marry me in spite of myself. Even if she has heard all about me and my doings, she'll keep dark till after the noose is tied, and then—well—then she may look out for breakers, for my temper isn't proof against everything. If I am weak I can be dangerous.”

With such feelings in his heart, Thorne tried to put on a bright and smiling expression, and he went on his way to the quiet street in which Mr. Willard had found a boarding-house to suit him. He found the number, rang at the door, and sent up his card.

Thorne was ushered into a small reception room, comfortably furnished, with a bright fire in the grate, and he sat several moments absorbed in reverie before it. He was wondering how Agnes would look; what

she would say when they met, and trying to get up some show of interest in the approaching interview; but all his thoughts were suddenly put to flight by the sound of a strange voice at his elbow.

"Mr. Thorne, I believe. I am glad that you have arrived at this crisis, sir, for Mr. Willard is almost in *articulo mortis*. I have been affording him the consolations of religion, but his anxiety for your arrival was so absorbing, that I fear he was not so much benefitted by my ministrations as a man in his condition should be. But you are here now, and his mind can be set at rest on the score of his daughter's future."

Thorne started up at the commencement of this address, and saw before him a tall, pale man, of grave and stately presence, whom he should at once have identified as a clergyman, even without the clue to his profession afforded by his words.

"Is Mr. Willard so bad as that? I am grieved to hear it, for I hoped he was improving."

"There has been little hope from the first; and for the last few days he has rapidly sunk. I was sent for this morning, and when the priest is summoned to the bedside of a worldly man, you know there is not much hope of life left to him."

Thorne bowed, and briefly asked:

"Can I see him, sir?"

"It was to invite you to his room, and to prepare you to comply with his last wishes, that I came hither. I understand from Mr. Willard that you have been long betrothed to his daughter, and it is his most earnest desire to see you united to her before he passes away from earth and all its cares. Every arrangement has been made in anticipation of your arrival, as

your father wrote that you would be in this city to-day."

The suddenness of the request was a severe blow to Thorne. He had unconsciously hoped that something might interpose to release him from the necessity of making Agnes Willard his wife; but in this crisis of affairs he saw no means of escape. He felt the net narrowing around him, and soon he would be bound beyond the possibility of escape. He confusedly said:

"It is quite true that I have long been betrothed to Miss Willard, but—but she may have some objections to so precipitate a marriage. I would not for the world be the cause of making her unhappy in any way, and—and, just at this time, with her father so near death, she may shrink from fulfilling the compact. To tell the truth, I had rather be married myself under more cheerful circumstances."

The reverend gentleman evidently regarded him with extreme surprise. He coldly said:

"Miss Willard offered no objection to an immediate marriage. On the contrary, she has expressed her willingness to relieve her father's mind of all uneasiness on her account, by accepting you as her legal protector before his decease. I think, Mr. Thorne, that nothing remains to you but to accede to the wish of both father and daughter."

With a sort of reckless despair, Walter replied:

"I am quite ready; let it be as they wish. But—but should there not be a license?—or can we dispense with that formality?"

"That has already been obtained, in anticipation of your arrival. The most important thing now is, to set the mind of the dying man at rest, and that can only

be done by making his daughter your wife. The expediency of your marriage will scarcely be disputed by any one, I presume, as all parties have been long agreed concerning it."

"No—there will be no one to set aside *this* marriage," said Thorne, with intense bitterness; but seeing that the clergyman looked surprised at the emphasis, he hastened to add:

"I am quite ready, sir. Pray lead the way to Mr. Willard's room."

Feeling more like a criminal going to execution, than a bridegroom about to meet his betrothed, Walter Thorne ascended the flight of steps that led to the upper chambers, and drew near the apartment of the dying man. The door was softly opened, and he looked on the scene within with a stony calmness, which gave him the power to go through with what was before him without too glaringly betraying the reluctance with which he played the part required of him.

Mr. Willard, only the ghastly spectre of his former self, was supported in a sitting position by a number of pillows; and his daughter, wrapped in a crimson shawl, knelt on a cushion beside his bed, holding in her clasp the wasted hands that were already chilling in death.

The face of Agnes was worn and pale, but her hair was carefully arranged, and her toilette showed that she had not forgotten that before the day was over, her betrothed would arrive. She raised her head as he entered the room, and gave him a single glance, and his inconstant heart smote him as he saw the love-light flash into the eyes from which, an instant before, tears were raining.

"Oh, Walter, you are here at last!" she impulsively exclaimed. "I have looked and wearied for your presence—so long—so long."

Thorne felt the reproach; at that moment he pitied her, and he would have spoken some words of affectionate interest, but Mr. Willard, in a voice so hollow that it sounded as if issuing from a vault, said:

"You are in time, Mr. Thorne. We have long watched and waited for your arrival; but although you have come at the eleventh hour, you are not too late to give me, before I die, the certainty that my child will not be left alone in the world. You are ready to give your hand to Agnes, I do not doubt, and she has already assured me that she will afford me this last consolation before I leave her forever."

The lips of the young man refused to unclose for a moment, but the effort he made to speak was at last successful. "I am quite ready, Mr. Willard; though I regret that our union must take place under such afflicting circumstances. I had no idea that I should find you thus, or I should have made an effort to get here before this time."

"My last earthly journey is almost finished, my dear son, but I hope to see you and Agnes start on a long and happy one before the curtain falls on myself. Doctor, will you ask Mrs. Ralston to step in this room for a few moments? She, with yourself, will be sufficient to witness what is about to take place here."

A small man, in black, came from behind a window curtain, which had hitherto shrouded him from observation, and crossing the floor, opened a door which gave into an adjoining apartment.

Agnes arose from her kneeling position, looked ear-

nestly upon the agitated face of Thorne, and extended her hand as she whispered :

"Do not be alarmed, Walter. It will soon be over, and we must think more of papa than of ourselves just now."

Thus brought back to the reality of the part he was required to play, Thorne took the offered hand, lightly pressed it, and replied in the same subdued tone :

"Pardon me, Agnes. I am only bewildered by the suddenness of all this, but I am sure I am not frightened at the thought of claiming you as my *own*."

"And I am happy to become yours, even thus," she fervently replied, a faint roseate glow coming into her pale cheek, which rendered her infinitely attractive. "You have been a laggard in love, but when I have only you to cling to, you will atone for all you have made me suffer since we met."

"I will endeavor to do so," he muttered, wondering if she really knew anything of the events of the last two months, and yet was willing to forgive and accept him again as if nothing had happened to mar the smooth current of their wooing.

The physician came back, accompanied by a lady in mourning; the clergyman unclosed his book; Mr. Willard made a feeble motion to him to commence the ceremony, and the solemn words of the Episcopal marriage service were spoken, the responses being almost mechanically made by the two thus inauspiciously joined together.

Thorne felt as if he must be dreaming; that he who had so lately plighted himself, heart and soul to another woman, could not be holding the hand of Agnes Willard in his own, vowing to love and cherish her

throughout the life they were henceforth to spend together. It must be a horrid nightmare from which he would presently awake to find himself once more free.

He looked pale and distraught; but the girl who stood beside him glowed with exultation that she had secured him at last; she said to herself :

"Walter does not yet love me with all his heart, and soul, but he shall learn that sweet lesson before we have been married many weeks. My father is leaving me, but another who is even dearer, is taking his place near me, and even beside his death-couch I dare to be happy."

When the benediction was pronounced, Mr. Willard sunk back with a sigh of satisfaction, and feebly said :

"Now I am ready to go. Be good to my child, Walter, she has long loved you most faithfully."

The newly wedded pair knelt beside the bed, the clammy hand of the dying man was laid upon the two that were still clasped together, and Walter felt as if its chilling grasp was upon his very heart. He made an effort to give the assurance the earnest gaze of Mr. Willard seemed to demand, but his parched lips refused to utter the words he would have forced from them; and he could only look intently into the fading eyes that were bent searchingly upon his.

What the father read there with the clairvoyance of a parting spirit, caused him to utter a cry of anguish, and in a stronger voice than he had yet spoken he exclaimed :

"It is done, alas! and cannot be undone; and he fell back as the words seemed rent from his lips, struggling as if in the agonies of death.

Agnes started up, saying :

"What do you mean, father? what would you have undone? Not my marriage with Walter, I am sure."

Mr. Willard extended one of his long, thin fingers, and pointing to his newly made son-in-law with effort said:

"My daughter, you *would* have it so, but—the—future—will prove—that—you have now—a barren lot, I fear. Kiss me, Agnes, and remember that I have only done what you wished, in the hope that I was securing your happiness."

"I shall remember it, father, and I shall always be grateful."

A faint convulsion passed over the face of the dying man, and murmuring, "I trust in God you will have cause for gratitude, but I fear—I fear for the result of this day's work," he sank back quite insensible.

Vain were all the efforts of his physician to restore consciousness, and at the end of an hour he took his leave, saying that he would return again towards evening. Before he came back the spirit had passed away, and the room was left to the silent watchers by the dead, while the bereaved daughter wept away her sorrow on the breast of her strangely wedded husband.

In those hours of affliction Thorne could not refuse to be tender with her, and Agnes deluded herself with the belief that he really cared for her; that her task of winning him to prefer herself above all others, would not be so difficult after all.

Alas! if she could have looked into the rebellious heart that beat so near hers, she would have shrunk away and buried her face in the dust of humiliation and despair. It had been her will to bind this man to

herself with bonds he was powerless to break, and she had never dreamed that to herself they might in the future become as intolerable a burden as they were to him in these first hours of their precipitate union.

There was nothing grand or self sacrificing in the nature of the man Agnes had made the master of her fate, and he was forced to put strong constraint upon himself to conceal his repulsion, and make such efforts as were necessary to soothe the hysterical grief over which she mourned her father's loss.

The last words of Mr. Willard, "my child *you* would have it so," had fatally enlightened him as to whose will had entrapped him into this sudden marriage, and a feeling of bitter resentment and disgust was aroused within him. Even while he held Agnes clasped to his breast he said to himself:

"She knew all, and in defiance of every womanly feeling she has, in a manner, compelled me to become her husband. If she had waited—had given me time to forget that stricken creature I have been forced to desert, her old influence might have brought me back to my allegiance to herself. But she feared the result—her pride shrank from being left to wear the willow, and she has consummated her own wretchedness and mine. Oh, Agnes, if you could only understand what you have done."

The long watching beside her father's sick bed had completely prostrated the strength of the poor bride, and she needed constant care and attention. She turned to Thorne so helplessly; appealed to him so sweetly and gently for kindness, that he would have felt himself a brute if he had then betrayed what was passing in his heart.

He soothed and comforted her as far as lay in his power, and in spite of his bitter resentment for the course he believed she had pursued, he was flattered, and at moments attracted by the tenderness with which she clung to him, seeming to find in his presence consolation for the loss she had sustained.

He soon found it impossible to remain insensible to the proofs of affection Agnes lavished upon him; and gradually a self-complacent feeling stole over him. He found it very pleasant to be set up as an idol—to be worshipped by one so superior to himself as his father had made him believe Agnes to be. But for that mistake on the part of Col. Thorne, Walter might long since have become tenderly attached to the girl his father had chosen for his wife; but, like all weak men, he recoiled from the thought of claiming as his own a woman who would perpetually throw him in the shade, and probably rule him by the royal right of superior intellect.

Thorne saw with intense satisfaction that Agnes only sought to win her way to his heart, to place him always in the foreground, and render to him the loving submission due from a tender wife to her liege lord.

The funeral was over. Mr. Willard was laid to rest in Laurel Hill, and still the young pair lingered with Mrs. Ralston. Thorne did not wish to return to L—— quite yet, and Agnes had no desire to make a bridal tour so soon after her father's death. Her tranquillity returned, and she devoted herself to the object she had most at heart—the winning of her husband's tenderest love.

As the weeks flowed on, his feelings toward her began to soften, and he almost forgave her for the hur-

ried marriage he had been forced to make. With his usual facility Walter Thorne was becoming reconciled to a state of affairs which he had so lately believed to be insupportable to him.

It was only when he recalled that other honeymoon so like a dream of Heaven, which he had enjoyed with the brilliant being whose companionship made the hours fly so quickly, that he felt how faded and common-place was this one beside it. But he resolutely put from him all such memories; the broken life, the embittered heart of the forsaken one he believed could be condoned by the gift of money, and he silenced the self-accusing spirit which would sometimes make itself heard. It was natural that he should think pecuniary compensation would be a sufficient atonement to Claire, for had he not surrendered himself to his father's will for a price? And neither from Col. Thorne nor Miss Digby had come any intimation that his forsaken wife had refused the annuity offered her.

On hearing of the late marriage, his father wrote and invited himself and Agnes to return at once to Thornhill, and take up their abode with him. When Agnes heard of this proposal, she gently asked;

“Would you prefer living with your father to a residence at Willow Glen?”

Thorne shrugged his shoulders:

“It is not what *I* prefer, but what my father wishes, that concerns us. He is tired of living alone; he might find a wife for himself, if he were not so obstinately bent on marrying a woman who will never accept him. I really think his wooing is the most absurd proceeding that a sensible man was ever guilty of. However, let us think what we may about a home



of our own, the old man has signified his pleasure, and there is nothing for us but to accept the one he offers. In a few more months he must take possession of the gubernatorial mansion, and we shall have Thornhill to ourselves."

Agnes smiled faintly as she replied:

"Perhaps Miss Digby will lend a more favorable ear to Col. Thorne's proposals when he is Governor of the State."

"No; there is no hope of that. What happened this fall set her more completely against him. If Ada would have yielded her consent to marry him, she would have done it to purchase for me——"

Thorne had spoken thus far without thought, but suddenly the whole import of his words flashed upon him, and he looked curiously at Agnes to see what effect they had produced. She was listening intently, but with no apparent discomposure, and he marvelled at her self-command. She asked in the same even tone:

"What was the bribe offered by Col. Thorne to win her for his wife? I am curious to know—it must have been a strange scene."

"I dare say; but as I did not witness it, I cannot describe it. Do you really mean what you say, Agnes? Are you not fully aware of all that occurred in L—— this fall, in which I was implicated?"

She looked up half-startled, and hurriedly asked:

"What was it, Walter. I know nothing of what you refer to. I was too much taken up with the fluctuations of my father's illness to pay much attention to any thing else, and no one ever wrote to us from L—— except Col. Thorne. *He* was not like-

ly to tell anything to your disadvantage, Walter; nor could it have been a very serious scrape, since you extricated yourself from it so easily."

Thorne looked keenly and doubtfully at the fair face of the speaker, but he saw nothing in its expression to induce him to doubt the truth of her words. He knew now that his suspicions had done her injustice, and the knowledge of that summer folly had yet to be made known to her. He laughed in an embarrassed manner and lightly said:

"You don't catch me telling on myself, my lady. I thought you knew all about it, or I should not have referred to the affair at all."

"Why not tell me of it now, Walter, for I must sooner or later know all its details. Whatever concerns you, I am bound to inquire into, you know."

A slight frown crossed his brow, and he almost brusquely said:

"The less you know about this, the better for yourself, Agnes. I would not advise you to make any inquiry into that foolish affair, if you prize the peace that now exists between us."

A vivid flush mantled her cheeks, but she repressed the words that arose to her lips, for she possessed a haughty temper, and was little used to rough language.

"As you please," she simply said, and turned away without another word; but she was not the less determined to make the inquiries he seemed so nervously to deprecate.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE WIFE'S DISCOVERY.

AGNES no sooner found herself alone than she sat down to write to the only friend she possessed in L—— on whom she could rely for a truthful and candid history of what her husband had refused to tell her. She had a vague feeling that both her honor and happiness were in some way concerned in this mystery, and she was resolved to probe it to its depths before she returned to the town in which the event referred to by Thorne had occurred.

She awaited the arrival of the answer, with a keen anxiety proportioned for her love to the man to whom she had given her hand. When it at last came, she tore open the envelope and read the following lines from Ada Digby:

L——, January 15, 18—.

MY DEAR AGNES:—You have asked of me a very painful service, and my reply to your questions can only give the deepest pain to yourself, yet I cannot refuse to answer them.

“I am aware that Walter is now your husband, and if it were possible to keep from you all knowledge of the event which has formed the gossip of this place for the last three months, I would gladly do so. But you are coming hither to take up your abode, I understand, and what must then inevitably become known to you had better be told by a friend before you arrive.

“Walter should have made his own confession, and

obtained your forgiveness; perhaps he would have done so, but for the suddenness of your marriage. The facts are these:—

“During his summer tour, Walter unfortunately met with a very attractive young girl, a child in years, and eloped with her from the home of her adopted mother. A Catholic priest united them, but no witnesses were present, and there was nothing to prove the marriage.

“Col. Thorne took advantage of these facts to have it set aside; he refused to receive the young girl as his son's wife, and sent her from his house when Walter took her there. He brought her to me, and she is still under my protection, though she insists on leaving in a short time to return to the friend from whom she so imprudently ran away.

“I have stated as briefly as possible what you wished to know, and now my dear Agnes, receive patiently a few words of advice from one so much your senior in years, who is deeply interested in your happiness.

“I trust that the great affection you have so long cherished for your husband will enable you to forgive his temporary inconstancy. He is irrevocably separated from the object of his passing fancy, and she is so utterly disenchanted with him that I think she has ceased to feel anything but resentment toward him. I think she will, in time, recover from the blow his desertion gave her, and find a happier lot than hers could have been with the man who was willing to give her up at the command of his father.

“The adoring love you have so long lavished on Walter, gives me the hope that you can forgive even this wrong, and be happy with him in spite of his

ephemeral fancy for another. I would have written to you of what was going on here, had I thought that you would listen to any accusation brought against him; but I believed, that in the blindness of your attachment to Walter, you would cling to him in spite of the entanglement from which Col. Thorne was so resolute to free him. I regret now that I did not do so, as you would then at least have had a choice of action.

"Now you are Walter Thorne's wife, and but one course remains to you, to forgive and forget the brief inconstancy of which your husband was guilty. The future is your own, and with your charms of person and mind, you cannot fail to keep the heart you prize so highly, true to yourself.

"Your attached friend,

"ADA DIGBY."

As Agnes read, every shade of color fled from her features, and when the last line was reached, she fell as if dead. She was alone and how long she lay insensible she did not know. When she regained consciousness it was several moments before she could recall her scattered senses, or realize the mortal blow that had fallen on her.

Agnes Thorne was a woman of strong passions, and keen resentments: proud, too, as Lucifer, the son of the morning, and the thought of the humiliation of her position was almost as maddening to her as was the shock to her affections. In those moments all the passionate love she had given her husband, seemed turned to bitterness. He had secretly wedded her rival, and even taken her to his father's house in the hope that she would be acknowledged as his wife.

And then, like the craven he was, he had given her up because he dared not face the poverty with which she instinctively knew his father had threatened him. To save his inheritance, Walter Thorne had basely sacrificed one woman, and as basely wedded another. He believed *her* rich too, and the iron entered her soul, at the thought that her supposed fortune had influenced him to make her his wife. The white lips muttered:

"He will be disappointed in that, for the wreck left from my father's estate is a mere pittance, and it is secured to me in such a manner that he cannot touch it. He should not *now* have a penny of it even if that hard old man were to cast him out to beggary. Oh, Walter! Walter! to think how kindly, how unselfishly I have loved you, and you could make no return better than this!"

"Married—divorced—remarried, all in the space of a few fleeting months! and I—I to be humiliated, pointed at as the wife accepted at his father's hands, while the one he preferred to me is remorselessly cast out to break her heart, or to harden it, till hate take the place of the wild passion she must have felt for him to forsake her home, her friends, everything for his sake."

Her passion of anger and wounded pride unfortunately had not time to exhaust itself before Thorne came in looking animated and happy, carrying in his hand a bouquet of hothouse flowers which he had taken great pains to select for her himself.

Agnes heard his step bounding up the stairs; that step which of late had been the music of her life, but now it only caused her heart to contract painfully, and

brought a gleam of fire into her light blue eyes that might well have startled him. She arose white, and defiant, from the seat on which she had cast herself, and stood facing the door, grasping Miss Digby's letter in her hand.

As Thorne entered the apartment, he gaily said :

"See, Agnes, what lovely flowers I have brought you ; heliotrope, roses, japonicas, all your favorites are there ; it costs like the deuce to gratify a taste for exotics at this season, I can tell you. But I shall not care for that, if they please you."

She snatched the bouquet from his hand, threw it upon the floor, and trampled it under her feet. For a moment her husband regarded her with stupefied astonishment ; then a hot flush of anger mounted even to his brow, and he spoke between his half-closed teeth :

"Madam, what does this mean ? Have you lost your senses, that you treat thus the costly flowers *I* have selected, thinking they would afford you pleasure."

In tones of cutting scorn Agnes replied :

"It means that from your hand no gift will ever again be prized by me. It means that henceforth there can be neither love nor trust between us, though we are unfortunately bound together for life. Read that letter, Walter Thorne, and see for yourself what I have learned to-day. Oh ! had I but known of your treachery in time, you would have been spared accepting the hand you have tainted by your false touch. You would have been free to reclaim the bride you chose in preference to me, yet had not the manhood to stand by when your father bade you give up her, or

fortune. I know not which is most unfortunate ; the girl who so fatally trusted you, or the unhappy one who now stands to you in the relation of wife."

Overwhelmed by this passionate torrent of words, Thorne stood for a few moments looking amazed and indignant. He then stooped and took up the letter she had disdainfully thrown toward him. He glanced down the page, understood the nature of its contents, and a dangerous glare came into his dark eyes as he lifted them to the pallid face that confronted him. But the steel-blue orbs that met his did not quail before the lurid fire of his glance. Agnes was too indignant, and far too deeply outraged at this moment, to think of or care for the consequences of a rupture between them.

"I warned you," he hoarsely said, "yet you have dared to pry into that almost forgotten folly. The girl referred to in this precious missive, is nothing to me *now*, and we should never have been silly enough to fancy that we could be all in all to each other. Have I not put her aside ? Have I not married you, and does not that assure you that, as Ada says, my love for her was but a passing fancy ? Come, Agnes ; be reasonable, you have carried your point ; you *would* marry me, for your father said as much almost with his dying breath, and now you are ready to quarrel with me for a thing that has been repented of long ago."

With a movement of superb disdain, she haughtily said :

"You dare to taunt me with the hurried union into which we so unhappily rushed, and I presume you imagine that I insisted on it to secure so precious a pos-

session as yourself. But you are mistaken. I *did* suggest to my father that our marriage could be solemnized before his death, but it was to lift from his heart a weight that pressed heavily upon it. He had lived beyond his income; he knew that he was ruined, and all that was left of his fortune was our home in L—, which is deeply mortgaged, and a few thousand dollars he has managed to secure to me. I believed *then*, that to yourself and your father, the loss of my fortune would be of little importance: so far as Col. Thorne is concerned I still think so; but what am I to think of *you*, when you surrendered your first wife at his command because you feared disinheritance?"

The face of Thorne underwent a marked change as Agnes made this unexpected statement. It was certainly a severe blow to him, for he had looked forward to complete independence of his exacting father through the fortune he expected to gain with her hand. Unconsciously to himself this anticipation had enabled him to yield to the force brought to bear upon him—with a better grace than he would otherwise have found possible.

He sullenly replied:

"Your estimate of yourself is but just. I would never have married you if I had known this. If I must have taken a dowerless bride, I would at least have clung to the woman I preferred above every other. I loved Claire; I tolerate *you*."

With a sudden and most expressive motion Agnes clasped her hands over her rapidly beating heart, but she haughtily replied:

"For once I hear the truth from your lips, Walter Thorne, and I believe it is for the first time. False,

craven, and interested in your motives, what is there to admire, or respect in such a man as you? What is left on which to build a hope of faith, or trust in the future? Yet—yet it is my misfortune to be your wife!"

Thorne threw himself upon a chair and laughed mockingly:

"Upon my word, this is a rare scene with which to treat the man you proposed to win to love you. That was your expectation in marrying me, was't it? To that I owe the pretty submission you have hitherto shown me; the graceful blandishments you have lavished upon me? Come, Madam? resume the marital yoke, and learn to play the part of the demure Griselda; it is more becoming to your position than these tragedy queen airs. You have made me your master, and in spite of the intellectual superiority you assume, I intend to prove to you that I will maintain the authority you have given me as the ruler of your fate."

If lightning from the eye would kill, he would have been scathed by the glance that quickly traversed his person. Agnes drew up her stately figure to its utmost height, and scornfully retorted:

"Before I submit to be ruled by such a man as you, all the fire of my nature will be crushed out, every impulse of my soul deadened. No—I will never become the slave of any man; certainly not of one who has forfeited every claim on my respect or esteem. Go back, and take to your false heart the one for whom you avow a preference. *She* may bend before you, but I will defy you to the bitter end. I loved you madly, stupidly; but that phase is over. I will never forgive

you for the insult you have put upon me. You broke your faith to me ; doubly broke it to her you have so cruelly forsaken. You have placed me in a position I abhor above all others ; that of wife to a man who has another living claimant on that sacred name. Her claims are superior to mine, for the law of Heaven emphatically says, 'whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' "

Again Thorne uttered that mocking laugh which grated on her heart, and drove her almost to frenzy.

"That law is obsolete, my fair tigress. Men have made better ones for themselves, and the old man was sharp enough to make sure that I was freed from my first bonds before I came hither to assume new ones, in such a d—l of a hurry that I had no time to remonstrate. The divorce was hurried through the court rather indecorously—but it was given, and you belong to me. Haughty and defiant as you are, you will yet find it your best policy to bend your proud neck and accept the fate you were so eager to make certain. If you had left me a loophole of escape, I would have availed myself of it, and left you half broken-hearted at losing my precious self. But you would not—you hurried me into bondage, under such painful circumstances, that I was debarred from uttering any protest ; and, in spite of the fury into which you have worked yourself, I am not so sure that the history of the divorce had not reached you before our union took place. What L——rang with for weeks, could hardly escape being told to one so deeply interested in it, by some of your correspondents, though you find it to your interest to sham ignorance now."

If anything could have added to the storm of indig-

nation and insult raging in the heart of Agnes, this last taunting assertion was calculated to do so. Thorne had thrown down the gage of battle, and she promptly accepted it. She seemed suddenly to harden into marble, and with the coldest scorn, replied :

"It is worthy of *you* to speak thus—to utter a suspicion as degrading to me as it is flattering to your own vanity. I have stated the truth : believe it or not, as you may choose. But if I had been aware of your previous marriage—of the heartless treatment that hapless girl received at your hands, I would have died sooner than assume her rightful place. The law, as you say, binds me to you, but since you have found a divorce so easy of attainment, *I* can avail myself of the same means to regain the control of my own fate. I shall not hesitate to do so, and you may again figure before the tribunals before many more weeks pass away."

Thorne looked at her with a half smile so full of defiance, that she felt as if nothing could ever induce her to forgive him. He coolly said :

"I shall not allow such a proceeding on your part. It would ruin me with my father, and render the sacrifice I have made of no value to me. Without my consent you can never obtain a divorce ; and little as I care for you, I will not be made ridiculous by you. We have both put on fetters, and heavy as they may be—deeply as they may cut into our hearts—it is my will that they shall be worn to the end. I have pronounced your fate, Mrs. Thorne, so make up your mind to submit to it with a good grace."

A leaden weight seemed to fall on the heart of the listener. Her courage gave way, and the woman in



her nature asserted itself: she burst in tears, and after many moments of convulsive weeping, she found voice to say:

"I will reserve my decision till I have seen and talked with your father. He has a genuine affection for me, if you have only counterfeited it. I may consent to remain with you, but in the future I can see nothing but wretchedness in a continued union between us. I do not deny that I have loved you above all earthly beings—above even my hopes of Heaven; but that was when I believed you to be true and honorable. I believed that your affection for me, though less earnest than mine for you, would deepen into a tender and lasting regard for the woman who so highly estimated you. But you have stripped the ideal being I worshipped of the attributes with which I gifted him, and I see in you but a tyrant to be dreaded—a master whose chain I will not wear. If I am forced to walk through life with you, it will be over a path burning with angry passions, scarred with bitter dissensions. My temper is not one to forgive or forget an injury, and you will do well for yourself to allow me to obtain a legal separation from you."

Thorne brusquely replied:

"And have a d—l of a fuss with the old man that rules me with a rod of iron. No—thank you—and much as you seem to rely on Col. Thorne's protection, he will help me to keep you in bounds. We shall not live like turtle doves, as you had sentimentally pictured to yourself, but we can at least consent 'to dwell in decencies forever.' Since I have marred *my* life to please my father, you can at least take up your cross, with the meekness becoming to one of your sex. He

will no more consent to grant you a divorce than I will. I have made you my wife: you willingly assumed the obligation, and I do not choose to free you from it. Understand that and return to your sober senses.

"If you had gone on as you had commenced I might have loved you in time; I was beginning to feel tenderly toward you, but your bitter words have uprooted every gentle feeling. I have done wrong—I freely admit it, but regret, so far as you are concerned, is at an end. You used language to me which the most ardent affection could not survive. The path we must travel on may be hard and arid enough, but it is you who have made it so; it will be you who will soften or embitter my soul still more. A woman must be an angel of peace in such a home as mine will be, or the demon of discord will rule over it. Choose your own course, for I have said that you shall be its mistress, come what will."

Agnes listened to him with shivering anguish—all fire seemed for the time to have died out of her soul, and she could only feel how deeply the iron had entered into it. In spite of his cruel harshness—his plain avowal that his own will had not made him her husband, her traitorous heart still clung to him with that tenacious love which alike defies wrong or injury to destroy it. The threat of leaving him, which she had made in the violence of her passion, she felt that she would be most unwilling to carry out, and it was a feeble consolation to her that Thorne refused to grant her the freedom which would have been odious to her, although it was done in so brutal a manner.

Yet, with her haughty and imperious temper, her bitter sense of slight and humiliation, Agnes knew that

she could never again assume the bearing of a tender and submissive wife toward the husband who asserted his prerogative in such terms. There could be no peace in the house in which they would dwell together—no confidence between them,—yet with these convictions in her heart, after a few moments of reflection, she said:

“Have your will, then; but remember that you have as fiery a nature as your own to deal with, and what I have said I adhere to. I will not be your slave—I am your equal in every respect, and as such I will be treated.”

He laughed again—the hollow, cynical laugh which grates so harshly on the heart of the listener.

“It is well, madam, that you have been wrought on to see the necessity of coming to such a conclusion. But should you find my rule a hard one you would gain nothing by severing yourself from me. Since your fortune is gone, even the hollow state of mistress of Thornhill will be better than poverty and obscurity. To evade them, you will remain in the position I have given you; I think we are quits now.”

Agnes raised her head with all her native pride, and fixedly regarded him as she disdainfully replied:

“I had not thought of that, but as you say, it may be as well to retain the material enjoyments of life, even if all else is swept away. I could not endure a sordid home or narrow income, and Thornhill will be something, even if its future master proves a rude and overbearing companion. The little my father left is secured to me, and I shall, in a measure, be independent of you, though I am your wife.”

“So be it, madam; yet, if my father had been aware

of the state of Mr. Willard's affairs, I scarcely think he would have acted with so high a hand as he did. But the past is irrevocable, and you do well to retain what is of more value to sensible people than so uncertain a thing as a man's heart. ‘Beware of the first quarrel,’ has been uttered as a warning to married pairs, and we would have done well to take heed to it. Our first one has been bitter and hard enough, but I have the presentiment that it is only the beginning of the end. You and I will fight the battle of life literally, I can see plainly enough. You will always seek to gain the upper hand of me, and I intend to be master in my own house.”

“It would be better if you could learn to be master of yourself,” was the cold response.

And Agnes, weary and heart-sore, arose and left the room before he could retort.

I shall not follow her into the seclusion of her chamber to depict the wild struggles that rent her heart, embittered her nature, and prepared her for the reckless and wretched future that lay before her.

I have described this first quarrel from which sprang the deadly Upas that overshadowed her home, poisoning its atmosphere, and blighting those that dwelt within it. She made no attempt to conciliate her husband; she had conceived for him too bitter a contempt for that, and the love that held her to him only made her despise herself because she could not uproot it.

Agnes, in those first moments of suffering, bitterly blamed herself for yielding to the first transports of outraged love and pride; but for the mutual recriminations which had broken up the very foundations of

wedded happiness, the cloud in time might have lifted and forgiveness been accorded; but now, with her husband's words of insult tingling in her ears, his cruel taunts striking to her heart, she felt that all hope of that was past. True, she had acted and spoken violently at first, but had she not sufficient provocation? Could any love less insane than hers condone the wrong that had been done her? Yet Thorne had thrown on her the blame of their rupture, as if the deadly offence lay not with him.

It may seem strange that so haughty a woman did not cast forever from herself the chain that so bitterly galled her; but Agnes had loved Walter Thorne from girlhood, and without him the world looked dark to her, in spite of all he had done to estrange her. Therefore she clung to him still, and when continued discord widened the gulf between them, till life was scarcely endurable beneath the same roof, she still remained in her home, because she was too proud to recall her word, and too sensitive to be willing to allow the tongue of scandal to busy itself with her ruined life and blighted affections.

Ada Digby stood by her through all her trials, and many efforts did she make to bring about a better state of affairs in the splendid desert Walter Thorne and his wife called their home. Such influence as she had once possessed over him was lost, and he became hard, reckless, and at times dissipated; his only aim in life seeming to be to prove to his unhappy wife that in being forced into a union with her, he had lost all respect for himself or for her.

But I am anticipating; other events must be related which had a bearing on the fate of husband and wife, before their complete estrangement was accomplished.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE MEETING OF CLAIRE AND AGNES.

EXHAUSTED with weeping—almost incapable of further suffering, Agnes lay upon the sofa on which she had thrown herself. She was trying to arrange her thoughts, and prepare for the return of her husband. How should she meet him? How atone for the bitter words she had uttered, and yet maintain her own dignity.

The question was set at rest in a most unexpected manner. A note from Thorne was brought to her, in which he briefly informed her that he had joined a party of gay young men on an excursion to New York, as he thought it best to absent himself until she had recovered from her anger, and learned submission to him as her lawful lord and master. It might look strange that he had deserted her in the honeymoon, but when all the honey had turned to vinegar it was of little consequence how soon the fact became patent to the world. He should be back before very long, he could not tell exactly when, but he was not vain enough to suppose she would sigh for his presence, when she had so harshly snubbed him in their last interview.

At the bottom of the page he added:

"Do not be afraid that I have gone back to my pretty love. I have no such intention, for it would embroil me too deeply with the old man. It is to our mutual interest to keep on good terms with him, as he has everything in his power. When I return to Phila-

delphia, we will set out at once for Thornhill; once safely there, we must play the part assigned us in the dreary tragi-comedy called life. I scarcely think that we shall brighten it for each other, but we must at least drag the chain that has been fastened upon us; not with my consent, you know. Yet as I have already told you, I will not have a link loosened—you had your way in that, and now, I will have mine."

The absence of Thorne was a relief to the unhappy Agnes, though she read his flippant letter with a raging sense of bitterness and added indignity that nearly maddened her.

She paced her room for hours, too restless to remain quiescent—too wretched to occupy herself with anything but her own miserable thoughts. She recalled the past, and lived it over again, gleaning little consolation from it. She had always known that Walter Thorne's preference for her was very lukewarm; that he had submitted to the wishes of his father in engaging himself to her, rather than been prompted by any strong feeling on his own part.

Yet firm in her belief that, as his wife, she could win him to love her, she had not scrupled to hurry their union, though her father had not urged such a course upon her. Mr. Willard knew the state of his affairs, and trembling for the future of his daughter, with the small provision he could make for her, he eagerly grasped at the proposal first suggested by Agnes herself, to marry Walter Thorne before his death, and relieve his mind from all dread on her account. Her will had been carried out, yet all that she had gained was thrown away in a moment of ungoverned anger and outraged pride. She had subjected

herself to the suspicion of having secured a rich husband before the state of her father's affairs was known to any one but herself; and for what? To gain the hand of a man who had dishonored himself in her estimation; on whose heart she possessed no claim; over whose temper there was no control. Yet she loved him! That was the refrain to all her restless thoughts.

She would never make him happy; she did not think she would now even make an effort to do so, yet she could neither release heart nor hand from the fiery bondage in which they were held.

Fortunately for Agnes she was not in a regular boarding-house, in which her desertion so soon after her marriage must have proved a fruitful theme of gossip. Mrs. Ralston, the mistress of the pleasant house in which her father had taken refuge, was the widow of an old friend of his, who eked out a too narrow income by taking a family into her two spare rooms, and Mr. Willard had been fortunate enough to find them unoccupied on his arrival in Philadelphia.

Mrs. Ralston was a quiet, undemonstrative woman, who saw all that passed around her, without commenting upon it. She was very tender with Agnes, for she saw how unhappy she was, and came to the silent conviction in her own mind, that the precipitate marriage which had taken place beside the bed of the dying father, was most unfortunate for both parties concerned in it. She read the character of both husband and wife very clearly, and in the early days of their inauspicious union, she saw that all the devotion was on one side, met on the other by a repressed coolness which proved to her that the bridegroom was on his good behavior for the time being.

But Mrs. Ralston was not prepared for Thorne's sudden escapade, and she scarcely knew how to account for it. Here was this young and friendless wife, left a few brief weeks after her marriage, in a strange city entirely alone, while her husband rushed off to New York with a party of gay young men, who would be sure to lead him into every dissipation.

After that first rude note announcing his departure, Thorne wrote no more to his wife, and week after week rolled by, each day and hour widening the breach between them. The lonely watcher grew wan and listless; the fiery agony of her bitter trial burned to ashes, but she still suffered in a dumb, helpless way.

Christmas came with its festivities. The children, of whom Mrs. Ralston had three, made quite a jubilee in the house, and the forlorn Agnes endeavored to interest herself in their gleeful sports. She roused herself from the apathy of grief, to go out and purchase presents for them, in the hope that the sight of their happiness would lift a portion of the leaden weight that lay upon her own heart.

But nothing could do that; she smiled on them, listened to their innocent prattle, and replied to it with apparent cheerfulness, but bitter to her was the sound of merry laughter, when her own heart lay like a frozen thing in her bosom. Six more weeks passed by, and the middle of February had come without bringing any tidings of the absent husband. Unable to endure this neglect any longer, Agnes went into Mrs. Ralston's sitting-room and abruptly asked:

"Do you think it would be difficult to travel to L—— this week?"

Mrs. Ralston looked up, surprised out of her usual equanimity.

"My dear Mrs. Thorne, I not only think it would be difficult, almost impossible. Heavy snows have lately fallen, and in many places the roads must be nearly impassable. Besides, how could you go alone? What would your husband think on his return to find you gone?"

"It matters very little now what he thinks," said Agnes in a constrained tone. "He has been gone two months, and I have not yet heard from him. It would serve him right if I went away, and never allowed him to find me again."

"My dear young friend, don't say that. I do not understand what has happened to estrange you and your husband from each other so soon after marriage, but I would strongly advise you to do nothing to alienate him more completely from you. He must be back in a few days more, I think."

"I do not agree with you. He will stay as long as he is amused; as long as he thinks he can torture me by his neglect. Oh, Mrs. Ralston! if my heart had not turned to stone it must have broken long before this time;" and with a gasping sob she sat down close to the fire, shivering even in its warmth.

Mrs. Ralston took her cold hand in both her own, and tenderly caressing it, gently said:

"I have seen that you suffered deeply, Mrs. Thorne, but I have refrained from seeking your confidence, for I think that a sense of injury between husband and wife deepens if its cause is discussed with another. When you meet Mr. Thorne again, better feeling may arise between you, and you may yet live together in peace and happiness."

"Never! never!" was the passionate response.

"Our home must be a scene of discord, for I am resentful and Walter is passionate. He cares nothing for me; yet—yet I was mad enough to exult in the thought of becoming his wife."

After a painful pause Mrs. Ralston said:

"Having become such it is your duty to try and smooth the difficult path before you. When Mr. Thorne returns, receive him kindly; act as if nothing had occurred to wound you, and you may yet win the affection you say you do not possess."

"Too late! too late," came brokenly from the pale lips of Agnes. "I have angered him beyond forgiveness, yet I declare to you that mine was not the greatest fault. I cannot explain to you what came between us, for cruelly as Walter has treated me, I do not forget that I am his wife; that I am bound to shield him from censure if it is in my power to do so."

"You are quite right in that, Mrs. Thorne; and I should be unwilling to listen to any accusation brought by you against your husband. With such right feeling on your part, the estrangement which now causes you so much suffering must come to an end."

"Oh would that it might! but it never will! I know that it never will, and if I had strength to tear myself forever from him, it would be better for us both. Tell me, Mrs. Ralston, is it not better for those who *know* that hope of a perfect reconciliation is impossible, to tear asunder the ties that bind them to each other, than to drag out life in a weary round of wretched bickering? Such must be our lot, if we continue to live beneath the same roof."

Mrs. Ralston looked shocked; she gravely said;

"I hope it is not so bad as that, Mrs. Thorne. You

evidently love your husband very devotedly, whatever may be his feelings toward you; and so attractive a woman as yourself, should not despair of winning the regard of the man to whom you have plighted your faith. Since you have asked my opinion of a divorce, I will tell you that I consider such a step unjustifiable without extreme ill-usage. Marriage is a contract sanctified by heavenly as well as earthly laws, and the holy book tells us that man shall not sunder those the church has joined. The fate of the woman who separates herself from her husband is rarely a happy one in the isolation to which she condemns herself; and the voice of the world is always against her. It is often unjust in its condemnation, I know, but that scarcely heals the wounds inflicted by its censures."

"Then a woman must bear everything and seek no redress. If I could bring myself to tell you *why* my appeal would be considered just, even by a censorious world, you would reason differently. Tell me this; if—if the divorced party married again while the husband or wife still lives, do you believe the second marriage to be valid?"

"The law of the land makes it so, but the sacred law is plainly against it. Conscience must be the guide of one placed in such a position. But I should be sorry to think that you would seek freedom from your husband, only to give your hand to another," replied Mrs. Ralston in cold surprise. "I have not surely been mistaken in believing you ardently attached to the man you married."

"I was! alas! I still am in that humiliating bondage. I was not thinking of my own course when I asked that question, nor can I explain to what it referred."



Mrs. Ralston regarded her compassionately, but said nothing more. After a long pause, Agnes again spoke.

"I must see my husband's father. Col. Thorne is as much attached to me as he can be to any one. He is a hard man in some respects, but he can, and he will give me such counsel and assistance as I so greatly need. I will no longer wait here for a laggard who never comes. I will brave the snow drifts, and if I perish in them it will be better than living in the icy atmosphere I have lately breathed. I can bear this no longer, and to-morrow I shall set out for L——."

In vain did Mrs. Ralston combat this resolve. She found too strong a will opposed to hers, and her nephew, a young clerk in the city who boarded with her, was sent to secure a place in the coach that was to leave the following morning.

With feverish haste Agnes finished her packing, and sat down to write a few lines to be delivered to Thorne when he returned and found her gone. She said:

"You deserted me in the most shameful and heartless manner, and not satisfied with that, you sent me a parting blow in the letter you left behind you.

"I have watched, and waited long enough for your return, to satisfy the sense of wifely duty that is in my heart, and now, I shall guide my own fate, whether for weal or woe remains to be seen. I am going to L—— to lay before your father all that has occurred between us, and by his decision I will abide. He at least, has feeling enough for me to advise what will be best for me, without reference to you. AGNES.

It was a cold, nipping day, with bright sunshine over-head, and a deep snow that had fallen the previous night, upon the earth. But Agnes, wrapped in furs, bade defiance to the severity of the weather, and set out on her long journey.

She felt that the life of weary hopelessness she had lately led, must end in action, or her reason would give way. She took leave of her hostess and the children, promising to write to Mrs. Ralston, when she had any good news to impart to her, and took her place in the crowded vehicle. Ladies traveling alone, even in winter, is too common an occurrence to attract much notice to any particular one, and Agnes sat silent, and self-absorbed, scarcely noting the progress they made. She had a long journey before her, but that did not daunt her, and the hours passed on, she scarcely knew how. At night, a few hours sleep were obtained, and then on—on they went, over the snow-clad earth.

A few miles from Philadelphia the coach was exchanged for a well-appointed sleigh, and the bells on the horses jingled merrily as they dashed over the frozen surface of the snow. Under other circumstances, Agnes would have enjoyed this rapid and exhilarating motion; even as it was, her spirits began to revive a little, and she looked less like a marble woman than on the day they set out.

But the long tension on her mind and heart had been too much for her strength to bear, and within a day's journey of her destination she fell ill, and was compelled to stop at a roadside tavern, at which the horses were changed.

She was carried in nearly insensible, and the kind-hearted landlady had the best room the house afforded

prepared for her. Exhausted, both in mind and body, Agnes fell almost immediately into a deep stupor, which lasted so long that Mrs. Jones was alarmed for the result. Fortunately she was a good nurse, and she succeeded in restoring the patient sufficiently to take nourishment, but her mind evidently wandered, and it was many days before she regained control of it.

For weeks Agnes lay in a state of catalepsy, from which she would arouse to utter wild mutterings, and call upon her husband to come back to her and save her heart from breaking. She always believed that to this state of semi-unconsciousness she owed her life at that time; her painfully agitated mind relaxed into partial torpor, thus affording time for the physical energies to react and restore the equilibrium which had been so fatally disturbed.

When Agnes recovered sufficiently to understand where she was, the bright sunshine of early spring was shining in her room and the budding branches of the trees rustled against her window, while the merry chirping of birds greeted her awakening senses.

She awoke from her long lethargy, and looked wonderingly around the strange room in which she found herself. She attempted to rise, but finding herself too weak to do so, she faintly asked:

"Where am I? What on earth has happened to bring me to this place?"

A slight figure arose from her seat near the head of the bed, and a young but deeply-saddened face looked down on hers. She hurriedly said:

"You are sane again, thank Heaven! and I can learn what I wish so earnestly to know. What I have lingered here so many days to ascertain."

Agnes looked at the speaker with dreamy eyes; she thought her lovely enough for an angel visitant, though there was little of heavenly peace in those fathomless dark eyes; little of angelic humility in the curve of the proud lips.

This being, young as she was, had evidently borne wrong and grief, and they had not softened or improved her nature. Agnes tried to collect her thoughts, and after a pause she asked:

"What is it you wish to know? I do not remember that I have ever seen you before."

"No, for we never met till four days ago, and in that time you have shown no signs of consciousness till now. I have watched beside you many hours, in the hope that you would revive sufficiently to enlighten me as to what I wish to learn."

A sudden light flashed into the dimmed eyes of Agnes, and her numbed heart began to beat violently. She rapidly said:

"I understand—who are you? what do you wish to know of me? How did you, a stranger, come to watch beside me?"

"It is easily explained. I stopped here for the night, on my way to Virginia. They gave me the next room to this, and through the thin partition I could not avoid hearing your rambling words. The name of Walter Thorne was often on your lips, and—and it possesses also a deep interest for me. I lingered here, and offered my assistance to Mrs. Jones in watching over you, in the hope that you would recover sufficiently to tell me of *him*. Where is he? Has he become the husband of that young girl his father insisted that he should marry? Are you another of his broken-hearted victims?"

These words recalled all the bitter past to the unhappy Agnes, and she painfully moaned :

"I am that most unfortunate girl. I am the deserted wife of Walter Thorne ; in the first month of our marriage he left me and went to New York. He did not write to me, and after waiting as long as I could for his return, I set out for home alone. I became suddenly ill, and Heaven knows how long I have lain here. Snow was on the ground when I last remember anything, and now the leaves are budding on the trees."

Claire listened to her with a faint flush stealing to her changed cheek ; the bitter resentment toward the one who had supplanted her died out at this statement, but she fiercely asked :

"Did you not know before you married Walter Thorne that another had been thrust violently from the position you were about to assume ? That her heart was broken, her life crushed by the base treachery of which she was the victim ?"

"As Heaven is my witness, I did not know it. I would have died sooner than give him my hand, if I had been told in time. When I discovered how he had acted, the quarrel that ensued caused the separation between us. He left me in violent anger, and I have not seen him since. I scarcely know now if I ever desire to see him again."

"Then I have wronged you, and I ask your pardon for it. We are partners in suffering, for you are the deserted wife of that false man and I am his repudiated one. Which is the most unfortunate, it would be difficult to decide. His father will compel him to return to *you*, for you were *his* choice, though I was Walter's. With me, he might have become a good man, for he

loved me ; with you, he will become a demon of passion, for he is a man to resent bitterly the compulsion which has been used toward him, and he will not be generous enough to forbear toward her who was the cause of it. He will break your heart, and then—Well—when you are under the sod, the world shall see how I can avenge the wrongs he has put upon us both."

Agnes listened to these words with dilating eyes, and she asked, in faltering tones :

"What can you mean ? Are you mad to talk thus ? I wish I had died since I have been lying here. I cannot see why I have been brought back to so wretched a life as mine must henceforth be. Take it, if you will. I have unconsciously injured you, but I have courage to bare my breast to the stroke of your dagger ; the blow from your hand will be less painful than the one *he* dealt me."

Claire shook her head, and a faint but very bitter smile crept to her lips.

"I do not carry a weapon, and if I did, I should not use it on you, though you are my rival. What should I gain by killing you, while the old colonel still lives ? I can wait ; the great reaper, Death, will, in time, remove you both from my path, for *my* day *must* come ; God would not be just if it did not ; and he finds means to punish wrong-doing even in this world. 'The mills of the gods grind slowly,' but fate consummates all things, if we have patience to wait. I am very young ; I can afford to spend many years in preparing myself for the ordeal that I *know* will come. It is well I stopped here, for I meant to have gone to Philadelphia to find you, and see what sort of rival Walter had giv-

en me. Miss Digby would not tell me your name, nor where you were to be found, but I wiled both out of Barbara. I am afraid that my head is a little flighty yet, for I have been ill, too—yes, very, very ill. I hardly think such a wretch as Walter Thorne worth the suffering he has caused to you and me. He will reclaim *you*, and torture you at his leisure; but take this comfort to your heart, when my turn comes, *I* will pay him back for all he will inflict on you. *My* heart he can never again wring with anguish, but I shall find means to reach the very core of his, and inflict on it such pangs as he dreams not of in these gay, and careless days. He thinks now only of himself and his own enjoyments; the time shall come, when he shall only realize life through the suffering it brings. But I must bid you adieu; the coach will soon pass, and I must be ready to take my place in it. I only tarried here to satisfy myself of what you are to Walter Thorne.”

Before Agnes could reply she flitted from the room, and soon afterward the sound of the stage horn, winding in the distance was heard. The coach stopped but for a few moments, and Agnes was glad that her strange visitor was gone. She lay dreamily thinking over the singular interview which had just taken place, till the landlady came in bringing a cup of nourishment in her hand. She saw the new light in the eyes of her patient, and briskly said:

“You are a deal better to-day, ma’am; but you’ve been lying in a strange state for the last six weeks. It seemed to me a sort of trance, and I had some difficulty in getting you to take nourishment enough to keep you alive. Sometimes you’d get excited, and talk about some man you called Walter, but most o’

the time you lay quiet enough. Drink this, ma’am, and you’ll soon come ’round now.”

Agnes mechanically obeyed, and soon after fell into a natural and refreshing slumber; from that day her recovery was slow, but certain. The interview between herself and Claire had given the fillip her mental faculties needed, for her illness had been more of the mind than the body. But for the long torpor in which her senses had been locked, Agnes always believed that she must have lost her reason; she suffered yet, but not so keenly as in those first days of anguish, and a cold sense of wrong had usurped the place of the tender trust she had once placed in Walter Thorne’s native nobleness of character.

She was at length able to sit up beside the window of her room, which looked toward the road. Day after day she vaguely watched the passers by, hoping and believing that one familiar form must appear upon it, coming in search of herself. By this time her husband must surely have become aware of her departure from Philadelphia, and followed her to L—. Col. Thorne himself must have become uneasy at not hearing from her, and inquiries must soon be made for her. If they were not, Agnes had half determined to evade them all, and conceal herself for ever from the man who had so heartlessly treated her.

Thinking thus one bright morning toward the end of April, she sat with dreary eyes looking out upon the sunny landscape, at times wondering why a broken life could never revive again, as nature does, putting forth new blossoms, and concealing old wounds.

The house stood back from the road with a yard in front, filled with grass and fruit trees, and those who

came to it, could only be seen when they entered the enclosure. The day was unusually warm for the season, and the window was open which looked toward the gate. Agnes, wrapped in a shawl, sat beside it, listlessly, dreaming sweet and bitter fancies, when the sound of a familiar voice below made her stagnant blood leap in her veins. It said:

"We have been baffled thus far, but we may have better luck here. Let us go in and inquire."

The latch clicked, and a gray-haired man of stately bearing, came up the brick walk leading to the house, followed by a younger one. The landlord was sitting before the door, smoking, and after the usual salutations Agnes heard Col. Thorne say:

"We have called here, sir, to inquire if a young friend of ours has been detained by accident or illness in this house? A lady, traveling alone, set out on this road two months ago, and she has not been heard from since. Is such a person here?"

Mr Jones removed his pipe, and leisurely replied:

"Oh—ah—so you've got message about her at last, have you? Me and my old woman has been wondering if nobody belonged to a young critter like that, that would be coming to ask after her. There is a uncommon pretty young gal up stairs, that has been in a dazed kind o' way, but we took good care on her, and she's coming round again, and will soon be chirk enough I guess."

"It must be Agnes!" exclaimed Col. Thorne, "I shall be glad to see this lady, if she will receive me. Take up this card if you please, and inquire if she will grant a few moments conversation to the person who sent it."

"Be you her father?" asked Mr. Jones, bluntly; "and this youngster, mebbe, is her brother?"

"I am her father-in-law, and this young gentleman is her husband, provided your guest is the person we are in search of."

"Pheugh!—then she's run away from him, I suppose, or you would'n't a had to hunt her up in this way. She's the right ticket anyhow, for she told my old woman that her name is the same that's on this bit of pasteboard."

In his most stately manner Col. Thorne said:

"Pray oblige me, sir, by keeping your suppositions to yourself, and taking my message to the young person I wish to see."

Agnes overheard the whole conversation, and she sunk back shivering with dread and uncertainty as to how the approaching interview might end. In spite of all she had gone through, she yearned to hear the sound of Walter Thorne's voice again; to behold the face that had so long been to her the dearest on earth. She despised herself for thus weakly clinging to the man who had shown himself so unworthy of the love she still bore him, yet all her efforts were powerless to overcome it.

All her late apathy was gone now; her heart thrilled and throbbed as if it would burst from her bosom; her eyes regained their brightness; and when Mrs. Jones came in to inform her that friends were below who wished to see her, she quickly replied:

"I will see Col. Thorne, I know that he is there, for I saw him as he came up the yard; but I wish him to come to me alone."

The landlady stared at her as she said:

"It's him that wants to come up. But it seems mighty strange if the young one is your husband, that you want to see the old gentleman first, seeing how long you've been away from home."

Agnes spoke with all her old stateliness of manner :

"You have been very kind to me in my long illness, Mrs. Jones, and I feel very grateful to you ; but that does not give you the right to pry into my affairs. I shall be glad if you will carry my message at once, and bring only the elder gentleman to me. I shall see my husband afterward."

"In course, ma'am ; I didn't mean nothing to offend you. I has took good care of you, but you has paid your way like a lady, I will say ; and it's no business o' mine to be meddling in what don't concern me any way. But if you, and your young man has quarreled like, you'd better make it up with him. For man and wife to separate is like taking the rivit out'n a pair of shears ; they aint no use arterwards. Mebbe he'll go to the dogs, and you won't be no better off for knowing that ; but leastways you know your own business best."

Having given utterance to this piece of wisdom, Mrs. Jones hastily retreated, and Agnes with a bitter smile, muttered :

"The same advice from two of my own sex should surely decide me to accept the destiny that binds me to Walter Thorne. Alas ! my own traitorous heart prompts me to the same course, although I am certain that the authority of his father alone has brought him in search of me."

The sound of approaching steps was heard, a light tap came to her door, and Col. Thorne, looking

harassed, and worn, came into the room. His stern face lighted up as his eyes fell on Agnes, and hastening toward her he clasped her tenderly in his arms, as he said :

"You have suffered much, my dear child, and we have been very uneasy about you since we learned your departure from Philadelphia. Till lately, I thought you were in New York with Walter, or you would not have been left so long unsought. I heard from him regularly, and although your name was briefly mentioned, he gave me no reason to suppose that he had actually left you alone in a strange city so soon after your union."

While speaking, he gently replaced her in her chair, and drew forward another for himself in such a position that he could see her face perfectly, without having the glare of light from the window thrown upon his own.

"Then you do not think I was wrong to try and get to you, that I might be guided by your advice ?" she tremulously asked.

"No, my dear daughter ; I place the blame where it is due, upon Walter's shoulders and mine own. I should not have insisted on an immediate marriage between you. That scandalous affair in which he was implicated, should have had time to die away—you should have had time to forgive, and forget it ; you would have done it, for I am sure that in his heart Walter prefers you to the unformed creature he became so fascinated with for a season. He is now most anxious for a reconciliation, and willing to atone in every possible manner for his late desertion."

"Oh, Col. Thorne," asked Agnes with emotion, "do



you think you treated me well in keeping the inconstancy of your son concealed from me? You should yourself have stated the whole case to me, and given me the option of breaking forever with Walter, or receiving him again with favor. You kept me in the dark, and see what has come of it."

"Well, my dear, what has come of it, but what I anticipated?" he asked, in his silkiest manner. "Few married couples settle down without clearing the domestic atmosphere by a rousing quarrel or two. You had good cause to give Walter a good rating, and I am glad you had the spirit to do it. He will have a wholesome dread of your sharpness from this time forward; after a fight, a truce, you know, and you will keep the peace toward each other more scrupulously than if this flare up had not occurred."

"But—but, Col. Thorne, I have been so grievously wronged, and insulted, that—that I really think your son and myself had better agree to live apart. I am sure that we shall *not* keep the peace, as you express it, for neither he nor I are angels of forbearance."

"My dear Agnes, that may be true enough, but what you propose is out of the question. It is not *respectable* for married people to live apart; besides, you should have some consideration for me. Here am I, a forlorn old man, who has been looking forward to the time when I should have a pleasant companion in the person of a certain young lady for whom I have a strong attachment, and now she coolly threatens to throw both father and husband overboard, and go, Heaven knows where, herself! My dear daughter, I cannot consent to give you up. Come home with me and give Walter the opportunity to win back the love

you once felt for him. You have both been in the wrong. You were too bitter and he too resentful; but with myself for mediator between you, I do not despair of yet bringing about a good understanding."

"You are too sanguine, I am afraid," she gloomily replied. "Walter cares nothing for me or he would never have gone away from me as he did. It is four months since we met, and we had not lived together as many weeks. *He* went to seek amusement in a gay crowd, leaving *me* to wear my heart out in lonely struggles and vain regrets. So lately bereaved of my father, he was hard enough to inflict on me the anguish of finding myself a forsaken wife. Do you suppose that I can ever forget that? No—with our past, it is better to be sundered as widely as the poles. I will go with you to Thornhill, if you wish it, but Walter had better return to the society of the gay companions for which he left me."

"But, Agnes, you must remember that you spoke very harshly to your husband, and he has not a forbearing temper any more than yourself. I ask this grace for my son. Let him make the effort to win your forgiveness; I am sure that your heart is not closed to him, and when you see him daily you will relent, and remain at Thornhill, not only as my daughter, but as Walter's honored and cherished wife."

"Did he wish this himself? Did he send you to me as his ambassador, in the hope that a reunion might be effected?"

"He did. Walter has told you himself that he refuses to grant the separation you demanded in a moment of passion. He thinks, as I do, that when you have seen how deeply he regrets the misunderstanding

that severed you, your heart must return to its old allegiance."

"And *his* heart," she bitterly asked, "what of that? Does it still cling to—to the girl he preferred to me?"

"That folly has been repented of, and should be no more referred to. The girl will never cross your path, be assured of that. She has already gone back to her friends. That chapter in my son's life is closed forever, so set your jealous fears at rest."

Agnes thought of the sad, young face that had bent over her couch two weeks before, and sighed; but she said nothing of the singular meeting Claire had sought, nor of the threats she had uttered. She considered her temporarily deranged, and gave little weight to them. In truth she was too wretched herself, to give much thought to the sufferings of another.

She sat silent so long that Col. Thorne, who was attentively regarding her face, at length asked:

"Do you require time to make up your mind to receive the repentant prodigal, my daughter?" I will not doubt the result; for such love as you have felt for Walter is not easily cast aside; yours must brighten with life again, when he asks you to restore it to him as the most precious boon that can be accorded him."

A faint tinge of color came for the first time since her illness into her marble face, and with a sigh she said:

"If I could only believe that, I—I might relent, for my own heart plays the traitor to me, and prompts me to the course you urge; though alas! I feel the conviction that happiness can never spring from the re-union of your son and myself."

"Let us, at least, make another trial, Agnes," said a

voice that thrilled through every pulse of her being. With a start she raised her head to find her husband standing beside her, with arms opened to enfold her in his embrace."

Acting on the impulse of the moment Agnes sprang up, it seemed to her, without any volition of her own, and fell, weak and trembling, upon his breast. While she wept convulsively, Thorne caressed her tenderly and whispered:

"Forgive me, Agnes, and take me back to your heart. I will try to make you contented at least. There is nothing left for either of us now but to make the best of the fate we have embraced. Our lot may not be a cloudless one, but at least we can try to live together in unity and peace."

She raised her head and said:

"After such a demonstration as this, I have no right to refuse. I am weak as water where you are concerned, Walter, and I concede to you what I lately deemed impossible. You may break my heart as has been foretold, but it must cling to you or perish."

Col. Thorne softly left the room, and with a sense of triumph Walter felt that his battle was won. Whether he would come off conqueror in those that still remained to be fought, the future alone could determine. He glossed over his abrupt departure and prolonged silence as well as was possible, and Agnes, willing to be deceived, listened to his excuses and tried to believe them.

Thorne did not tell her that his father almost forced him to join in the search for her; that motives of self-interest swayed him; for Col. Thorne held the mortgage on Willow Glen, and upon it had been discovered

a coal mine that was found to be very valuable. The old man had closed the mortgage, taken possession of the property, and offered it to his son as the price of a perfect reconciliation with his wife.

Agnes was strong enough to travel, and preparations for an immediate departure were made. Col. Thorne and his son had their own carriage, and the pale invalid well wrapped up, was tenderly placed on the back seat, after taking a kind leave of Mrs. Jones, whose broad face beamed with satisfaction at the result of the interview between the estranged husband and wife.

She leaned into the carriage and oracularly said:

"It's all for the best, ma'am. If a married woman can't find happiness with her good man, she aint likely to find it anywhere else in this vale of tears."

"I believe you are right, Mrs. Jones, and therefore I return to my duty as a wife, and I shall never forget how good you were to me, and I hope you will remember me kindly."

"No fear about that, ma'am. I shall not forget how patient you've been, nor how liberal with your money. I'm paid three times over what I did for you. Keep a stout heart, and you and your handsome husband will get along as well as most married folks do."

They shook hands cordially, the gentlemen took their places on the front seat, and Walter took the reins.

It was a bright and balmy day, and Agnes felt new life and hope revive within her with every passing hour. On the following evening they arrived at Thornhill, over which she was enstalled as mistress, and for a few weeks all went on smoothly enough. Her father-in-

law's stay with them was brief, for he had already been inaugurated as governor of the State, and could not linger long in his old home.

As long as Col. Thorne remained, the conduct of Walter toward his wife was kind and considerate, but as soon as they were left alone, he showed the utmost indifference to her, at times verging almost on contempt; for Thorne could not deny himself the pleasure of proving to his wife that he had not forgotten her bitter words, and did not intend to forgive them.

He considered himself wronged of his freedom, and despised Agnes for the very love that brought her back to his arms. When a daughter was given to them, he showed no fondness for the child, and the link that should have bound them more closely together, became an additional cause of bitterness and discord.

Agnes, with all her natural pride, and fire, resented not only the treatment she received at her husband's hands, but the utter indifference he manifested to her helpless little one, because it was *her* child.

She looked forward to a long visit to Harrisburg as an agreeable change in the unhappy life they led together, but fate denied her even that. A sudden, and brief illness deprived her of the best friend she had, in the person of the ambitious Governor, and Thorne became the undisputed possessor of his father's wealth, and the ruthless master of her life.

Agnes would not leave him now, for she would never be separated from her child, and she knew that little as Thorne cared for her darling May, he would never permit her to be removed from beneath his roof.

So the years passed on—she had her nursery—her husband, his studio, and they never sought each other in confidence, or affection.

When the tedium of his home became too oppressive, Walter Thorne left it for weeks, or months, as the whim seized him, and his wife soon learned to consider these seasons of absence the only quiet and peaceful ones she enjoyed. She had but one friend. Ada Digby pitied the terrible mistake both had made, but her sympathies were given to the woman whose fate had been wrecked through her unappreciated affection for a hard and ungrateful man.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### CLAIRE'S RETURN.

ON a warm evening in April, Mrs. Courtney was sitting in her own room, looking over papers, and arranging them before going on the long journey that lay before her.

The preparations for embarking in the early part of May were nearly completed. Her son was at home, but he was restless and unhappy, and she feared the disappointment he had met would exert an unfavorable effect upon his future life. On Andrew's return to the Grange, his first inquiry was after Claire, and when told that she had not been heard from, he declared that he would go in pursuit of the man who had stolen her away, and if he had wronged her in any manner, he would exact a fearful expiation from him.

His mother used all her influence to detain him near her, and finally extorted from him a promise that he would wait till within two weeks of the time appointed for their embarkation before seeking Claire. Then, if

no news from her came, he might make inquiries in person, and satisfy himself as to the fate she had met.

As the days and weeks passed on, bringing no letters from Claire, Mrs. Courtney also became very anxious to ascertain something of her god-child, and she felt as unwilling as Andrew to go so far away without satisfying herself as to her actual condition.

The last evening of the stipulated time arrived; her son had gone over to the post-office himself, and she was anxiously listening for his return in the hope that he would bring a letter for her from the absent one.

At length she heard his step upon the piazza, and laying down the paper she had been looking over, she glanced eagerly toward the door. Andrew came in, frowning heavily and throwing his riding-whip upon the floor, angrily said:

"It is the last day of grace, and there is nothing for you. Not a line—not a word to the friends who would have stood by her through everything. Claire is not ungrateful—I maintain that, though she did elope from your protection; and if she had anything good to tell, she would have written long ago. I know that the wretch she trusted has blasted her life, or broken her heart. For either he shall dearly pay, I swear it. I will go in pursuit of him to-morrow; it is now more than six months since she left the Grange, and it is high time that somebody interested in her fate should be looking after her. I can act the part of her brother, if a nearer and dearer relationship was denied me."

His mother reluctantly replied:

"I suppose that no other course is now left. I am very anxious about the poor girl myself; but, Andrew, I am afraid that sending such a fire-brand as you in

pursuit of her, is not the wisest plan I could adopt. I think it will be best for us to travel together to L—, and if Claire has been badly treated, I can stand her friend better than you. We can go on from there to New York in time to embark on the India. She sails on the eleventh of May, and we have ample time to discover what has become of my poor child."

"Suppose he has murdered her," said Andrew, with dilating eyes. "I have read of such things, and her incomprehensible silence gives us license to think the worst. Such an unmitigated scoundrel as I believe this Thorne to be, would he capable of anything."

"Yes—anything *short* of murder," said a voice that startled both mother and son. Andrew started from the seat on which he had thrown himself, and rushed toward the open door.

There, standing in the shadow, was the worn and weary phantom of the bright sylph who had fled from the shelter of that roof a few brief months before. The light of childhood had faded from her brow, its smiles from her lips, and she appeared ten years older than when they had looked upon her.

Claire came forward with languid steps, knelt before Mrs. Courtney, and burying her face in her dress, in a voice sharpened by anguish, cried out:

"I have come back, desolate and broken hearted, to the sole friend I can claim on earth; and if you refuse to receive me, there is nothing left for me but to die. Oh, mamma! I am the most wretched of women!"

Mrs. Courtney lifted her in her arms, caressed her tenderly, and wept some bitter tears over her. She softly said:

"You were right to come to me in your trouble,

Claire, and the promise I made your father shall be sacredly fulfilled. But where is your husband? Why are you alone? and how is it that I have not been kept informed of what happened to you?"

"I had nothing good to tell you—nothing save humiliation and anguish worse than death. Look at my face, my hands, do they not show you that I have struggled with illness that brought me almost to the verge of the grave? The man for whom I forsook you, cast me off, he broke the feeble link that bound him to me, and gave his hand to another girl to whom he had been betrothed before he came hither. His father, a hard, stern man, refused to acknowledge the penniless bride Walter had found for himself, and I was ignominiously turned from his house. Had my husband been true to me, he would have been disinherited. He weighed me in the balance against his father's gold, and that preponderated."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Andrew, through his closed teeth. "How dared he wreck the life he had promised to cherish and make happy? Claire, you shall be avenged. The coward thought you had no friend to stand by you, but I, boy as I am, I will bring him to an account for his baseness!"

She turned toward him with an expression of dreary calmness, and said:

"No, Andrew, that must not be. I thank you for the interest you manifest in my fate, but it is settled now, and a duel with Mr. Thorne could not do me any good. The day will come—*shall* come, in which I will repay him with interest, for every pang he has made me suffer. I can live on till that time arrives, preparing myself for the part I shall have to play."

"I consent on one condition," replied Andrew, gloomily: "and that is, that I shall be permitted to aid you in bringing retribution to this man who has so irreparably injured you."

Claire paused a moment, and then said:

"Perhaps I may need you—if so, I will call on you."

"Oh, my children, what compact is that you are making?" cried Mrs. Courtney in alarm. "Forgive, as you hope to be forgiven, is the Christian law, and you both must learn to abide by it."

Claire turned from Andrew, and in tones of pathetic entreaty said:

"Oh, mamma, take me in your arms again; let me feel that I have a shelter on the tender heart that watched over my childhood, and softer feelings may come to me. I treated you very badly, but I have been bitterly punished—how bitterly, God and my own heart alone know."

Mrs. Courtney again clasped her to her breast, and tenderly said:

"I forgive you, my child. I receive you back as a gift from Heaven, for I have sadly missed you. We will go far from this country; in new scenes, you shall forget this sad episode in your life, and yet be happy."

Claire shivered, and mournfully replied:

"That is a word that henceforth has no meaning for me. But I can live on without it, cherishing the purpose that has given me courage to face the desolation of my lot. Oh, mamma, I am no longer the bright, pure spirit I once was. Fallen—fallen is my nature, and I can make no effort to exorcise the demon which ever whispers that vengeance on that false man may yet be mine."

"Hush, hush, my dear Claire; this is madness. In time, your mind will regain its true tone, and with a return of tranquillity, the evil promptings will cease. No man, and still less woman, should arrogate the right of Deity to punish wrong. Quiet your agitation, and try and tell me all that has happened to you since we parted."

Claire sat down beside her friend, shook aside the short curls with which her head was covered, and after a pause to collect her thoughts, commenced from the night of the flight from the Grange, and told all she could remember of her painful experience. She ended by saying:

"I should have come back to you as soon as I was strong enough to travel, but the kind friend who received me, would not permit me to leave her house while the winter lasted. She wished me to remain with her altogether, but that was impossible. Only with the friend of my childhood, could I hope for peace. I left Miss Digby's house at last, without her knowledge, for she always had some excuse for detaining me, and I feared you would be gone, if I tarried longer with her. On the way hither, I stopped at a country tavern, because I was too weak to travel through the night. I there found my rival, deserted like myself, in the first weeks of her marriage. Walter Thorne obeyed his father's commands to the letter, but broke them in the spirit, for his last wife was traveling alone to L——, when she fell ill on the way, and he was, Heaven knows where, amusing himself. I saw her, spoke with her, and I pitied her, for she loves him, and he, in spite of his conduct to me, I know he loves *me*."



"My dear Claire, rid yourself of that idea, for Mr. Thorne loves no one but himself. Without remorse he has sacrificed both you and her, but you are more fortunate than she is, you are freed from him. Do not delude yourself with the belief that this man ever truly loved you."

Claire almost passionately cried :

"It is no delusion! He made one little month of my life a dream of Heaven! He is hard, unprincipled, and as you say, supremely selfish, but such heart as he has, is mine—all mine, and on that certainty I base my hopes of retribution. I will not give it up, for it is all I have to live for. Take that hope from me, and I shall perish."

Her eyes flashed, her pale cheeks flushed, and Mrs. Courtney soothingly said :

"We will not speak any more of that at present. Finish your recital, my dear ; who brought you hither to-night, and how came Andrew to miss you, for he has just returned from the post-office."

"I came in the coach to S——, and walked on here ; I saw Andrew as he passed through the woodland, but I concealed myself, as I wished to meet you before speaking with him."

"You came alone four miles through the forest, and at night too! You who were once afraid to go through the house after dark."

"It is my lot to go alone now. I know that henceforth I must suffice to myself. I was not afraid in the woodland, because I felt that there the great spirit of nature was around me as a protecting presence. Houses are sometimes haunted by evil spirits, but forests never that I have heard of. The only phantoms that crossed

my path to-night, were the memories of that fatal one in which I left the safe shelter of this roof, and went forth with one unworthy of belief or trust. Oh mamma! you are very good to take me back again, but I hope that I shall not long be a burden to you."

Mrs. Courtney regarded her with surprise.

"What can you mean, Claire? I hope you are not already maturing another plan to desert me?"

"If I am, it is not to return to my recreant husband, for he *is* my husband, in spite of the decree that annulled our union. Our church does not sanction divorce, and I am Walter's lawful wife, though that other poor victim will bear all his harshness and indifference in the belief that it is her duty to do so. Let me tell you my plans, mamma, and I am sure that you will sanction them. You are aware that my father left a son in France, who is a middle-aged man now. He is rich, though he left us to live in poverty, but I do not think that was altogether Armand's fault. I shall appeal to him to do a brother's part by me ; take me to France with you, where I shall probably find one both able and willing to provide for me."

Mrs. Courtney was silent a few moments ; she then said, with a glance toward her son, who had been an eager listener to this conversation,

"I know something of your brother, and we will settle about this at some future day. But, is it possible that Mr. Thorne has been base enough to cast you off, without affording the means of living independently of others, to one he has so irreparably injured?"

Claire drew her slight form up with a movement of superb disdain.

"Compensation in *money* was offered by his father,

for Walter has nothing of his own ; but I refused it I would sooner toil for my daily bread, than be indebted for it to the man who so cruelly insulted me ; who sent me from his house as if I had been a leper whose presence infected its atmosphere. When I enter it again, it will be to put my foot upon the neck of him who permitted me to be so ignominiously thrust from the home of which I should now be mistress."

With fiery impulsiveness Andrew here broke in :

"You were right, Claire, to refuse his money. Like fairy gold, it would have brought a curse with it. But do not speak or think of ever going back to the house from which you were spurned. You have a better one always open to you, with true hearts in it, who will do their best to render you at least contented. Only let me do something for you. Let me prove by my actions how ready I am to do battle in your cause. I will go to L——, find this man, and make him answer for his baseness."

Claire turned towards him, and grasped his hand.

"Dear Andrew, you are a true cavalier, and I thank and honor you. But for me no risk must be run ; no blood shall be shed on my account, and if you were to seek Walter Thorne, that would surely follow your meeting. Leave me to work out my own plans ; the blood I refuse to allow to flow in expiation of my wrongs, shall yet be wrung from his heart in drops of bitterness. My hand alone shall strike the blow that shall reach him ; you are but a boy, and I will never consent to embroil you with the wretch who has destroyed my youth, and made my life desolate."

While she thus spoke, Claire looked so wild and fierce, that Mrs. Courtney was firmly impressed with

the belief that her mind had not entirely recovered from the shock of her desertion. She gently said :

"You need repose, Claire. Come with me to your old room, no one has occupied it since you went away. I will order some refreshments sent up to you, before you retire."

"Yes—I am very weary, but I do not need food, I took supper at S——, and by this time it is known through the village that I have returned alone. It is well that we are going away, for I could not live here in the future. Good night, Andrew ; I shall not forget that you would have avenged my broken life, but *that* species of retribution would not suit my purpose."

The ardent youth took the hand she held out to him, and pressed it so fervently to his lips, that she suddenly withdrew it, and proudly said :

"Do not be too demonstrative to a wedded wife, Andrew. Remember that, in my own eyes, I am that, though I have permitted my husband to put another in my place. I am helpless now to right myself, but it will not always be so. Good night."

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CLAIRE AT HOME.

CLAIRE left the room with her friend, and half an hour later, Mrs. Courtney returned to find her son pacing the floor like a madman. He turned fiercely upon her, and rapidly said :

Claire cannot mean it ; she will never be so silly as

to cling to the absurd idea of bringing retribution to a man who is unworthy of a single thought! Oh, mother! to have her back with us on any terms, is happiness to me. We must win her to forget him, and be to us what she formerly was."

"If you ask for nothing *more* than that, my son, I think we may succeed," replied his mother. "The poor child has endured more than the bitterness of death; and knowing how deeply she has suffered, I forgive her for her treatment to myself. I will do all that is possible to restore her to her former brightness of heart; but to you she can never be more than a sister."

"Why not? If I can make her love me, I will marry her, in spite of every argument against it. I am my own master—or, at least I shall be when I am twenty-one—and I shall then use my freedom as I choose."

"My dear Andrew, you are cheating yourself with a fatal delusion. Claire will never give up the wild hope of yet compelling Walter Thorne to acknowledge her before the world as his wife. I fully understand that from her strange words. I fear that her mind is warped; but she has always shown singular tenacity of purpose, and you nor any other man will be able to induce her to abjure the phantom she is bent on pursuing, and accept in its place the love of an honest heart."

"We shall see," he moodily replied. "If I thought this Thorne would be always in my path, I would seek him out at once, and slay him with my own hand. He merits such a fate if man ever did."

"That course would scarcely serve your cause with

Claire," said Mrs. Courtney coldly. "You seem very ready to fasten on yourself a life-long remorse, and speak of taking a human life as calmly as if the law of God does not forbid it. I regret to see that all my teachings have produced so little fruit."

"But this man is unworthy to live! It would be doing good service to mankind, to blot out from among them such an ingrate as he has proved himself," cried Andrew impetuously.

"That may be, but it is not *you* who have the right to sit up in judgment upon him, and then proceed to execute the sentence you have yourself pronounced against him. Besides, Claire would never forgive you, if you undertook to redress her wrongs in that way."

Andrew angrily exclaimed:

"Then she cares for him still! If she hates him as her words implied, she would thank and reward the man who took up her cause and avenged it."

His mother gently replied:

"The human heart is difficult of comprehension; but, if I read Claire's aright, there is beneath all its bitterness a delusive hope that a day of reunion will come between herself and Walter Thorne. That is the only consolation she has now; judge then how little she would thank you for interfering between them in any way."

"But she must put aside so wild a notion; she must forget him, or think of him only with contempt and aversion. How can she cling to a man who has so ruthlessly crushed her? Mother, Claire shall yet turn from him to me; I swear it, and I will not be baffled."

"Andrew, you make the path before me a very diffi-

cult one. You will force me to regret having again received Claire under my protection. If you were not going to Heidelberg to remain two years, I would not take her to Europe with me at all. As it is, when I get to Paris, I shall either surrender her at once to the care of her brother, or place her in a pension to complete her imperfect education."

"You will do the last, mother, for Claire is your god-child, and you are responsible for her. You will never give her up to this brother of hers till you know something of his character. From his treatment of her father, I should say that he is unworthy to be trusted with his sister. Poor Claire seems to be doubly cursed, with a worthless husband and a heartless brother. Did M. Lapierre never explain to you how it was that he had a son in France, the possessor of wealth, while he drudged on here to the last, for the small sum you annually paid him."

"He spoke of him to me, a few days before his death, and I think it must have been some presentiment of his approaching fate that induced him to do so. He stated that M. Latour and himself had some business difficulties, which ended in an open rupture: for he had taken his son into partnership in the banking house, of which he was the head."

"Why do you call him Latour? Was not his name the same as his father's?"

"His mother was noble, and he chose to assume her name when he took possession of the estate he inherited from her. Such things are of frequent occurrence in Europe."

"A precious specimen he must be! Yet you are thinking of making him the guardian of his disowned sister."

"M. Latour has not disowned Claire, for I scarcely think he is aware of her existence. His father held no communication with him for many years before his death; and I believe it even possible that the son was never informed of his second marriage. He told me that if anything happened to himself, he wished me to take Claire with me to Europe, find her brother, and with the assistance of papers he left behind him, establish her claim to the sum of forty thousand francs, with the interest that has accumulated on that sum in the last eighteen years."

"And with that money due to him, M. Lapierre vegetated here, and never claimed it! What a queer old creature he must have been!"

"My son, do not speak so lightly of so noble and high-toned a man as your old tutor was. I do not understand the details of the case, and I think M. Lapierre was a very resentful man, but he made it clear to me that Claire had a just claim upon her brother, which I shall certainly put forward."

"But the old man did not tell you to give his daughter up to the tender mercies of this affectionate and dutiful son?" asked Andrew, bitterly. "As to myself, I would sooner see Claire thrown into the arena with wild beasts than surrendered to such a man as this Latour must be. His own father abandoned his native land sooner than dwell on the same soil with him, and I am sure there must have existed a bitter and irreconcilable feud between them, nearly as they were related."

"I have no wish to part from Claire myself, but you may render it necessary for me to do so. If you dread the thought of placing her under the care of her natu-

ral protector, you must put a curb upon yourself, and give me no cause of uneasiness on your account. My first duty is to my own children; after performing that, I will do the best I can for the unfortunate girl who has again returned to me. If you are really her friend, you will bury this mad passion in oblivion and learn to regard Claire only as a dear and cherished sister."

"As if that were possible! Preaching is of no use, mother—I shall love Claire to the end, as I have loved her since I could remember anything. But I will try and do nothing to frighten you into throwing her into the power of her brother. I hope that you will not be able to find him, nor do I wish Claire to accept money from him. You are rich enough to give her as much as Latour owes her, and neither Julia nor I would object."

Mrs. Courtney smiled faintly.

"I dare say not, but I have a promise to fulfil which was made to the dead. M. Latour will not be difficult to find, for he still has business connections in Paris. He is not an acting partner, but a large portion of his fortune is embarked in the banking-house of Latour & Co."

"Why, how did you find out all this, mother?"

"I wrote to a friend in Paris immediately after M. Lapierre's death, to ascertain what chance there is to obtain justice for Claire. The reply came two months ago, but as she was gone I said nothing about it."

"Is Latour married?"

"He has no wife, but when in Paris he keeps up an elegant establishment. He is supposed to be very rich, but he wastes money in various ways, and no one can tell how long his resources may last."

"Umph! a spendthrift—a defaulter—a bad son! A charming relative to claim, upon my word! I think it will be better for all concerned to let this man rest in the shade; no good can come to any of us from allowing him to know in what relation he stands to Claire."

"It is too late for such a course as that. Claire understands her claim upon him, and from her words to-night I think she intends to enforce it, if necessary. I have no right to ask her to forego it; and, after all, M. Latour is her brother. We have no power to withhold her from him, if he asks her to go to him, and she consents."

"She will never do that, after all your kindness to her."

"She will certainly do it, if you attempt to breathe into her ears a hint of your insane passion for her. Claire is a willful and impulsive creature, and no one can tell what she may do in a moment of excitement. God help you both! for you are alike in some respects and most unfitted to bear the burden of life together, even if she would listen to your warning."

"She *shall* listen to it yet, and give back love for love," he muttered under his breath; but he added aloud, "Good night, mother! I think I have listened to enough wisdom for one lesson. You mean kindly, I know; but I am afraid I am not as grateful as I should be. I will promise to be on my good behavior on our voyage, and I have too much to occupy me before it begins, to waste much time in thinking of Claire."

He kissed her forehead lightly, took up his candle and went to his own room.

Mrs. Courtney sat late over her accounts, but her thoughts were not with them. At length she put them

away, and slowly moved toward her own apartment. She could not refuse the deepest sympathy to the forlorn creature who had thrown herself on her compassion, but she had not quite forgotten or forgiven the wilful disobedience which had resulted so fatally to Claire herself. If she had not followed the bent of her own will, how different a fate might have been hers! Under the fostering care of her maternal friend she would have developed into sweet and gracious womanhood; in time the fervent love of Andrew might have won its reward, and the course of her life have been comparatively smooth.

Andrew had his faults of temperament and character, but they were trifling in comparison with those of the man Claire had so implicitly trusted, only to have her heart broken and her pride trampled in the dust. Mrs. Courtney shuddered as she thought of what results might follow this too early initiation into the harshest realities of life for one so brilliantly endowed with beauty, intellect and passion.

That Claire would not remain passive under the humiliation and suffering that brought to the surface all that was evil in her nature, she felt assured. Into what it might culminate who could tell? And her son, the darling of her life, had set his heart upon this wayward, unattainable creature, this young leopardess, who only veiled her claws till the opportunity for a fatal spring upon her enemy should be possible.

Mrs. Courtney might be pardoned if in her heart arose the wish that it might be possible to shift the responsibility of such a fire-spirit upon the brother on whom she possessed the strongest claim.

It was late before she slept, but she was aroused at

an early hour by the rapturous exclamation of her little girl over the return of her dearest Claire. Julia rushed into her mother's chamber, crying:

"Oh, mamma—mamma, Claire has come back; but something is the matter with her! She don't laugh and frolic with me as she used to. She took me in her arms and cried over me, but I was glad to see her back for all that. Mammy Betty is here, and I thought she would have gone crazy with joy when she saw Claire again. But where has she been all this time, and where is Mr. Thorne? I thought he was coming back with her?"

Mrs. Courtney looked down on the eager face of the child. She sadly replied:

"You must not speak of him, Julia—he is dead to Claire now."

"Dead, mamma! then no wonder she cried. Oh, I am sorry for her—shan't I tell her how sorry I am?"

"No, my love; that would only distress her more. You must never mention Mr. Thorne's name to her."

"But, mamma, you talk of my papa—and even like to do it—and he is dead, too."

"But my dear, Claire and I are not alike. I have been alone many years; but with her it is a new and very bitter grief. Don't ask her any questions, Julia. I am sure you will not when I tell you that it will be unkind to do so."

"Well, I'll be good then, and not tease her—only I hope she won't cry over me much. I had much rather she would romp and play with me as she used to before Mr. Thorne came. Oh, mamma, he looked so strong and handsome. Does God take young people like him away, too? I thought only old people are apt to die?"



"My dear, did not Sally's baby die when it was but a few months old?"

"Y-e-s; but then it was such a little thing, and I heard you say she let it die because she didn't attend to it. Claire wouldn't let Mr. Thorne die that way, I know."

Her mother scarcely knew what reply to give to this, but suddenly the voice of Claire spoke through the half-open door:

"Come with me, Julia, and give mamma time to dress. Let us visit poor old Carlo's grave—you promised to show it to me."

The child sprang away, and her mother heard her talking busily as the two crossed the hall and went forth into the yard.

The faithful old dog had been buried near a clump of shrubbery that stood on a little knoll in the rear of the house, and Julia had induced her brother to carve out a wooden board and place it at the head of his small grave. Andrew had cut the name of "Carlo" in large letters; and beneath it, in tiny characters, were the words:

"A faithful friend—slain by the treacherous hand of one we trusted."

As Claire stooped over to read the inscription, Andrew joined them. Before he could utter the salutations of the morning, she raised her head, and with flashing eyes, pointed to his work, as she haughtily asked:

"Does that refer to *me*? You carved those words, and you knew nothing of *him*. How dared you suppose me capable of hurting poor old Carlo?"

With fire equal to her own, he replied:

"The dog was in your way, and he was poisoned.

Was not the inference a just one, that you had, at least, been privy to his destruction?"

"Oh, brother, don't say that," cried Julia, "for you know that Claire would never have hurt even a hair on poor old Carlo."

Andrew's ungovernable temper was aroused by the anger glare in Claire's eyes, as she fixed them upon him, and he defiantly replied:

"I don't know that at all. She wounded my mother to the heart by eloping with a man she knew little enough about, and she struck a mortal blow at mine by giving herself to him. Yes; you know what you were to me," he passionately went on,—“You have always known it, yet you forsook those that loved and cared for you, to go off with a man who has rewarded you with a worse fate than was given to the poor old dog.”

Claire covered her face with her hands, and burst in tears. Julia pulled at her brother's hand, and whispered:

"Oh, brother, how could you talk to her of Mr. Thorne. He is dead, you know, and Rosebud is sorry about him."

"I would to God he were dead," muttered Andrew, as he approached nearer to Claire, and tried to speak in a gentler tone.

"Don't mind me, Claire; you know my temper always gets the better of me. I don't believe that *you* put Carlo out of the way, or that you even knew anything about it. The same ruthless hand that has crushed you, gave him the deadly drug that killed him. There—forgive me—let us be friends again."

She raised her face, pale with the conflict of passions that rent her heart, and said:

"On two conditions I will forgive you. They are, that you never again refer to my wretched past; that you respect my position sufficiently to refrain from any allusion to the affection you profess for me. In the church yonder, I plighted the vows that shall be binding on me, if they have been broken by him who pledged his in return. I am a forsaken wife, but still a *wife*; remember that, through all our future intercourse with each other, or we shall cease to be friends."

She walked away with the proud bearing of an insulted queen, and Andrew stood looking darkly after her, internally raging at the words she had just uttered. He clenched his hands, and muttered:

"We shall see. Haughty as you are, you shall bend to me yet, and accept the love I will make *necessary* to you. I will win you in spite of yourself."

With terrified eyes, Julia looked up in his excited face, and then slowly asked:

"Why do you look so angry, brother? and what did Claire mean? I don't know why you should quarrel with each other, and she just come back too. I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to make her cry as she did."

"Babies like you have no right to think about anything," he roughly answered. "You can't understand affairs; but you are not to tell mother of what has happened here. Do you hear that, Julia?"

"Oh, yes, I hear plainly enough," replied the little lady, offended in her turn, and she was moving away, when Andrew caught her by the arm, and bending over her, significantly said:

"You had better heed my words, too, Julia. I am not trying to threaten you, child, but mother would

only be annoyed to know that Claire and I have had a quarrel, and it will be best not to tell her of it."

"Then I won't tell, for I don't want to trouble her. Let my arm go—I must go to Claire, and try to make up for your crossness."

Andrew permitted her to leave him, and half an hour later, the four met at the breakfast table. Claire, whose vivacity and grace had once been its ornaments, sat like a sorrowful phantom beside it; she made an effort to talk, but soon relapsed into vague silence, and the delicate viands placed before her seemed to offer no temptation to her appetite.

Andrew lowered like a thunder cloud ready to break into electric flashes, and but for Mrs. Courtney's deep compassion for the unhappy girl, she would have bitterly regretted the necessity that brought Claire again beneath her roof, and threw her in daily contact with her son. She felt her inability to cure Andrew in any way, for his fiery will, and headlong temper had, even in childhood, been beyond her control; now, it was hopeless to do more than influence him when he was in a tractable mood.

When the meal was over, he followed his mother to her morning room, and curtly said:

"I am going away to-day, and I will be glad if you will have my things packed. I am not willing to stay any longer in as gloomy a dungeon as this house is, since all the joy and life went out of it with Claire's brightness. I would as soon eat 'funeral baked meats,' as sit at the table with her again till she becomes more like her old self."

Mrs. Courtney was glad of any respite from his moodiness, and she quickly replied:

"It is the best thing you can do, my son. You can make a parting visit to your cousins in Lynchburg, and return here in time to escort us to New York. With the assistance of my lawyer and overseer, everything can be settled to my satisfaction, without troubling you at all."

So much the better, for I am sick of the monotony of this place, and I need a change. I have but one charge to give you, mother, and that is, to impress on Claire that *you* are the one to protect her, and not this unknown brother of hers."

"Let the future take care of itself, Andrew," said his mother, impressively. "I shall do the best by Claire that is consistent with the higher duty I owe to you."

"Oh, bosh! She's cut me twice already about her fantastic notion that she's bound to Thorne, whether he is to her or not; and I am going away to try and forget all about her. I'll see if my cousin Emma has grown into as pretty a girl as she promised to become, and maybe, I shall console myself with her."

"I only hope that you are in earnest, Andrew, for Emma possesses the qualities you will need in a wife when you are old enough to take one. She is gentle and yielding, and she would be to you what I was to the father you so strikingly resemble—a spirit of peace."

Andrew regarded her a moment in silence, and then more gently said:

"It is hard on you, mother, to have a second edition of so passionate a man as my father was, to deal with. I remember his fiery and impulsive temper very well, but you bore it all like an angel, and made him happy

in spite of his own shortcomings. I will make an effort to do what will please you, but I have many doubts as to my success."

"Only try in good faith, Andrew, and the result will be all that I could wish," replied Mrs. Courtney, with a sigh. "If I possessed with you the same influence I once wielded over your father, all would be well. But I fear you think it manly to rebel against your mother's authority, and set her wishes at defiance."

He blushed scarlet, and frankly said:

"Perhaps there is some such silly feeling in my heart, but indeed, mother, I have the highest respect for you, and I earnestly wish to remove from you your present cause of uneasiness—therefore I am going away."

"Thank you for that concession, my son," and she kissed him tenderly. "Put from yourself all thoughts of Claire—regard her as utterly beyond your reach, and you will soon gain a victory over your passion for her."

"Perhaps so," was the vague response: "I can but try at all events. I am going now to order my horse, and I shall take Cæsar with me to bring him back from S—. I shall be sure to be back in time to accompany you to New York."

Thus it was settled, and Andrew set out on his journey. After he was gone, Mrs. Courtney pursued her preparations for departure with a lighter heart; Claire endeavored to render herself useful to her, and in the active occupation of the following days, she grew to be something like her old self.

Her health became stronger, and her spirits began to revive, though at times she was plunged into the deepest gloom from which nothing could arouse her.

At such seasons she roamed alone about the place, occasionally extending her rambles as far as the old ruins, in which she and her father had lived together. But these visits made her more gloomy than before, so she gradually confined her walks to the domain around the Grange.

Yet every spot about the grounds was filled with memories of Thorne, and if she had wished it, she could not have escaped from that enthralling past. But she did not wish it; to him all her thoughts turned;—to find the means of reaching him, and repaying him for the ruin of her young life, was her one absorbing dream, and soon it became the master passion of her undisciplined soul.

The further adventures of the heroine in "THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE" will be found related in the sequel to this work, just published, under the title of "THE DISCARDED WIFE; or, WILL SHE SUCCEED."

THE END.