

THE  
GIPSY'S WARNING.

BY

MISS ELIZA A. DUPUY.

AUTHOR OF "ALL FOR LOVE," "THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST," "WAS HE GUILTY,"  
"WHY DID HE MARRY HER," "THE CANCELLED WILL," "MICHAEL RUDOLPH,"  
"THE PLANTER'S DAUGHTER," "WHO SHALL BE VICTOR," ETC., ETC.

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*"The Gipsy's Warning" is a story of Monmouth's Rebellion, but there is far more of Love than of War in it. A brief, yet graphic picture of the terrors of that awful period in English history is given, but they are only incidental to the main story, the interest of which centers in a single family. The old baronet, his unscrupulous son, and the lovely girl, led while yet a child into the union which proves the terror of her life, are vividly, and clearly portrayed. The revengeful Gipsy and her son, the wild-hearted Sylvia, all contribute to the working out of a terrible retribution to the heartless man who cares only for himself, and his own interests. It is a charming love story, full of action, with not a page in it one would be tempted to skip.*  
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## P R E F A C E .

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Not many years since, a concealed room was discovered by an architect employed to make some alterations in an old English mansion. In it were found rich furniture, jewels heaped up on the dressing table, and on the sumptuous bed lay two skeletons, both supposed to have perished by violence.

That statement was the nucleus of the following story.

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## THE GIPSY'S WARNING.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A PROUD AND RUINED OLD HOUSE.

It was a stately mansion of the olden time, surrounded by trees coeval with its origin. The Priory had been built before the days of Henry VIII., and among other church property had been confiscated and bestowed upon one of the retainers of the court.

Finding the original building inconvenient as a private residence, Sir Henry Methurn added a new wing to it in the Tudor style of architecture, and the apartments in the older portion of the building were suffered to fall into partial decay.

The immense pile presented a rather incongruous appearance; but the lapse of time had imparted an air of sombre grandeur to its dilapidated walls which accorded with the deep shadows cast by the unpruned trees, and the neglected park over which the underwood was permitted to spring in unchecked luxuriance.

The evening sun penetrated through an open door into a wide hall paneled with oak, and decorated with faded banners and ancient armor. A grand staircase wound upward from this, at the head of which was a large window filled



with painted glass representing a scriptural scene, executed in a style of art unknown in England at that day.

This window had once formed a portion of the decoration of the chapel, and by the command of the new lord of the domain it had been removed to the more modern portion of the building.

Doors opened on either hand into the apartments used by the family; but these comprised but a small portion of the mansion, for the fortunes of the house of Methurn had fallen into decay, and of the wide lands granted to Sir Henry his great-grandson retained but a moiety. This was partly due to the civil war under Charles I., in which the lord of the Priory had adhered to the royal cause, partly to the habits of extravagance in which the successive owners of the property indulged.

The present proprietor, Sir Hugh Methurn, retained only the Priory and a few farms, which brought him in but a tithe of the income once enjoyed by his ancestors.

A large chair, heavily carved, was drawn near the open door, in which sat the burly form of the baronet. He was apparently absorbed in unpleasant thought, for his brow was clouded, and his lips unclosed at intervals to utter imprecations.

Sir Hugh Methurn was a heavy, coarse-looking man, verging toward his sixtieth year, and his bloated features betrayed the cause of the gout from which he evidently suffered, for his swollen feet were wrapped in flannel, and a crutch rested against the arm of his chair.

Few who looked upon the wreck of a once stately-looking man would have recognized the court gallant who, in the roystering days of Charles II., had figured among the most distinguished beaux of that dissolute period. Foremost among the most reckless of the merry monarch's court was the gay Sir Hugh Methurn, and the deepest inroads upon

his inheritance were made in those days of reckless folly and boundless prodigality.

When his ruin was nearly consummated, Sir Hugh retired to his paternal acres to recruit his finances and curse the extravagance of which he had been guilty. On looking into his affairs he found that the only resource to avert absolute ruin was a wealthy marriage. The hey-day of youth was past, but Sir Hugh was still a fine-looking man, with the polished address of a finished courtier with which to veil the inherent coarseness of his nature and the violence of his temper.

Devoured with ennui in his secluded home, he sought such diversion as the society of the neighborhood afforded, and, in spite of the reputation which had preceded him, he was graciously received by every family in which unmarried daughters were found. Quite a rivalry ensued between the young ladies of the neighborhood as to which one should bear the title of Lady Methurn, and this doubtful honor was finally bestowed upon an orphan heiress whose fortune was entirely within her own control. Sir Hugh made such inquiries as satisfied him as to the exact amount possessed by Miss Vernor and the manner in which it was invested. She had inherited thirty thousand pounds, which at that day was considered a magnificent dowry.

Sir Hugh decided that with her beauty and fortune Arrabella Vernor was worthy to become his wife, and he so successfully played the part of the tender wooer that within three months from their first meeting she became Lady Methurn.

The union proved wretchedly unhappy. The young bride was spirited and haughty; she was perfectly conscious of what was due to her as the possessor of a large fortune and the wife of an English baronet; but the exacting and imperious temper of her husband led him to treat her only as a

superior menial in his household rather than as its lawful mistress.

Lady Methurn soon recoiled from her husband with all the strength of a passionate nature; she bitterly resented the treatment she received; but the hard and cold nature with which she had to deal crushed her into submission, and her proud heart broke beneath the indignities to which she was subjected.

In the first year of their union a son was born, and a few months afterward Lady Methurn suddenly died under very mysterious circumstances. She had no near relations to inquire into the causes of her death, and although many wild stories were whispered in the neighborhood, no one ventured openly to accuse Sir Hugh of having made away with his wife.

Satisfied with his experience of married life, the baronet made no effort to assume such bonds again. The infant was put out to nurse, and Sir Hugh returned to London to resume his former course of dissipation. He no longer cared to glitter in court circles, but in gambling houses, at horse races and theatres he was always found, and the fortune obtained by his wife soon melted away as his own had done before. He thought little of the wrong he was thus inflicting upon his son, for self-indulgence was the first law of his nature, and the claims of others were held as nought where they conflicted with his own wishes.

At length his resources were exhausted, his health broken, and premature old age creeping upon him. Nothing remained to him but to return to his paternal acres and vegetate there for the remainder of his life. Sir Hugh found his son a wild untrained lad of ten summers, nominally under the care of the curate of the parish, who eked out his narrow income by receiving a few pupils; but Vernor preferred a ride after the fox hounds, or a gunning expedition, to the dull lore of books.

His father rather encouraged such preferences; he thought they indicated manliness of character, and his cold heart opened to the boy as he fancied he recognized in his wild daring and wayward spirit a strong resemblance to himself.

The gay sallies of the lad amused him, and after Sir Hugh's return to the Priory, Vernor's attendance upon his tutor was less frequent than ever. The father and son lived together, and two servants, a groom and housekeeper, formed their whole establishment. Thus Vernor might have grown into a veritable Orson, but in his fourteenth year a diversion was made in his favor by the arrival of a gentle and refined woman to act as mistress of his father's house.

Sir Hugh had an only brother, who lived on a small property inherited from his mother, which was situated in the north of England. His sudden demise left a widow and only son slenderly provided for; for Henry Methurn had embarked all his means in a speculation, the failure of which broke his heart. In his last moments he wrote an appeal to his brother to receive his widow and child beneath his roof, and assist her to educate her son for some career in which Gerald could win his bread in the future. Mrs. Methurn had a small annuity secured to her for life, but it was insufficient to enable her to live in comfort with her son.

At the first reception of this news, Sir Hugh was irate at the burden about to be imposed upon his broken fortunes, but Vernor declared that he should be glad to have a companion of his own age to share his sports; he insisted that their household would be better managed by his aunt than by the old woman who performed the double duties of cook and housekeeper.

Sir Hugh reflected that Mrs. Methurn would not be absolutely dependent upon him, and with less reluctance the letter was written which accorded permission to the widow and her son to shelter themselves beneath his roof.

They came, and the baronet soon found that he would have no cause to regret his liberality. Mrs. Methurn was a pleasing and refined woman, an accomplished nurse, and thoroughly drilled in domestic affairs. She brought with her a servant of her own, and a suit of apartments was prepared for her use. The changes she introduced in their way of living were so gradually and unostentatiously made, that Sir Hugh was scarcely conscious of them till they were accomplished. She nursed him in his attacks of gout so skillfully — bore with his outbursts of temper so patiently, that he soon wondered how he had managed to live so long without her womanly ministrations.

Her son was a quiet, retiring lad in his twelfth year, who submitted to be patronized by Vernor with an air of placid indifference, for the two cousins were as unlike in character as they were in personal appearance. The young heir, with his fair complexion, profusion of fair hair, and light, flashing blue eyes, seemed the very impersonation of the wild and daring Saxon; his fiery and impatient temper would not brook constraint, and nearly as free as the Arab of the desert he had hitherto been.

Gerald Methurn was in every respect a strong contrast to him. His complexion was dark, his eyes and hair black like those of his mother, and his features regular as those of a young Antinous. His lithe and graceful figure was perfectly proportioned, and promised in its full development a rare union of strength and symmetry. Beneath the gentleness of his manner lay impulses as strong, a will as unyielding as that of his more demonstrative cousin; but of that he was as yet himself unconscious. The influence of his mother had thus far moulded his nature, but when the trials of life came, Gerald was to show the true metal that lay beneath that fair boyish exterior.

In the second year of Mrs. Methurn's residence at the

Priory, a strange lady in bad health came to the neighboring village for the benefit of sea-bathing. She was accompanied by a little girl of very attractive appearance and great sprightliness, who was then in her sixth year. In her visits of benevolence to the cottages of the poor, Mrs. Methurn accidentally encountered the pale invalid. An acquaintance ensued which soon ripened into a warm friendship. Mrs. Clifton was dying of an incurable disease, and she soon confided to her new friend the fact that at her decease her child would be left without a protector on whom she possessed any claim of affection.

Mrs. Clifton stated that she had eloped with the younger son of a noble family; her husband had been cast off for marrying so far beneath himself, for she was the daughter of his tutor. Her father received them in his humble home, and at his death bequeathed her the savings of life, which afforded her the narrow income of eighty pounds a year. On this the young couple managed to live contentedly, for they were devoted to each other, until Mr. Clifton was drowned in a yatching expedition.

The sudden and violent shock produced the heart disease of which she was dying, and what was to be the fate of her desolate orphan after her decease she could not think without a shudder. To the suggestion of Mrs. Methurn that her father's family would probably receive the little Ethel, she replied that her husband's family had treated her with such indignity that she could not think of throwing her daughter on their protection. She sighed bitterly as she added:

"My Ethel is a little waif who will be thrown on this wide world after I am gone. Dear friend, if I could only confide her to you—once certain that your gentle, womanly heart would watch over her, I should die happy."

"If I were in my own house," replied Mrs. Methurn, "I

would not hesitate to assume the charge; but Sir Hugh is peculiar, and I am afraid that he would scarcely consent to receive the child at the Priory."

"She will not be a dependent," said the pale mother. "My small means are securely invested, and she will have enough to keep her above want. I must lose no time in seeking an asylum for her, for I feel that my time on earth is brief."

This conversation took place on the evening of a lovely summer day, and the friends parted, little dreaming that it was for the last time.

At an early hour on the following day, a messenger came in haste to the Priory, to say that Mrs. Clifton was found dead in her bed that morning, and the child was inconsolable for the loss she had sustained. Mrs. Methurn went at once to the village, and the desolate state of the little creature thus left alone in the world, touched her deeply. She saw that arrangements for a respectable funeral were made, and returned to the Priory, bringing with her the young orphan; for she justly reasoned that Sir Hugh would not object to her presence for a few days.

Coarse and ill-tempered as the baronet was, he was not quite an ogre, and the delicate beauty of the child, the deep and quiet sorrow of a creature so young, touched even his hard heart, and he submitted to her presence without making the disagreeable comments her new protectress had feared.

Mrs. Clifton was consigned to the grave, and her effects examined, to discover to whom letters should be addressed with reference to the position of the young Ethel. From these it was ascertained that Baron Clifton, of Cliffden, was her grandfather, and to him a notification of the sudden death was sent, together with a statement of where Ethel was to be found.

In due time a reply came, in which the viscount formally renounced all interest in the little girl, and refused to receive her. He stated that, on application to his man of business, fifty pounds a year would be paid for the support of the child, and requested her present protectors to find some one who would take charge of her for that sum. Beyond that he neither could nor would interest himself in her welfare; her father had been disowned for the plebeian alliance he had made, and his daughter had no claim on him beyond being provided with the bare means of living.

Several weeks had elapsed since Ethel was received at the Priory, and in that time the natural playfulness and vivacity of her temper began to revive. She betrayed no fear of Sir Hugh, and the novelty of being caressed by a lovely little fairy, and prattled to with the sweet ingenuousness of her years, became attractive to him. The two boys were charmed with her precocious intelligence, and when the fiat of her grandfather came, it was soon understood that Ethel was to remain in the asylum in which fate had cast her.

The sum which was annually paid over to Sir Hugh's order, enabled him to obtain many indulgences which he could not hitherto afford, and Ethel soon became an important member of the little family. Vernor teased, petted and tyrannized over her by turns, and his more gentle cousin undertook the part of instructor to her in such branches of education as his mother did not superintend. Ethel proved a docile and apt pupil, and her young preceptor took extreme pride in her progress.

Mrs. Methurn became tenderly attached to her protégée, and she had never regretted the adoption of this little waif. Three years had passed away since the death of Mrs. Clifton, and Ethel was now in her tenth year, Gerald Methurn sixteen, and the young heir eighteen years of age. Such was the state of affairs at the Priory at the opening of our story.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE GIPSY'S PROPHECIES.

SIR HUGH uttered several impatient growls, and then burst forth:

"Diable! am I to sit here by myself the whole evening? What has become of those young monkeys, I wonder. What can have become of Ethel, that she does not come to tell me how the Mayday has passed off. Ah! times have changed with me since I was the gayest galliard in such a scene. Dancing on the light fantastic toe wouldn't be so pleasant with these cursed old gouty feet. Ugh! why can't nature gently steal away the breath that is only drawn in pain? What is the use of an old hulk like me continuing to cumber the ground? I'm tired of life; it's a disgusting performance, this rattling through the seven ages allotted to man. I've almost come to the 'lean and slippered pantaloons,' though with me the *lean* portion will never come to pass; I know how to keep up the supplies too well for that;" and he stretched forth his hand toward a decanter that stood on the table near him. After holding it up to the light, and admiringly surveying the deep ruby tint of the wine, he poured out a goblet nearly full, and quaffed it with the true gusto of a connoisseur.

"The doctor said a thimbleful wouldn't hurt me. *His* idea of a thimbleful and mine probably differ; but I prefer my measure. Fine wine—noble wine; but Vernor shows too much fondness for it of late. I must not encourage the lad in such habits, for they have brought me to what I am. So I'll just finish the bottle before he returns. I've already exceeded bounds, and a drop more won't add much to the mischief that's already done. Why should wine, which

even the Scriptures recommend—which Christ himself manufactured out of water—be so injurious to man, I wonder? I don't believe it is; my gout is constitutional; I got it from my ancestors, with many other things that were better worth having, which have somehow slipped away from me, while this cursed inheritance hangs on, and cripples me half the time."

While he thus muttered, Sir Hugh again applied to his bottle, and poured forth the last drop, which was drained at a draught. At that moment the sound of approaching music was heard, which was soon blended with the confused murmur of voices; and peering through the open door, he saw a joyous group approaching the house. The three most prominent figures were very familiar to him, and he grunted:

"Hum! coming at last, with that pack of grinning fools at their heels! I wonder why they couldn't have finished their revels without disturbing me with all this noise and clamor?"

The door on his left hand opened, and a serene-looking woman, wearing a black robe and plain white collar, approached him. Mrs. Methurn was yet youthful-looking, and the black hair that was combed back from her broad, smooth brow was unthreaded by a line of silver. The eyes were large, dark, and singularly soft in their expression; and the quiet grace of her movements revealed the refined and gentle spirit from which they emanated. She spoke in a soft clear voice:

"Our revellers are returning; they seem in great spirits, but I am afraid it was ill-judged to bring their companions back with them. Let me entreat, Sir Hugh, that you will not damp their mirth by too severe a reprimand."

"Humph! and much they'd mind it, if I did. I've been left by myself half the day, and now they are coming back with this cursed hullabaloo to deafen me and fill me with

spleen, over the mad antics in which I can no longer join. Yes, times are changed, sadly changed, with me."

The soft eyes compassionately regarded him.

"I would have borne you company, if I had not had reason to suppose you preferred being alone. When I came you requested me to leave you to your own thoughts."

"Ordered you, you should say—yes, I am a brute—I know I am; but my infernal temper is always getting the better of me. This morning I was in one of my savage moods, but now I feel more human. The wine the doctor permitted me to take has brightened me up a little. With such tippie as this I feel as if there is still something worth living for."

The lady glanced toward the empty bottle, and said in a tone of surprise:

"You surely have not ventured to drink a whole bottle, Sir Hugh?"

"Zounds, madam, what is that trifle to a six bottle man? a mere drop—a mere nothing. Would you have me such a milk-sop as to leave the beaker undrained! Yes, I drank it all, and I think I should like more."

"But the doctor said——"

A volley of oaths burst from the choleric old man, and he exclaimed:

"The doctor and his drugs may go to the dogs. I've found out that they are worth nothing. Why don't he set me on my feet if he has any skill? Here I've been nearly helpless for three weeks, and he has done nothing to help me, till he had sense enough to say I might take a taste of this life-elixir."

Mrs. Methurn said nothing more, but she looked apprehensively upon his flushed features, and thought with silent dread upon another seizure as dangerous as the one from which he was just recovering; for Sir Hugh was the most

intractable of patients, and the most unmanageable of convalescents.

In the meantime the May-day group approached the house, the musicians playing a lively air, with which the voices of the young people mingled in a roundelay suited to the occasion. They seemed to have improvised a festival for themselves at the close of the one in which they had just participated; for the rustic queen of the day walked in the rear, and in front was borne a wicker chair, over which a canopy, adorned with flowers, was erected.

Beneath this was seated a child of slender proportions, her white robe wreathed with flowers, and her long amber locks flowing beneath a crown of the same. Her complexion was delicately fair, with eyes of deep violet blue, with long, dark lashes curling upward. There was an expression of extreme refinement in her charming face, and in her small hand she bore a sceptre adorned with roses.

When her two bearers, Vernor and Gerald, placed her chair in front of the door, she sprang lightly from it, and bounding toward Sir Hugh, kneeled before him, and placed her crown and sceptre at his feet, as she said:

"The May Queen deposes me to offer her homage to the lord of the manor, and pray from him the liberty to tread a measure in the ancient hall of his fathers."

"Ho! Lady-Bird, that speech smacks of my scholarly nephew, for you would never have made it of yourself. What! dance in this old place? We've not trod a measure here since my lady died, but that is now many a year ago. *My* dancing days are over, but Vernor no doubt thinks his day has come. Well, well, young folks, since you've all come with the hope of having a reel, I'll not be bear enough to balk you. Come in, place yourselves, and let me see how you can perform."

"Thank you, dear, good Sir Hugh! I knew you would

consent," exclaimed the little girl, starting up and clapping her hands. "Now, Gerald, let us take our places."

Vernor stepped forward, and with a flashing glance said:

"To the *heir* belongs the hand of the fairy-queen. Come Ethel, let me lead you to the head of the reel."

She drew back, and with an air of childish command, said:

"I am but the queen's deputy; there stands the one to whom your courtesy is due," making a gesture toward a young girl of sixteen, who stood blushing and expectant of this honor.

Vernor imperiously replied:

"Gerald may do the honors there. You are to dance with me; I choose it to be so, and that is enough."

He seized her hand and drew her toward the further end of the hall, saying to his cousin as he passed him:

"Take out the rustic queen, Gerald, I prefer her deputy."

A faint flush crossed the olive cheek of the youth, but he was too much accustomed to the overbearing spirit of his cousin to be surprised at the command. He bowed courteously and approached the young girl, who looked resentfully after the young heir and his unwilling companion. But her brow cleared, and the smile returned to her lips as she listened to the request of Gerald to become his partner. She gave him her hand and, with an arch expression said:

"If Mr. Vernor had only known what a Gipsy told me yesterday afternoon he would never have put this slight upon me."

"So—you have dealings with gipsies, Miss Kate Conway. What would your father say to that, I wonder?"

"He'd scold me and keep me from walking in the roads, I suppose; but don't you want to hear what she said, for now it concerns you."

"Indeed! pray let me hear it then."

"The queen of the tribe told me that the one with whom I should first dance on this evening would be crowned with good fortune."

Gerald laughed gaily.

"Of course—since I have the honor to dance with you—that was all the prophet meant."

"Oh, no—by no means—for she went on to say that after many trials and difficulties you would win all you desire."

"It will be brave news for my mother that her darling boy is to become a favorite of fortune; but, unluckily, Gipsies' prophecies rarely meet with fulfilment. I am afraid that in this instance there is little prospect of their being realized."

"But I tell you this was the queen of the tribe—an old woman known far and wide for her skill in fortune telling; and I am glad, Master Gerald, that you are the person she referred to, for you are good as well as brave. I have not forgotten the time you dragged my brother from the fish-pond at the risk of your own life."

Gerald blushed slightly at this praise. He said:

"I only acted from an impulse of humanity. I could not see a lad drown when I knew how to swim, and my own life was not in the slightest danger, I assure you."

"Others thought differently, sir. But the music strikes up, and it is time for us to gain our places."

Fifteen couples stood up in a country-dance, at the head of which were the two cousins with their partners. Ethel flitted through the mazes of the reel with the light and airy grace which distinguished her, and Sir Hugh watched her with an emotion almost of pleasure. He contrasted her with the rosy and rustic beauties from the village, and said to Mrs. Methurn:

"See how our Lady Bird puts all the rest to shame; she



might some day make a figure at court, if that old curmudgeon of a grandfather would do his duty by her."

"Then we should lose our darling," said the lady, with a pensive smile. "Neither should I be willing to know that my pure-hearted child was exposed to the temptations of such a court as that which is now found at Whitehall."

"Zounds! Madam, you talk like a simpleton. The king is the most polite of men; he does not love long faces, and he does love youth and beauty. Life away from the court is but vegetating. I have sunned myself in royal favor, and I know what it is worth. If my acres had not so dreadfully dwindled away, I would take our young people to London and see what would come of it."

"I can tell you beforehand, Sir Hugh. Ruin would be the result. The favor of the present king did not reimburse you for your losses in the cause of his father. We had better content ourselves in the station Providence has assigned us, and teach our young people not to aspire beyond it."

"Stuff! for a sensible woman, you do talk more foolishly than any one I ever saw. Aspire! It is our right to do so; it is in our blood, and if Vernor was willing to sit down on this ruined estate, and seek for no means of rising in the future, I should despise him. No—he must build up a great future; risk everything to restore the ancient prestige of his family. He is handsome, daring and ambitious, and it is a bitter thought to me that I can do so little for him."

Mrs. Methurn did not remind him that to his own prodigality he owed his present disability to aid his son. She only replied:

"He who is born to a great destiny will achieve it in spite of difficulties. Vernor possesses all the qualities of which you speak, and I trust he will make a good use of them. As to my own boy, if he becomes a noble and true man, with industry to win his way to a competency, I shall be

satisfied. I have endeavored to give him good principles, and correct views of his responsibility as a human creature—the rest I am content to leave to a higher power."

"Oh, I dare say," sneered the irritable baronet; "but I've never seen that any power helped those who don't try to help themselves. Gerald is a very good lad, and it is well enough for *him* to content himself in obscurity. He is not the representative of the family, and my son is; you see there is a wide difference."

The fond mother glanced toward the two youths, and thought there was indeed a wide difference, but her maternal partiality induced her to believe that the comparison was entirely in favor of her own son. The manly self-dependence of Gerald, combined with quiet simplicity of character, rose in strong contrast with the reckless will and fiery temper of the heir, who already showed the traits of his father in a striking manner. Mrs. Methurn often marvelled what Vernor's future was to be, and feared that the restraints of principle would be slightly regarded in the pursuit of any course that promised pleasure or profit to himself.

But the cessation of the dance recalled her to the necessity of providing refreshments for their unexpected guests, and at her command, foaming tumblers of ale were brought in with such edibles as the house afforded. While sipping hers, the May Queen addressed Vernor with a slight toss of her pretty head.

"You would not dance with me, Mr. Vernor, but you gained nothing by your refusal, let me tell you. Ask your cousin what I have told him."

"I am sure I do not know what I have lost," replied the young man, indifferently. "I owed you a return for refusing to walk with me yesterday."

"My father forbade my doing so, and he will not like my coming here this afternoon, for he says you have been trying to turn my head lately by your flatteries."



"Well, it's a very pretty head, and what can your father expect but that a gay young man will tell you so? But what have I lost, Kate? I am curious to find out."

"Only the benefit of a prediction; that is all."

"Really! I am more curious than ever; pray enlighten me."

The girl then related what she had already told Gerald, and the young man glanced toward his cousin with an air of chagrin, but he laughed and said:

"I fancy I can accomplish more for myself than the prophecies of the gipsy can bring about. But where did you find her? I did not know there is an encampment in the neighborhood. Mrs. Tarply had better begin to look after her poultry if they are hereabouts."

"I accidentally came on them as I was walking last evening and the head woman of all told my fortune."

"So-o—you *did* walk after all. Tell me where they are to be found, for I have a desire to see this famous seeress."

"They are in a hollow behind the beech wood, about a mile below the Priory."

"I often shoot in that direction and I shall seek them out to-morrow, and probably warn them off. They are a set of pestilent vagrants and should not be permitted to remain on any gentleman's property."

Vernor sauntered away, and the fair Kate consoled herself for his neglect by flirting volently with a young yeoman who had long been in love with her.

Kate Conway was the daughter of a rich farmer, and as her father's income was quite equal to that of Sir Hugh, she had ambitiously aspired to become the future Lady Methurn; but the incidents of the day had taught her that the attentions and flatteries of the young heir meant nothing, and she wisely turned to one in her own sphere for consolation.

As the sun was setting the party broke up, and the family gathered around the frugal evening meal, which was served in a small apartment adjoining the great banquet-hall, which in the palmy days of the Methurns, had resounded with mirth and wassail. Now, it was desolate in its faded grandeur; given up to the rats and spiders, for Sir Hugh's decayed fortunes no longer permitted him to entertain his neighbors in the roystering style of the day, and his pride was too great to permit him to receive them with less splendor than had been the ancient custom of his house.

A deeply embayed window opened from this smaller apartment upon the neglected park, and the soft spring air fluttered through the shrubbery that grew near it. Ethel sat in such a position as to have a view of an opening in the woodland beyond, and she suddenly uttered an exclamation, and said:

"What a strange looking woman! and she is coming here, I declare."

Vernor rose and approached the window.

"It is one of the gipsy clan of which Kate Conway spoke. What do you say, Ethel, to having your fortune told?"

"Oh, I rather not, I am sure, I am afraid she might tell me something dreadful!"

"Pooh! there's no danger of that. She is too keen to tell what she thinks will not please. It will be some fun to see what the old impostor pretends to know of the future. Shall we let her in, father?"

Sir Hugh was in a better humor than usual, and after glancing toward the woman who was approaching with rapid strides straight toward the Priory, he said:

"If you choose; but I think it is folly to meddle with such mummery. What is to come, will come without any intervention from such a witch as that."

The woman was now sufficiently near to be distinctly seen,

and the uncomplimentary epithet applied to her seemed well deserved. She was very tall and strongly built, and her step was as free and firm as that of a woman of twenty, though her brown features were hideously wrinkled, and her black hair thickly streaked with gray, hung loosely over her shoulders beneath a crimson scarf which was wound about her head in the shape of a turban. A faded gown fell to her feet, over which was thrown a red cloak much the worse for wear.

The black eyes of this sinister apparition flashed upon the young party which had gathered in front of the window, and her keen glance wandered alternately from face to face, as if seeking to read the peculiarities of those she was about to address.

"A fair good evening to you, my young friends," she said, in a loud, clear voice. "A pretty trio for fate to dispose of. Cross my hand with silver, young sir," addressing Vernor, "and let me tell you what Fortune has in store for you."

"If I cross it with *gold* will not my fortune be better worth hearing?" he mockingly asked. "Tell me truly, good dame; for I would give much to purchase even the promise of a brilliant future."

The woman fixedly regarded him as she replied:

"The oracle is not to be bribed to utter that which is not to be. Let me see the lines in your hand, and for a silver coin I will tell you all I may see there."

Vernor drew a shilling from his pocket and placed it on her outstretched palm; then, extending his own hand, he laughingly said:

"Tell me the good, but leave the bad unspoken. I do not wish to be disenchanted with life before I have fairly commenced it."

The gipsy glanced at the lines within the well shaped hand she held, and, suddenly dropping it, she tendered him back the money he had given her.

"Your fate is so mingled with good and evil that I cannot attempt to tell one without the other. Take back your coin, since you will not hear all."

Vernor flushed deeply, and he haughtily said:

"But it is my will that you speak only what I wish to know. 'The wheat can be separated from the tares,' as the parson often says."

The woman regarded him with an expression as haughty as his own, and she sternly said:

"I, too, know something of the Scriptures, and it is there said that the good grain was choked by the tares that sprung up around it. Such will be your case, young sir, Unbridled passions, reckless will, ever bring forth the same fruits. Since you will have what I read in the lines traced upon your palm, I will speak the whole. You will conspire against the government—meet with defeat, imprisonment, ending in something worse. There will be gleams of good fortune which will but serve to delude you, and at noonday your life will be——"

She paused, for Vernor had raised his hand menacingly, and he peremptorily spoke:

"Enough; I have no faith in your words, and in time I shall prove them false. Now read the future of this child," and he drew Ethel forward in spite of her efforts to remain unnoticed.

The harshness melted from the brow of the woman as her eyes fell upon the fair face of the little girl, and she softly said:

"A dainty queen she will be; and, what is better, a lovely and beloved woman. Nay, little one, lay your tender hand in my hard brown one, and do not tremble so; for such as you the Fates have good in store."

Thus reassured, Ethel suffered the Gipsy to peer into the rosy little palm, which she extended with much internal perturbation; but she deprecatingly said:

"If you see anything very bad pray don't tell me of it."

"Poor little dove! I see that a hawk will swoop down and attempt to bear you away; but a young eagle will drive him off and place you in his nest in safety. After trouble comes joy, upon darkness breaks the light; and happy and fortunate will he be who will claim you as his own."

"Very lucid, upon my word," sneered Vernor, as the woman dropped Ethel's hand. "Quite as easy to interpret as the oracles of the Delphian sisterhood; and now for my cousin. He is a pattern youth, so I am anxious to know what awaits him in the future."

The seeress earnestly regarded the noble face of Gerald, and said:

"I read truth and candor on the broad brow, courage and hope in the earnest eyes, and success in the firm lips. His line of life also says that honor and good fortune shall crown him in the days that are to come."

Vernor started at the repetition of the prophecy which Kate Conway had so lately repeated, and a glance of passionate malignity fell upon his cousin as he said:

"So—all the good is reserved for Gerald and Ethel, and the vials of wrath are only to be poured out on me. What have I done to deserve such a fate at your hands, I pray?"

"Nothing as yet. The acts which will bear such bitter fruits lie veiled in the future. I might warn you to avoid them, but what is writ is writ, and as easily could I arrest the crash of the avalanche as stay you in the career you will surely run. He who grudges to the wandering Gipsy the shelter of his woodland, the game that wanders wild in the fern, and water from the bubbling spring, need hope for little good from the unseen spirits of the air, who rule and shape our destinies."

"Ho! ho! then you have heard my threat to drive you from your covert, and thus my evil fortune is accounted

for. Accept the warning you seem already to have received, for I shall certainly be as good my word. If I find you on my father's grounds to-morrow, I will set my bloodhounds on your track."

The woman regarded him defiantly, and she significantly said:

"Perhaps Sir Hugh Methurn will have a word to say to that. I came hither to speak with him, and I wish to see him *alone*."

Sir Hugh and Mrs. Methurn were still at the table, and the group of young people around the window had hitherto concealed the visitor from them. Vernor stepped aside and called out to his father.

"Here's a queen, sir, who demands a private interview with you, to petition for the right of herself and her vagabond companions to forage on your domain. What do you say to it, sir?"

Gerald and Ethel also drew away from the window, and the striking figure of the Gipsy stood as if framed in the open space, with a background of foliage through which the crimson clouds that still lingered on the horizon cast their radiant glow.

Sir Hugh regarded her with a stare of astonishment, and he roughly said:

"Let the hag go her ways, I have nothing to say to her."

The Gipsy raised her finger warningly:

"But I have much to say to you, Methurn. *Remember the Secret Chamber.*"

The baronet fell back upon his seat, and the purple flush upon his features faded to a livid hue as he listened to her mysterious words. The woman continued to gaze steadily, almost fiercely upon him, and after a moment of painful indecision he waved his hand and said:

"Away, all of you. Let the woman enter—I must speak with her in private."

In that house Sir Hugh's mandates were always obeyed without question, and even Vernor dared not linger, much as his curiosity was excited.

In a few moments the baronet was left alone in the room, and at a sign from him his strange visitor stepped over the low sill of the window and approached his chair. He gazed upon her wrinkled face with an expression of repulsion which she was quick to read and interpret, and with an accent of scornful bitterness she said:

"Once, Hugh Methurn, your eyes bore a different expression when I approached you. But then I was young and gay; now I am old and haggard. Look at my wrinkled face, at my whitened hair, and see if in them you can behold a trace of the wild beauty that once fascinated you; and I, in my turn, can gaze upon your bloated form, your swollen features, and contrast your present self with the gay galliard who came among my tribe, and spent months in wandering with us for the sake of the Gipsy Queen, whose only power has departed from her—that of youth and beauty."

"Yes," faltered Sir Hugh, "we are both sadly changed since those days. But what can have brought you here, Minchen, and why did you make so dangerous an allusion as that you uttered but now?"

"Dangerous? Why should it be? No one understood it but you and I. Ho! those were merry days when I shut up my rival, and gloated over her misery, while you took her gold and squandered it. I tortured her—I taunted her with her helpless position. She had a proud heart, and between us we broke it at last. Ha, Sir Hugh, do you ever enter that chamber now?"

"Why should I?" he faltered. "I have no business there, and the spring has rusted from long disuse. I have not trod the way for fifteen years, and now it is probably impossible to find it."

"Then *I* know more of your house than you do yourself; the spring is *not* rusted, and the passage is open, for I have passed through it to-day."

"*You!* what took you there, and why have you come to me now? I trusted that you and I had met for the last time."

"Oh, I dare say. Since you have become a *respectable* family man, you would be glad to forget the black spot that is upon your escutcheon; but it will spread, Hugh Methurn, it will spread, and *her* son will do nothing to remove the stain. The ban is upon you, Sir Hugh, and the son in whom all your pride is centered, will yet bring woe to your heart. He will bitterly avenge the wrongs of his mother, though it will be through his own ruin that the vengeance will be accomplished."

"Woman! how dare you speak thus? Is it not enough that I surrendered to you one victim to appease your jealous wrath, but you must come hither to denounce evil against her son? I will not bear it—no, I will not."

"How can you help yourself, Sir Hugh? I hold your life in my hand—your honor is at my mercy—I speak what fate has ordained. The son of Belle Vernor shall no more reign in the halls of Methurn, than *my* son shall claim the inheritance which is his right by of seniority. But both shall make way for a better man. The spirit of prophecy that has descended to me through many generations, has foreshadowed the fate of this house. You refuse to believe me, but that matters not—the destiny that is ordained must fulfill itself."

"No!" he passionately said—"I will not believe in your evil predictions. You hate the boy. You have hated him from the hour of his birth, and your malignity leads you to foretell ruin to him. What is your purpose in coming here now? Speak, and if I can aid you in any way I will do

it, on the condition that you will leave me forever. Your presence stifles me."

"Ha! ha! it brings back the memory of your crime. You fear that retribution is coming. But not from my hand, Hugh Methurn—not from me. My boy has your eyes, when they beamed with the light of love; your voice, when it spoke only to deceive, and I would not have *him* know that doom fell upon his false father through my means. No—you're safe so far as I am concerned, and no other human creature knows of the dark deed we planned and executed together."

"Then I again ask you what has brought you hither?"

She replied with a bitter smile:

"To see my old love—to talk with him; to show him the wreck of the beauty he once valued so highly. To look upon him, and wonder how I could ever so madly have loved him."

"That is accomplished, so leave me," sullenly replied Sir Hugh. "If you are disenchanted, I am doubly so. In the wrinkled hag you have become, I see few traces of the brilliant Minchen who turned the evil in my nature to her own purposes. *You* demanded the sacrifice of my wife, and I, prompted equally by love and avarice, consented. I grasped the fortune I coveted, and cast it to the winds. I now believe that you urged me to it in the hope that my son would be left penniless; but I am not quite ruined. I have saved a few of my hereditary acres, and the old house will descend to the lawful representative of my family."

"And the other son, the *eldest* born, Sir Hugh, what shall be his patrimony? The heart of the father should be as tender to one child as another."

"I would long since have removed Melchoir from you, and provided for him in the best manner my limited means would have enabled me to do, but you spurned all my offers. You have reared him to follow your own wild life, and I

have ceased to take an interest in him. The boy never loved me, then why should I trouble myself about him?"

"True, Sir Hugh, but you know the cause. The blow dealt in anger has not ceased to affect him; but he has sense enough to understand and bitterly resent the treatment his mother has received at your hands. He knows that when I ceased to be attractive to you I was cast off with a hardness of heart which few can emulate. You taunt me with my changed appearance, but what ploughed these wrinkles on my face? what blanched my hair to silver and turned my heart to gall but your desertion? Oh! Sir Hugh Methurn, we have a brave score to settle yet, and it is not my purpose to abate one jot or tittle of the reckoning."

The naturally irritable temper of the baronet was aroused to fury by this threat. There was in his heart no lingering feeling of tenderness for the speaker, and he angrily replied:

"Exact it if you will; but I warn you that the ruin that crushes me shall also fall on you. You want money, I suppose; I am poor enough, but I can give you a small sum if you will promise never to trouble me again, nor to thrust upon me the claims of your son."

He drew forth a worn pocket-book and took from it several gold pieces, which he offered to her with an expression of reluctance which the woman fathomed; but she took the coins, and, dropping them into a faded pouch that hung at her side, said:

"Melchoir has never troubled you, nor will he ever do so. He has the Gipsy's heart, and he loves the wild life of the woods too well to accept even your ruined house, if the gift were coupled with the condition that he should dwell within it. I only ask leave to stay for a season upon your lands without being harried by the bloodhounds, as your *wife's* son has threatened us."

"You have it. Vernor spoke idly; he will obey my command to leave you in peace."

"Be sure that you *exact* obedience, Sir Hugh, or it will be worse for you," was the threatening response, as the woman retreated through the window.

She again turned and stood in the shadow of the casement; waving her hand toward him, with an expression of scornful sarcasm on her dark features, she said:

"The hag leaves you to such peace as you may find, Hugh Methurn. If you have planted thorns in her heart, she has done the same by you; so we are quits on that score. Of the love that is turned to gall, beware! it can be more cruel, more implacable, than even hereditary hatred."

Before he could reply, she disappeared through the shrubbery, and Sir Hugh gave vent to his pent-up wrath by a volley of execrations, which were unheard by her to whom they were addressed.

Then he thought with dread of the power this woman possessed over him; of her fierce temper, her undisguised hatred toward the son in whom all his hopes were centred, and he shuddered at the possibilities of the future. The allusion to the secret chamber, and what had occurred there, was full of horror to him, and he would have given much to be able to visit it once more, and ascertain the condition in which it now was; but his crippled limbs forbade such an attempt, and he sat till twilight deepened into night, recalling that long-buried past, with its dreary array of heartlessness and crime.

## CHAPTER III.

## MYSTERIES AND JEALOUSIES.

LIGHTS were brought in, and soon after Vernor entered and looked around as if still expecting to see the gipsy. He lightly said:

"So your visitor has departed, sir; I had no idea that she was an old acquaintance of yours, or I would not have threatened her with my hounds. Yet I think if the landed gentry would drive the gipsies from their lands as fast as they light down upon them to commit their depredations, the country would soon be rid of such a pest."

"That may be true, but since others tolerate them, we must do the same. The woman who came hither this evening has claims on me, and I wish herself and her followers to remain unmolested. In fact, I have promised her my protection."

"Oh! I shall not interfere with her now, sir. I was foolishly angry at the fortune she read me, but since I have no faith in such stuff, it would be absurd to resent it. Besides, toward a friend of yours, however humble, forbearance is due."

"This woman is not a friend of mine, Vernor," replied the baronet testily. "I do not claim friendship with a wandering vagrant like that, but she is entitled to some consideration on the score of events that happened long ago. I cannot explain, nor is it necessary to do so. My wishes will suffice to prevent you from interfering with this gang in any way. I should be sorry to know that you had even talked with one of them."

Vernor keenly regarded his father, and he abruptly said:

"Then you must enlighten me on one subject, sir, or I

shall certainly seek this female dragon and try my skill on her. What did she mean by speaking of the *secret chamber*? You were deeply moved, I saw, and—"

"My dear boy," interrupted the baronet, speaking with affected calmness, "I have long intended to confide this knowledge to you, as a portion of your inheritance. To the successive lords of the Priory, the existence of this chamber has been imparted under the strictest seal of secrecy, and by you the knowledge of its locality must also be held sacred."

"Undoubtedly—I give you my pledge to do so," replied the young man with much excitement. "Pray tell me all about it."

"In the older portion of the house which was once occupied by the monks, is an apartment so cunningly contrived that no one would ever suspect its existence. It is situated in the very heart of the building, with no outlet save through a passage which leads to it through the cellars. The entrance to it is known only to myself, and—and—and one other. It was doubtless used as a chamber of penitence in ancient times. In my own day it has served as a refuge for the hunted cavaliers in the time of the Roundheads. But it is now many years since I have entered it, and I think there will be much difficulty in penetrating to it again."

Sir Hugh uttered this explanation calmly and naturally, and his son listened to it with intense interest. He quickly said:

"I must learn the way to this chamber, father, for in time to come, it may be as useful to me as it seems to have been to you. Troubles loom in the land; when King Charles dies, the people of England will not long submit to the rule of his brother. There seems to be a deep-seated dread of James among the yeomanry, if those of this section are a fair sample of the people of England."

"I scarcely think they are. The western counties are filled with dissenters, and the landed proprietors are nearly all Protestants; they naturally dread the rule of a Catholic King, and you hear many predictions of evil that will never come to pass. With common prudence, the Duke of York may succeed to the throne, and rule the people at least as wisely as Charles Stuart has done."

"Which will not be saying much for his rule," replied the young man with a sneer. "As to myself, I have my fortune to carve out in the future, and I look to the very disturbances I anticipate, to afford me the means of rising to the height I am ambitious to attain. I have few scruples on the score of the divine right of kings, and the party that can elevate me is the one that I shall join. You see, sir, that the lessons you have inculcated have not fallen on unfruitful ground."

"I did not intend to make you disloyal, Vernor; you have taken a flight far beyond me, and our house has already suffered too deeply from its adherence to the royal cause, to throw off our allegiance now. Do not permit your ambition to overleap its mark, my son."

"Yes," replied Vernor bitterly, "you ruined yourself in the service of the Stuarts, and met no reward save a welcome to the dissolute court of the king. The men who had fought for his father were passed by, and rewards only given to those who ministered to his pleasures."

Sir Hugh sighed and said:

"It is true, but there is no help for it. When Charley dies, his brother will quietly succeed him, and I hope that we shall never behold another civil war. It is better to submit to a feeble ruler, than to risk such a calamity as that."

"Such is the reasoning of men who have passed the hey-day of youth, but it is not hearkened to by the young and



the aspiring. In change I see my rising fortunes, and a change of rulers I ardently hope for."

"Who, then, would you place upon the throne if you had the power?" asked Sir Hugh, with a faint smile.

"Who but the handsome and gallant son of the present king? Do you remember the visit of Monmouth to Taunton but a short time since? You witnessed the enthusiastic reception he met with; you saw how completely all hearts were won by his grace and suavity of manner. Why shall he not succeed to his father's state if the Protestant interest will only be true to him and their own cause?"

"My dear boy, the son of Lucy Walters will never become King of England. The great lords would never submit to have a man of doubtful birth elevated to the rank of their ruler. It is madness to dream of such a scheme."

"Yet I am not the only one who looks forward to such a result, sir. Monmouth is the idol of the people; it is confidently asserted that he can prove the marriage of his mother with Charles Stuart, and it is to my interest to believe it."

"Pooh! nonsense! Because the Duke noticed you when he met you at Lord Stormont's last year, you think he will remember you in time to come. If he were King to-morrow, he would act precisely as the rest of his race have done: cast into oblivion the services of those who elevated him to the throne, and conciliate the malcontents by lavishing upon them all he would have to bestow."

"You did not hear him talk with me, father, so I pardon you for judging him so harshly. Monmouth is the most gallant gentleman, the most graceful knight in the land, and I have vowed homage to him in my heart. Besides, he distinctly promised to remember our losses in the days of

his grandfather, and repair them, if the power ever should be his."

"Ha! that was going very far upon the road to royalty indeed. He surely then aspires to succeed his father, and he begins his machinations by tampering with the young and enthusiastic to engage them in his cause. The people would doubtless be glad to have a Protestant ruler, but Monmouth is not the man. If they refuse to accept James, the succession will still remain unbroken, and the Princess of Orange will be the one on whom their choice will fall."

"The Princess of Orange is scarcely known in this country, and the Duke is adored by the masses of the people. You will see, sir, that on the death of King Charles a rising will take place in his favor, and he will triumphantly be proclaimed King of England."

"Even if he should be wrong-headed enough to suffer such a thing to be done, Monmouth will never reign in Whitehall as monarch of this land. With his father dies all his prestige, and his cold-hearted uncle will not hesitate to sacrifice him to his own safety. The king has turned his head by permitting him to assume the honors of a prince of the blood, but the son of the Welsh girl is still regarded as an inferior by the great lords, and not one of them will rally to his standard if he should be mad enough to raise it in rebellion against his uncle."

"Then let him do as Cromwell did before him: crush out their opposition, and rule by the right of his genius."

"Vernor, you talk like a very young and inexperienced man. Do you suppose this court-gallant, with his effeminate beauty, his fascination of manner, is fitted to run the career of the old Ironsides captain? I tell you that but one Cromwell is found among many generations of men, and such as he are not the offspring of a feeble and vicious race like that from which your hero is descended. If the



old Tudor lioness could have cut off the head of James I, as well as that of his mother, it would have been a blessing to this land."

"Why, father, this is strange language to come from the lips of a staunch old royalist, who fought and suffered in the cause of these very Stuarts."

"For that reason I more deeply feel all their ingratitude and incapacity. They are a thoroughly selfish set of pleasure seekers, who care for nothing beyond the enjoyment of the hour. Therefore, if the question of a change of rulers is forced upon this people, they will have none of them."

"Yet you said but now that in the event of a revolution the Princess of Orange would become queen."

"Nominally, but her husband will wield the royal authority. There is a man who may be placed side by side with old Noll, and lose nothing by the comparison. I have lived long, and in this dull retirement I have little to do but watch the progress of events, and draw my own conclusions from the signs of the times. They are adverse to the interests of your hero. A carpet-knight like Monmouth is not the man for the hour."

"Why should you call him a carpet-knight?" said Vernor, impetuously. "I am sure he has shown courage and ability in military life; he has already served with honor."

"Aye, under the command of others, but as a leader, those who place their trust in him will find that they have but rushed upon their own destruction. No, my son; put aside this fantastic preference for a man who has won you over by a little judicious flattery, and abide the issue of events, at least till you are old enough to take a decided course of action."

"Well, Sir Hugh, that is easily promised, for the king is strong and healthy, and bids fair to give his son no chance to try his popularity for many years to come."

Vernor sank into silence, and Sir Hugh pondered on the affairs of the country. There was no reason to apprehend that the life of Charles would be suddenly cut short, for he was comparatively young, and enjoyed seemingly robust health; but in the event of his death, there was every probability of a struggle for the crown between the son and brother of the present monarch.

The Duke of Monmouth had been permitted to bear the arms of England and France upon his escutcheon without the bar sinister which denoted his illegitimate birth, and it was widely believed among the common people that a ceremony of marriage had taken place at the Hague between the king and his mother.

Those who knew Charles Stuart in middle age, found it easy to believe that in the levity of youth, with his future prospects uncertain, he would have been quite capable of committing such an act to win a woman of whom he was passionately enamored. He permitted her son to assume the state of Prince of Wales, though the title was not conferred on him. The populace took the deepest interest in Monmouth, as the champion of the Protestant religion, and fondly regarded him as the rightful heir to the throne.

When he arrived in London at midnight, the watchmen were ordered to proclaim the joyful event throughout the city, and the streets were illuminated in his honor, while the bells rang out a joyous peal of welcome. When he travelled he was everywhere received with most enthusiastic demonstrations; long cavalcades of armed gentlemen came out to escort him, and cities poured forth their masses to join in the ovation.

The personal popularity of the young Duke was unbounded, for he inherited the rare beauty of his mother, with the grace and fascination of manner which rendered his father popular among all classes in spite of his mal-administration of the government.

Thus encouraged to aspire to royal honors, what could be expected but that Monmouth should, in time to come endeavor to grasp the sceptre when it fell from the hands of its present ruler? James was dreaded by the people of England, and it was confidently anticipated by the friends of Monmouth that the Protestants would throng to the support of their champion when the hour of strife arrived.

Sir Hugh thought, with a shudder, that he might live to witness another civil war as deadly and long-protracted as that which had desolated his country in the days of his youth. Then he was a dashing cavalier, ready to support the king at all hazards; now, the change of parties had placed him in opposition to the government, and like most of his class, he had become a strong Whig, though he wisely took little part in political disputes, and lived quietly upon his diminished acres, contented to be left to vegetate in peace.

But the day was coming in which his young and high-spirited son must take his part in the arena of life, and for him he dreaded a false move in the complicated game he would probably have to play. Sir Hugh had no scruples of attachment or integrity which would have led him to hesitate in any course that promised success. To reinstate his house was the darling wish of his heart, and Vernor had been trained to look to that as the chief aim of his existence. Although he had spoken so sensibly to his son, if Fate yet showed a smiling face to Monmouth's cause, the facile baronet would certainly be among the first to embrace it.

Suddenly Vernor spoke:

"When do you propose to send Gerald to Oxford, sir? I believe he has chosen to be a learned drone, in place of a man of action."

His sneering tone caused Sir Hugh to look up at him with an expression of surprise.

"Has any ill feeling arisen between you and your cousin that you speak of him thus?"

"No—not exactly that; but I am tired of his airs of superiority. His tastes lead him to book lore; mine to field sports, and we have managed to get along together without much clashing; but if he is to do anything in life, it is time he was setting about it. Besides, I know he is impatient to enter college, where he anticipates winning great honors. For myself, I care nothing for such learned lumber; a strong hand, a quick eye, and the will to use them, will be the keys to success in the days that are coming. If, as the Gipsy prophesied, Gerald is to be crowned with honors and good fortune, I am resolved to be equally crowned with pleasure and renown."

"Ho, then you are jealous of the good foretold to your cousin. But it is idle to believe in what that old beldame said. She knows no more of the future than ether you or I, and she indulged an old spite in irritating you against your kinsman."

"Spite! who is she, sir, and why should she feel it toward me? for I do not remember ever seeing her before."

"But you had threatened her, and that was enough to arouse her gipsy blood against you."

"You spoke of an *old* spite, sir, and that I could not have caused."

"Did I?—well, the word was inadvertently used; for she can do you no harm, unless you give her the power yourself, by seeking her, or falling under her influence in some way."

"Then give me the clue to the Secret Chamber and I promise to keep clear of her. But if you refuse to do this, I cannot say what the result will be."

At this cool assertion, Sir Hugh felt inclined to fall into one of his tornadoes of passion, but the calm and resolute face before him assured him that the day had passed in which Vernor could be terrified into submission by an outburst of

anger. He felt assured that this daring spirit would penetrate the mystery of that secluded spot, and all that remained for him to do was to gain sufficient time to remove from it the ghastly evidence of what had happened there.

He curbed his wrath, and said:

"Wait till I recover, and I will myself show you the way to the chamber as soon as I am in a condition to do so. Only keep clear of the gipsy's camp, and do not seek to meddle with them in any way, and your curiosity shall be fully gratified."

"Thank you, sir; I can easily promise the last, for I do not care to encounter that old beldame again. She regarded me with a most sinister expression, and I cannot help thinking she would be glad to do me an evil turn."

"The world is wide enough to hold you both without your coming in contact with each other. If you regard my wishes, you will seek to do so. If this woman or her son should cross your path, I desire that you will let them pass upon their way, and hold no communion with them."

Vernor listened with an appearance of respect, but the very anxiety of Sir Hugh to impress upon him the necessity of avoiding the Gipsy only increased his desire to fathom the cause of his father's evident discomposure at her appearance. It cost him little to promise, but keeping his pledge was quite another thing. He compromised with his conscience by thinking that he would not absolutely seek an interview with her, but if chance offered him one, he would use his utmost ingenuity to discover the secret tie that existed between two persons whose worldly positions were so widely severed. He again recurred to Gerald:

"You have not answered my question with reference to my cousin, sir; when does he go to college, and how is he to be supported there? for that seems to me to be a question of vital importance."

"He will go when I see fit to send him," replied Sir Hugh, testily, "and the money his mother has hoarded from her annuity since she has been with me, will enable him to live there. When his college course is ended, an old friend of his father, who is a lawyer in good practice, will receive him without the usual fee. Gerald may some day become my Lord Chancellor; the lad has good abilities, and he is industrious; two very powerful levers to help a man forward in life, and he may aid to bring the old name into notice again."

"You seem proud of your nephew's talents, Sir Hugh," said Vernor, with a sneer. "Perhaps you regret that fate had not given you such a son in place of a wild, sport-loving roysterer like myself."

"No, Vernor, I am satisfied with you, for you are of the true, high-mettled old stock. I do not compare you with this quiet lad, whose meek spirit accords with his humble fortunes. I only hope that in the path Gerald has chosen he will achieve distinction for the sake of the family from which he sprung. But you are the heir of the old name and honors, and you must play a more brilliant game than your cousin would dare to attempt. You are handsome, and have education enough; with a little polishing, you can become as great a gallant as I once was. You must win an heiress, and make her fortune the stepping-stone to greater successes."

Vernor smiled disdainfully.

"The heiress must be handsome, or I'll none of her. I shall not sell myself to a fright for a bag of money."

"Pooh! there are plenty of pretty and attractive women who possess wealth. But it will be time enough to look up one when you are a few years older. In the meantime, if I could afford to let you travel on the continent a few years, it would be a great advantage to you. Then, you might

return home an accomplished man of the world, and select a wife from the fairest and richest of English girls. But my income has narrowed down until I see no prospect of accomplishing so desirable an end."

"If you had hoarded for me, sir, as my aunt seems to have done for her son, I might have possessed the means of making this tour."

Sir Hugh flushed purple, and said with excitement:

"We were very differently situated. Mrs. Methurn has been at very little expense here, while I have used my means to maintain the poor state in which we live. Do not fling a reproach at my early prodigality, boy; for I will not bear it. If I have wrecked your fortune with my own, I have wit enough to help you to reconstruct it, if you will be guided by my advice."

"So far as it tallies with my own judgment I promise to do so," replied Vernor, coolly. "I did not intend to reproach you, sir; for you have been a very indulgent father to me, and I know that I have often proved a sad scapegrace of a son. We have at least one common interest—the aggrandizement of our fallen family; and I am quite ready to do anything that is reasonable to restore the tarnished lustre of its fortunes."

"Right, lad; and we shall find the means, be sure of that."

"I hope so, sir," replied Vernor, as he arose to retire. "But just now my most lively interest is in your restoration to your usual activity, for my curiosity to visit the secret chamber will be on the alert till it is gratified. I shall think of, dream of nothing but that mysterious spot till I have explored it and learned all its gloomy history."

He passed out with a cheerful good night, and Sir Hugh sank back on his chair muttering with pale lips:

"All — all! The *last* record must be kept from your

knowledge at all hazards. Oh, curses on the imbecility that made me a villain! Curses on the waste of health and life that have made me the wreck I am! Why can I not go to that den of horrors and see for myself what blasting evidence of my crime remains to witness against me to my son, to *her* son, of the sad fate I gave his mother?"

Sir Hugh fell into one of his impotent rages, and on the unoffending servant who came in to assist him to his own apartment the burden of his wrath fell. John was accustomed to such outbursts, and he bore his master's vituperation in sullen silence; for, in his present mood, the man knew that Sir Hugh would bear no reply to his maledictions.

After he was in bed, Mrs. Methurn came in and mixed his night-draught. There was something in her calm face and serene manner which always checked the old man in his fiercest outbursts of temper, and he repressed his oaths and took the medicine in silence. As she was leaving him he said in a rough voice:

"Agnes, tell Gerald that he may set out for Oxford as soon as things can be made ready for his departure."

"Thank you, Sir Hugh. My son will be glad to hear this news, for he is losing time here, and we have been awaiting your decision several weeks."

"Then why the d—l couldn't you speak out before this?"

"I thought you fully understood our wishes, Sir Hugh. You know that it is two months since my son was declared by his tutor fit to enter college."

"His tutor! the beggarly parson with his Greek and Latin rubbish, is a great judge, to be sure! But it's none of my business. If it is your will and the boy's wish, he must go; although I never expected a Methurn to become an attorney's apprentice. But I suppose it is the best the lad can do."

"It is the only path open to him, and I am very grateful to Mr. Clyde for his liberal offer," was the quiet response. "Gerald is anxious to make his way in life in some honorable calling, and that of the law will give scope to the abilities I believe he possesses."

"Umph! I only hope he may show them, that's all. But it will be many a long year before he can expect to win his bread. All your savings will go, and more too."

"I have hoarded them for this purpose, and if they were many times as great I would cheerfully devote them to it. The ultimate success of my dear boy will reward me for every sacrifice."

"If he wins—if he wins; but that has to be tried yet. Good night—I believe I have a fever with all this cursed excitement. I must be quiet—and there is no use in talking half the night about what is already settled."

Mrs. Methurn smiled faintly, and, thus unceremoniously dismissed, returned to the apartment in which she had left Gerald and Ethel.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GIPSY QUEEN AND HER SON.

THE long low-ceiled sitting-room, with its walls of carved oak, was dimly lighted by a single candle placed on a heavy table in the centre of the highly polished floor. Beside this sat Gerald Methurn and the little girl engaged in conning the same book; or, rather, Gerald was reading aloud in a clear, well modulated voice, and Ethel was looking over the page with kindling eyes and half-parted lips as she listened to the stanzas of the Fairy Queen.

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"Oh, Gerald! I wish you were a poet!" exclaimed the child, as he closed the book and turned his smiling face toward her.

"That I might make Ethel and her pet fawn as celebrated as the heavenly Nina, and her milk-white lamb? Ah, Lady-Bird, *my* destiny is to burrow among the mouldy parchments of law, not to cover them with my own dreamy fancies and quaint conceits."

"Must you, indeed, go from us? First to college, and then to London to live only among books, and old papers? What *shall* I do when you are gone?"

He smiled faintly as he replied:

"You, oh you will find enough to do. You will learn to make pickles and preserves from my good mother; how to make gooseberry wine and broth for the poor; besides all the mysteries of needle-work. Vernor will teach you to ride after the hounds, and my uncle will give you a chance to become a capital nurse."

"But there will be no one to direct my studies, no one to read with me; and when we meet again I shall be ashamed of my ignorance."

"The Dominie has promised to fill my place; the old books will still be here, and I hope you will not lose all interest in them when your fellow-student is gone. As for me, your bright little face will oft rise before me, and I know I shall yearn to see it smiling near me again."

"Will you, indeed, dear Gerald? But you will become estranged from us, I am afraid. This dull, old house has not much to bring you back to it again."

"It will contain my dear mother and my sweet, little pet," he playfully replied. "It has been my home for many years, and must ever be the dearest spot on earth to me. But I have my fortune to make, and I must stifle all regrets and give my heart to my studies. You shall be proud of me yet,

Ethel; and when I have won the meed of success, those I love shall share my triumphs. When I become a great law lord, I will live in grand style, and have you and my mother to stay always with me."

"That will be charming. Your mother is mine now, and I don't intend ever to leave her. But, Gerald, will you be obliged to cover your beautiful hair with a great curled wig, like that on the picture of Chancellor Bacon in the library?"

"Yes, I suppose so—it is considered dignified; and when I win the right to wear a wig, I shall think myself upon the sure road to fortune."

"But I shall always like you best with your own soft rings of hair that I have so often curled around my fingers."

"Yet when I become bald and gray the wig you object to will be quite acceptable," and he laughed gaily at the dismayed expression of her face.

"Oh dear! will you ever grow fat and red, like Sir Hugh, with shaggy gray hair hanging around your face. I am afraid I shouldn't love you as well as I do now if that were to happen."

"I am sure you're very fond of Sir Hugh, in spite of his appearance, Ethel. My uncle was once considered a very handsome man, but bad health and the inactive life he has led of late years have sadly changed him."

"Yes," she dubiously replied, "I love him because he let me stay at the Priory when my mother died; and I would do anything he asked me to do, to prove my gratitude to him."

"Right, little one; cherish gratitude, for it is a sacred feeling. I believe that my uncle is as much interested now in your welfare as if you were his own daughter; and I do not think he will ever ask you to do anything which will not promote your happiness."

Ethel, a thoughtful child, matured by suffering beyond her years, pondered on these words, and not long afterward, in a momentous crisis of her life, suffered them deeply to influence her decision.

Before she could reply, Mrs. Methurn entered, and kissing the forehead of her son, announced to him his uncle's wish that preparations should at once be made for his departure from the Priory. Gerald heard the news with delight; he was eager to escape to a wider field of action, and with the consciousness that his own exertions must win him a position, he was impatient of delay that involved the loss of time which was all-important to him. His exuberant joy was checked by the cloud upon his mother's brow, and he suddenly said:

"I am selfish, mother, to think only of myself; you will miss me sadly, I know, but you must console yourself for my absence with the thought that I am profitably using every moment of my time, and striving to win the right to have you always near me."

"Alas, my son, it must be many years before that can be accomplished; but I give you up cheerfully. I have confidence in your principles, and I know that such success as industry and talent may win must in time be yours. I can wait and hope, and my darling Ethel will help to console me for your absence."

Ethel nestled to her side, and laid her soft cheek against Mrs. Methurn's, as she whispered:

"I am your daughter—I have no mother but you, and I love you dearly."

The tender hope that she would really become her daughter at some future day had long been cherished by Mrs. Methurn, but she was too judicious to betray her wishes, and she only caressed her protégée in reply. The child sat quiet and attentive while the mother and son communed of

the future. She entered so completely into all their feelings that neither of them thought of her as an intruder on the sacredness of that hour devoted to maternal counsels and filial submission to the gentle and pure woman who had devoted so many years of her life to the training and development of the immortal spirit given to her charge.

At a late hour they separated, and within the next week Gerald took his departure from the home in which he had so long lived. Sir Hugh gave him much friendly advice as to the best means of rising in life, and furnished him with a few letters of introduction to such of his old friends as he thought might be able to advance his interests. Vernor shook hands with him, and said, with a laugh:

"Well, counsellor, if I should ever get into a scrape with the powers that be, I hope you will have skill and courage to help me out of it. Success to you, old fellow; and the best thing I can wish for you is, that you may never have to come back to this tumble-down old concern again."

"I should be very ungrateful if I did not return of my own free will," replied Gerald. "Do not fancy that you are altogether quit of me, Vernor; for I shall seize every opportunity to revisit the old place. Should you get into trouble, count on me as your fast friend in every emergency."

"Thank you; but I know if *my* wings ever bear me beyond these sylvan shades, it will be long enough before I permit them to bring me back again."

Vernor turned away with a light laugh, and the departing one was clasped to his mother's breast in a long and close embrace, while Ethel clung to his hand, which she kissed and covered with her fast flowing tears.

Gerald went, and with him the light of at least two hearts in that secluded household. Sir Hugh scarcely missed him, and Vernor was glad that he was gone. A restraint was removed from himself which he was well pleased to shake

off, for many of his actions were disapproved of by his cousin and frankly commented on by him when they were alone together. Mingled with a secret respect for his kinsman was a scarcely acknowledged jealousy of his superior attainments, though Vernor would make no effort to emulate them.

Sir Hugh was recovering slowly, and his son endeavored to check his impatience to visit the spot which had so strongly interested his imagination. A growing desire to see and converse with the Gipsy at length prevailed over every scruple, and Vernor, on the day of Gerald's departure, mounted his horse, whistled his dogs to his side, and took the direction of the beech-wood, in which he knew the encampment was still to be found.

He soon came in sight of the little dell, in which a few rude tents were standing that now seemed to be almost deserted. An old crone, with several children playing around her, sat near the embers of the smouldering fire over which their breakfast had been cooked. She glanced sharply up at the sound of approaching hoofs, and precipitately arose as one of the dogs bounded toward her fiercely barking. The children scrambled beneath the shelter of a neighboring tent, and the young man called to his dogs to return to his side. As they obeyed, the woman resumed her former position, and said in a wheedling tone:

"You honor wouldn't harm a poor old woman and these helpless children. The men are all away, and we are here without protection."

"I have no business with you, and no desire to interfere with you in any way," he curtly replied. "I shall merely ride around the encampment and return whence I came. Why should you suppose that I would suffer my dogs to hurt you?"

"We've heard that you've threatened to harry us, but I



don't believe that such a fine handsome gentleman would do such a thing. Let me tell your fortune, sir. Such as you should have a brave future."

Vernor turned proudly away as he replied:

"No, thank you. I have had enough of gipsy fortune telling. I will hear nothing from you."

He put spurs to his horse and dashed rapidly away; the crone lifted herself to her full height, and, raising her hand menacingly, muttered:

"Go—and take my malediction with you, for a proud and hard-hearted one, as you are. My curse never yet failed to fall, and it shall blight you yet for grudging the wanderers the spot of ground on which we camp, and the few hares we may snare. A brave descendant of the true old cavaliers you prove yourself to be."

Vernor rode furiously forward; he was in one of those reckless moods in which men often commit acts which are afterward bitterly repented of. Suddenly the bridle of his horse was seized by a figure which sprang from a thicket in the dense portion of the woodland through which his path lay.

Without pausing to see why his way was thus obstructed, he lashed his whip violently over the head of the man, and, using a volley of expletives, commanded him loose his hold upon his rein. The dogs, which had lagged in the rear, now came bounding toward them baying loudly, and the man made an effort to retreat toward the thicket, but he stumbled and fell, and the next instant the hounds would have been upon him, but the Gipsy Queen, wearing the same dress in which Vernor had before seen her, strode suddenly forward and threw herself before his prostrate form.

"Call off these brutes!" she commanded, with flashing eyes, and dilating nostrils; "if they harm a hair of his head, it shall be the worse for you, young heir of Methurn! It

is enough that your blows have fallen upon him, without being torn by your dogs. He but obeyed my command to stop you, that I might speak with you, and this is his reward!"

Vernor obeyed the command, for he had no wish to enrage the Gipsy; she might be of use to him; and he lashed the hounds from the prostrate form on which they were ready to bound. He was pale with anger and excitement, but he restrained the expression of his wrath before the commanding mien and savage eye of the woman; for they exerted over him a power which he could not resist.

When the clamor subsided, he asked:

"Why did you not step forward yourself? I should have recognized you, and stopped to speak with you."

"To what end?" she asked. "What can the young lord of the manor have to say to the poor wanderer who tarries for a season beneath the shelter of his woodland? Sir Hugh would have forbidden the meeting, if he had been aware that it was likely to take place."

"Why should you suppose so? Is there any reason why my father should fear a meeting between you and me?"

"Ho! ho! go and ask *him*. Did he not bid you leave me and my tribe alone? Did he not warn you to keep far from us? You need not speak, young sir; your face replies legibly enough to my question. Yes—I knew he would utter such a command; but you are his true son—disobedient and reckless; ready to rush on—you know not what."

"You speak as if there is danger to me in seeking you," said Vernor, disdainfully. "I brave it, if there is; such as you can work me no evil."

The woman defiantly replied:

"Lowly as I am, deeply as you scorn me, you shall yet feel my grasp upon your fate, Vernor Methurn. Vernor!



—detested name! I crushed one who bore it in her palmy days, and I will—— Yet no; threats are idle. Go your way, young man. At another day your path and mine shall cross, and *then* you shall know why I hate you.”

“But I would know it now; there is no time like the present; and if you have anything to say, speak it out. Why should my name inspire you with such fierce anger? and to whom do you refer? My mother was the only one who bore it in this part of the country.”

“Aye; but England is a broad land, and the name may be found elsewhere, I trow,” replied the Gipsy, evasively. “Ride back as you came, and do not tell Sir Hugh that you have talked with me.”

While they were speaking, the man had risen and shaken the dust from his garments, and he stood glaring on Vernor with an expression of ferocious enmity. He was tall and strongly made, and his fingers worked nervously upon the handle of a knife, which was thrust into a red sash which he wore around his waist. His long hair fell in elf locks about his face, from which gleamed his wild black eyes with an expression that made the visitor almost shrink; for in them was the light of passion, the power of brute force, without the steady light of reason which should hold them under control.

A thrill almost of apprehension shot through Vernor's heart as he encountered this baleful glance, and felt that he had incurred the hatred of this lawless-looking being. He said:

“Who is this man? and why does he scowl thus vindictively upon me?”

“Have you not laid the weight of your riding whip upon him, and when is such an insult as that forgiven by one of our race? Yet fear not—my son shall not resent the blow till the time arrives for full and perfect retribution.”

She turned toward the man and spoke a few words to him in a jargon which was unintelligible to Vernor, and he sullenly withdrew beneath the cover of the thicket.

The woman waved her hand, and turned as if to follow him, but the youth spoke quickly and impetuously:

“Stay—I came hither to speak with you, for I wish to ask you the solution of the strange words you used to my father when you came to the Priory last week. I am aware of the existence of the Secret Chamber, and Sir Hugh has promised himself to conduct me to it; but he is too infirm to visit it, and if you will show me the entrance to it I will reward you well for the service.”

The woman paused, and incredulously asked:

“Has he told you *all*? Yet no, he would not dare. Since you know that such a place exists, find your way to it yourself, young sir. I shall not take you there, be sure of that.”

“Then you have been there; you are familiar with the place, yet refuse to be my guide. Here is gold—see how it glistens through the meshes of my purse; I will give it all to you if you will conduct me to the spot I have so great a desire to explore.”

“It is an idle wish, and its fulfilment would work you wo. Since Sir Hugh will take you there himself, bide his time. Let him tell his own story; for the present I shall not contradict it.”

“Yet you wished to see me; you sent your son to intercept me. Why should you have done this if you had nothing to say to me?”

“I *had* much to say, but I have changed my mind. I would have spoken of my son to you; would have told you who and what he is, but you have struck him, and the tie that might have existed between you is forever broken. He will now accept no service at your hands, and I warn you

that no more implacable enemy lives than you have this day made. Go—your gold does not tempt me; your entreaties are powerless upon a will as immovable as a rock of adamant."

Vernor impatiently spurred his horse and whistled to his dogs; he saw from the hard expression of the face before him that no concession was to be hoped for, and he dashed impetuously through the windings of the narrow road.

Minchen smiled grimly, and muttered:

"Ho! Sir Hugh will take you to the Secret Chamber, will he? Then he must first go thither himself to prepare it for inspection, and I will have it ready for his reception. A bonnie welcome to that prison-house shall he meet when he hobbles there to see what proofs of his crime are left. Now I must seek Melchoir, and see what can be done to tame him again."

She plunged into the thicket, and after advancing a few yards, came upon an open space in the centre of which cowered her son, with his knife grasped in his hand, which he was digging furiously into the earth. He looked up at her and hoarsely said:

"I wish it was his heart—I do—I do. I will yet strike it into his vitals for the blows he gave me. I could have done it but now, but you bade me hold my hand when I was ready to spring upon him."

"Softly, Melchoir—that blustering youngster is the son of your father, and it is not well to shed kindred blood."

"My father—I have no father. He who struck me is the son of the woman who supplanted you—of the man that wronged you, then why shall I forbear towards him? His blows shall bear bitter fruit for him. Is it not enough that he has usurped my heritage, but he must load me with blows and contumely. Ah! he shall deeply rue the events of this day."

"All in good time, my son. Only follow my counsels and you shall have vengeance upon him."

"But why shall I wait? Why shall I not wreak my will upon him now? He would be as a child in my grasp, yet his blows tingle and burn upon my flesh; they rankle in my heart, which is seething as a caldron over a blazing fire, yet *you* bade me hold my hand."

"And for good reasons, Melchoir. A brawl between you and young Methurn, in which he was seriously injured, would lead to ruin to our tribe. The bloodhounds of the law would seize upon us and drag us to prison where we might rot without a trial, or be brought out only to be mocked with the forms of justice before being strung up like dogs. No, no, boy, such as we cannot cope with the gentry of the country, except through our subtlety and wit. You have not much of either, poor fellow, and you must submit to be guided by me."

Melchoir raised his hand to his head, and parting the hair from his scalp laid bare a long scar. He bitterly said:

"If I have little wit, it was *this* that caused it and *whose* hand dealt the blow that shattered my brain? What do I owe *him* but wrong and wretchedness? Yet you speak of him as my father."

Something of softness came into the woman's face as she ran her fingers over the scar, and she muttered:

"Poor lad—it was a cruel blow and you were such a little creature then; but he had been drinking, Melchoir, and he scarcely knew who he struck at. He was deeply grieved, and he paid the leech that tended you till you were out of danger. In those days Hugh Methurn would not have hurt *my* child if he had been in his right mind. No, no, he loved me then—he loved me." The voice arose almost to a wail as she uttered the last words, and the wild being beside her glared on her with an expression of vindictive anger, as he said:

"His love was never worth much, yet you seem to regret it. He has worked you evil enough to crush out all memory of his passing passion, yet you cling to its memory as if it had proved a blessing instead of a curse."

"It is the one bright spot in my life, and why shall I not sometimes turn to it?" she vaguely asked. "But for the results of that heedless blow, I might, I would have made you his heir. I held him under my influence; he was proud of your intelligence, and your childish beauty. His lands are not entailed; he would have settled them on you; but from that unhappy day, you turned from him with such evident dislike, that he became estranged from you; he ceased to seek me, and sought a wife among the rich and proud. He found one to her bitter wo, for I tempted him to evil against her; I avenged her rivalry. Oh, yes, *that* score is settled, and now——"

Her voice died away and she rocked herself to and fro, absorbed in thoughts which gradually brought back the baleful fire to her eyes, the hard and vindictive expression of hatred to her mouth.

Melchoir put up his knife, and with a bitter laugh, said:

"I stay my wrath at your bidding, but the time will come when I can strike home with sure aim, and wipe away the dishonor that has been put upon me. If you do not give me the chance I shall find it myself."

"Never fear—I will give it to you. Watch and wait, the wild blood of this youth will yet place him in our power, and enable us to repay his insults without danger to ourselves."

Minchen arose, drew her cloak around her and prepared to return to the camp. Her son followed her steps, muttering and twitching the handle of his knife. He was truly a formidable enemy; a creature reared with the wild instincts of his race, with few ideas of responsibility, with the fires

of hatred seething in his veins, and a brain partially warped by the blow which had been inflicted upon him in a moment of drunken anger.

The boy had attempted to arouse Sir Hugh from sleep as he lay overcome with liquor. He struck at him in his blind fury, fracturing the skull with the force of the blow. Long and dangerous was the illness that followed, and Melchoir arose from his sick bed with inextinguishable dislike to the author of his sufferings and a mind warped from its original promise. The brutal instincts predominated, and he acknowledged no influence save that which his mother wielded over him, and she was hard and ruthless in pursuit of her own aims and interests.

## CHAPTER V.

### A WINDFALL.

THE following morning brought with it a communication to Sir Hugh which was as welcome as unexpected. A letter came to him from Amsterdam which opened a prospect of carrying out his plans for Vernor from a most unexpected quarter.

The head of a law firm there thus addressed him:

"SIR HUGH METHURN:

"SIR,—The enclosed papers will show you that your young ward, Ethel Clifton, has become the sole legatee of the fortune of her mother's uncle, Josiah Winston, who died in this city a few weeks since.

"Mr. Winston was long engaged in trade here, and he has amassed a considerable fortune which he has uncondi-

tionally bequeathed to his grand-niece. You are named as her guardian and trustee, and on the day of her marriage, with your approbation, her fortune is to be paid over to her husband.

"It is advisable to wind up the estate without delay, and we think we may congratulate the young lady on coming in possession of at least fifty thousand pounds in personal property and real estate. Hoping to hear from you at your earliest convenience, and that an agent will be sent over to see to the settlement of our client's claims, we are

"Respectfully,

"HOOVER & BROTHER"

Sir Hugh read and re-read this letter, wondering if any man could have been so unsuspecting as to throw the inheritance of his ward so completely in his power. Fifty thousand pounds was a magnificent fortune in those days, and little Ethel was really the possessor of all this!

He turned over the schedule sent, and found that the greater portion of the estate was in ready money, the remainder in houses in the city of Amsterdam which yielded a handsome sum from their annual rents.

Among the papers Sir Hugh found a second letter addressed to himself, which explained Mr. Winston's confidence in him. It was dated a month back, and had evidently been written from the death-bed of the deceased merchant.

"SIR HUGH METHURN—

"Although I know nothing personally of you, yet the man who stepped forward to the assistance of my unhappy niece, who received her orphan child beneath his roof, must be eminently worthy of confidence.

"I have no near relative save this little girl, and to her the earnings of my life must go. Since my health began

to fail, I have caused inquiries to be made concerning my brother's family, and thus I have learned the story of your beneficence. That you took the orphan to your heart and home, is to me sufficient evidence that you are worthy of the trust I repose in you.

"Ethel will have an allowance of three hundred pounds a year until her marriage. On that event, if she marries with your consent, the whole of her fortune will pass into the possession of her husband. I do not believe in rendering a woman independent of the protector she herself usually chooses, and I believe that you will not permit her to bestow herself on one who is unworthy of such confidence.

"With my dying regards to my unknown niece, I conjure her to obey the wishes of him who has proved himself her friend when she had no other.

"JOSIAH WINSTON."

"What a precious windfall!" muttered Sir Hugh. "If Vernor will only listen to me now, his fortune is made. Fifty thousand pounds to come into his possession on the day of his marriage with the heiress, and what is to keep them from being married out of hand? Where lands and fortune are at stake, children have often entered into such bonds in this country, and then remained at school till they reached years of maturity. I'll do it, and Vernor shall travel on the continent while his bride is getting her education."

At that moment the steps of his son were heard crossing the hall, and Sir Hugh called to him. Vernor came to the door of the room and put his head in.

"I am engaged for this morning, father, and if you have no particular business with me, I wish you would excuse me a few hours."

"But I have very particular business with you, to which everything else must be deferred. Come in and shut the door, for I have something to reveal to you which nearly affects your future fortunes."

Vernor's curiosity was aroused by these words, and he came in, saying:

"Oh! if that's the game, I can put aside my affairs for the present. But what can this wonderful revelation be?"

"Read these," replied Sir Hugh, offering him the letters, "and then I will see if your thought tallies with my own."

Vernor obeyed, and then returned the letters with an expression his father scarcely liked.

"Well," he said, "Ethel has become suddenly rich; but how does that affect my fortunes?"

"You are very dull, or you would see that, as her husband, you can gain possession of the whole of this money."

Vernor looked annoyed.

"She is but a child, Sir Hugh; and, before she is old enough to marry, I may find a better way of recruiting our exhausted finances."

"You must be very hopeful, then," sneered his father. "If Ethel is a child, so much the better for you; for she can have no will of her own to oppose to mine. Your idol, Monmouth, was married to Lady Anne Scott while she was of tender years, and what is to prevent you from following his example?"

Vernor started and looked steadily at the speaker.

"Are you in earnest, Sir Hugh? Would you make such a use of the trust confided to you?"

"What better use can I make of it than to advance the interests of my own son? We need this money, and it will be no wrong to Ethel to secure it in this way. You can travel, and learn the ways of the world, while your child-bride can remain with your aunt till she is old enough to assume her position as Lady Methurn."

"But really, Sir Hugh, I do not care particularly for Ethel, and she likes my cousin far better than she does me. She will develop into a gentle, quiet woman like Aunt Agnes; but the being I shall love must be brilliant and dashing, passionate and vivid in her nature. No, Sir Hugh, I can never love little Ethel as my wife."

"Believe me, Vernor, the woman you describe would make you wretched. I speak from experience, for I have loved such a one, and lived to loathe and fear her. Do not walk in my footsteps, but grasp the good fortune that has been thrust upon you."

"I have heard that you did not live happily with my mother; but I was not aware that such feelings had grown up between you," said the young man, with a slight show of emotion.

"Your mother! Oh, no—not to her did I refer. Your mother brought me wealth; but I married her after the hey-day of passion was past. We were not happy, and I am afraid it was more my fault than hers. Let that pass; it has nothing to do with the matter in hand."

"I am afraid it has, sir; for if I marry Ethel, I shall, in my turn, make her miserable. I know that I can never love her. She is too sensitive—too refined, to assimilate with such as I am. Besides, as I said before, she likes Gerald far better than me."

Sir Hugh spoke with some passion:

"Then you are ready to let all this money go to your cousin without a struggle to retain it? No wonder he has been pronounced the heir to good fortune if you resign your best chances in his favor."

Vernor flushed deeply; this was touching him on a tender point; but, after a pause, he said:

"If I should consent to this arrangement, sir; if Ethel can be induced to give me her hand before she is old

enough to make a choice for herself; will it not be a terrible abuse of the trust her uncle has reposed in you? I need money, and the temptation is great to avail myself of this chance to obtain it; but you will be censured for getting possession of your ward's fortune in so irregular a manner."

"Why should we care for the scandal of others if we are well paid for it? I have already arranged in my own mind what is to be done. An agent must be sent to Amsterdam, and you shall go thither as the husband of the heiress. There will be no difficulty in settling with you in that character, and then you can make an extended tour on the continent. You may be absent four, or six years if you wish it, and return only when your bride is old enough to be claimed. This is the only avenue of escape from the fox-hunting life you have hitherto led. I believe you have ambition, and this is your sole chance to gratify it. The child is yielding and easily persuaded. She will grow up with the idea that her allegiance is due to you, and she will learn to love you."

Vernor pondered a few moments and then asked:

"How much am I to sell myself for, Sir Hugh? What does the lawyer say is the amount of her fortune?"

"Fifty thousand pounds — a splendid inheritance, by Jove! and, besides, Ethel stands almost in the direct succession to her grandfather's title and estates. She is the daughter of the second son, and the eldest is a man of dissipated habits, who is likely to die unmarried. Think of it! She may yet be Viscountess Clifton in her own right, with a rent roll of five thousand pounds a year. You're a fool, Vernor, to hesitate a moment."

"Thank you, sir; but I am not quite such a simpleton as to permit all these chances to fall to Gerald's lot. I suppose I must make a compromise of taste and feeling and

accept the little one as my wife—that is, if she will consent to take me."

"I have no fears about that. We can soon win her over; make her a few handsome presents, indulge her fancies for a few weeks, and you will gain the ground that Gerald's absence must cause him to lose. I will write to the lawyers and tell them that an agent will be sent over shortly, and in the meantime you must commend yourself to Ethel that she may not be difficult to manage."

Vernor arose with a resigned air.

"What destiny wills must be submitted to, I suppose; so I shall begin forthwith to play the part of lover to the baby heiress. But I say, Sir Hugh, will it not be necessary to keep what is going on from Aunt Agnes? Her notions are rather rigid, and I fancy she looks on Ethel as her peculiar property. It was she who took her, you know, and she has had the care of her since she has been with us."

Sir Hugh reflected a moment, and then said:

"There is no need to tell Mrs. Methurn what has happened just yet. I will make things straight with her when the proper time comes. Curb your impatient temper, Vernor, and be gentle with the child; she has a very affectionate nature, and you can easily step into the place Gerald lately held. Ethel has long wanted a pony; I saw a beautiful one a short time ago at Farmer Conway's that Kate has been in the habit of riding. He said he would sell it if he could get his price, which is somewhat high, but that is of no consequence now. Here is money; buy it, and send to Taunton for the necessary outfit; and by the way, order a hat and plumes for Ethel, and a scarlet habit. *That* will be sure to take her childish fancy."

Vernor laughed:

"You *are* going into the affair in earnest, sir, and you seem to know something of the way to win a woman."

"Why should I not, when the sex was once the study of my life? They all like pretty things, and as a natural consequence, they love him best who can give them the most of them. A few hundred pounds, judiciously used, will make Ethel think you perfectly charming."

"I bow to your experience, Sir Hugh, and take the cue you have so obligingly furnished. I shall, as Shakespeare or somebody else says, 'smile, and smile, and be a villain,' for this poor fragile little creature I shall never, never love—I shall spend her gold and break her heart, I know beforehand."

"Oh, well, if such is your resolution, you had better leave her to Gerald, for I should be sorry to push my plans to that consummation. Ethel may develop into a brilliant woman, though she is so retiring as a child. But whatever she may be, your cousin will never hesitate to take her and her fortune."

The reference to Gerald acted as Sir Hugh intended it should. Vernor frowned, bit his lips, and decisively said:

"I shall not allow Gerald the chance. Let him delve his fortunes out of musty parchments; it is all he aspires to, but I shall secure the one that is ready made to my hand, even with the incumbrance of a wife that may prove distasteful to me."

"That is settled then?"

"Certainly—give me the money, and I will ride over to Conway's at once and make sure of the pony, though I expect some black looks from Kate for my pains."

"By the way, that reminds me that Conway told me that Kate would accept young Crofts if you would cease your attentions to her. The father has sense enough to know that you have no intention to marry her, but it seems the girl thinks differently. It was very presuming in Kate Conway to aspire to become my daughter-in-law, and you

must have said many absurd things to lead her to form such a hope."

"Perhaps I have, sir," replied the young man, indifferently; "but you need have no apprehensions on that score. Kate and I have come to an understanding, and she told me yesterday that she had accepted Crofts. I promised her a bridal present, and the money I shall pay for the pony will probably buy her wedding finery."

"So much the better. I suppose Kate Conway, with her bold black eyes, and flippant tongue, is your ideal of a brilliant woman. Go into the world, Vernor, and see such women as I have known; then you will blush for your *penchant* for the village beauty."

"I shall take your advice, sir. But what if I should see there one who will make me wish that the bonds you would have me assume could be as lightly cast aside as my passing admiration for poor Kate? Such a thing might easily happen when my hand is plighted to a baby, and my heart free from any preference for my child bride."

"Without the fortune of the child-bride, you will have no chance to see them at all, so you must balance one against the other, and decide for yourself. I shall not urge you further."

"There is no need, sir. Necessity has no choice, as you perfectly comprehend. Gilded slavery or indigent obscurity are the alternatives. I choose the former, and resign myself to my fate with the philosophy of a martyr. Hand over the *quid pro quo*, Sir Hugh, and I am away upon my errand."

The baronet gave him his purse, and Vernor sauntered from the room, lightly humming a cavalier song. He encountered Ethel on the lawn, wearing a large garden hat and leading, a pet fawn, which Gerald had given her, by a long ribbon attached to his collar. Exercise had flushed her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with animation. Vernor regarded her critically, and he thought:



"She will really be very pretty, but then she is such a little creature. I like stately women, and this one is going to be a fairy. But what does it matter after all! The weight of her purse will make up for any deficiency in her own weight."

Ethel threw back her curls and came dancing toward him with smiling lips.

"Oh, Vernor, I have had such a delightful romp with Pitapat. Isn't that a nice name? It's just the sound his feet make on the hard road."

"It is a very suitable name, Lady Bird! and shows that you have a nice ear."

"Oh, I didn't give it to him. Gerald gave him to me, and he named him."

"Well, pretty one, I shall not permit Gerald to be the only one to make presents to you. I am going to give you something better worth having than your spotted fawn, for he will soon outgrow his spots, and become a dangerous playmate. My present shall do you some good."

The child's eyes brightened, but she threw her arm over her pet's neck, and said:

"This has done me a deal of good, for Auntie says my color is brighter since I had Pitapat to run after. But what are you going to get for me, Vernor? I had no idea you would ever think enough of me to give me anything."

"Oh! you're mistaken there, Ethel. I have always thought a great deal of you, but you were so much taken up with my cousin, and with your studies, that you had no time to notice me. It will be different now Gerald is away, and I am going to teach you how to manage a pony of your own."

She clasped her hands in childish ecstasy:

"Dear Vernor! a real, live pony? Oh! how delightful. Gerald said you would teach me to ride after the hounds;

but I do not wish to do that; I should be afraid of breaking my neck. But if you give me a pony, perhaps I shall like to do it after I get used to riding him."

"Yes—no fear of that. You've got a flash of spirit in you that will come out by and by. You must be very lonely now Gerald is gone, and I mean to make you my especial pet. Don't you think we shall get along together very well?"

Ethel looked rather doubtful, and she dubiously said:

"If you will have patience with me, and not get into what old Maud calls your tantrums. You know you flash up so quick, and lose your temper, so that—that sometimes I am quite afraid of you. Gerald always——"

"Never mind Gerald now," he impatiently broke in. "You need not expect me to be like him, for I do not care to imitate him, highly as you appreciate him; but I mean to be as patient as Job where you are concerned, for I have set my heart on filling my cousin's place while we are still together."

"Dear Vernor, I hope you are not thinking of going too. What should we do, with you and Gerald both gone?"

"Would you really be sorry, Lady Bird, if I were to leave you?" he asked, and he looked earnestly into the sweet face that was upturned to his.

"Oh, so sorry! Besides, why should you go away? You have not your living to gain, as Gerald has."

"Then you do love me a little bit."

"Of course I love you. Are you not my big brother? You have vexed me sometimes, but I always forgave you for it, because you know you can't help getting into a passion when anything goes wrong with you; and I know that I am often a sad worry to you. I am a timid little goose, but if you will teach me how to use my pony, I will try to be more courageous."



"That is right; and I promise you to try and restrain my quick temper. We will make a mutual compact, Ethel, and I shall be sure to keep mine, for I have set my heart on rivalling Gerald. I am jealous of your preference for my cousin, for I think you a charming little person."

The child opened her eyes with surprise at the first compliment Vernor had ever paid her, and she archly said:

"What would Kate Conway say if she heard that. She was vexed that you danced with me in preference to her on May-day."

"I fancy she wouldn't care much about it, for she is too busy fixing for her wedding to think of anything else. Don't you know that she is going to marry Tom Crofts?"

"And you must wear the willow," she roguishly said. "Here is a tree convenient—let me bind a spray around your hat."

"Do—but I shall wear it, not as a trophy of defeat but a promise of victory;" and he took off his hat and held it toward her, while she twined around it a long willow wreath from an immense tree, under the shadow of which they stood. In a few seconds the fantastic ornament was adjusted, Vernor placed the hat upon his head with a flourish.

"You have crowned me, Lady Bird, with the symbol of hope, rather than of despair. Good morning now, and dream of what gifts the good fairy will bring you within the next three days. Sir Hugh has opened his heart and purse, and ordered a birth-day gift that will be splendid; but I shan't tell you what it is to be."

"How good of Sir Hugh! Nobody but Aunty and Gerald ever thought of my birth-day before; and it's very kind of you and your father to remember that I shall be ten years old the ninth of this month."

Vernor might truly have told her that he had only remembered it himself within the last few moments, and

offered it as an excuse for the unusual liberality shown toward her; but he only said:

"You must say nothing to my father, Ethel, for he wishes to surprise you; and I should have given you no hint of the pretty things in store for you. Sir Hugh has adopted you as his daughter, and in future he intends to treat you as such."

"He is very kind, and I will try and be a good child to him, for, oh! Vernor, if he had not let me stay at the Priory, I do not know what would have become of me when my poor mamma died."

"Nor I either, for you had no one to take care of you; but if you are obedient, and mindful of Sir Hugh's wishes, he will never repent of his kindness to you. He may ask some return from you some day, Ethel, and then you can show your gratitude."

"I will do anything—*anything* he asks me," impulsively exclaimed the child, with flushed cheeks, and radiant eyes.

Vernor pinched her cheek, and laughingly said:

"That will do, Lady Bird. I see you are in earnest, and I will leave the future to develop itself. I must go now and bargain for the pony."

He blew a kiss to her from the tips of his fingers, and left her standing under the old tree lost in a delightful reverie. It had long been the darling wish of her heart to have a pony of her own, and no gift could have been so welcome to her. Her tastes were simple and natural, but Sir Hugh rightly judged that her childish heart could be won over by gifts and attentions to which she had been unaccustomed.

## CHAPTER VI.

## SIR HUGH AND VERNOR OPEN THEIR GAME.

DURING the next few weeks of her life, Ethel might have believed that she was suddenly endowed with a fairy god-mother, whose chief pleasure it was to minister to her peculiar fancies. The pony, a beautiful bay, with a skin like satin, and long flowing mane plaited with scarlet ribbons bearing a saddle with embroidered housings of the same color, and gaily decorated bridle, was led to the door on her birth-day morning; at the same hour a mysterious box made its appearance in her room, from which was drawn a complete outfit for the young equestrian. A fine cloth habit, embroidered with gold, and a cap with long white plumes floating to her shoulders. There was also a small riding-whip, with an inlaid handle, and a pair of fairy gauntlets, ornamented to match the dress.

The wild delight of the child as each article was successively exhibited, amused and surprised Mrs. Methurn; she said:

"These are beautiful gifts, Ethel; but I am afraid Sir Hugh must have taxed his means to afford them. I begin to think, my dear, that the material things to which I have sought to render you indifferent, have great power to give you happiness."

"Yes," replied Ethel, frankly. "These presents make me very happy, and I should be the most ungrateful of creatures if they did not. But I hope Sir Hugh has not spent money for them which he cannot afford. Do you think he has done that, aunty?"

"I suppose not, my love; for Sir Hugh is not a man to embarrass himself to minister to the gratification of a

child. He must have laid by something for this purpose from the sum annually paid by your grandfather. He seems fonder of you lately, and he told me last night, that in future he should regard you as his daughter."

"Yes; Vernor said he meant to adopt me as such. My own relations care nothing for me, and but for Sir Hugh and yourself I must have been a poor little homeless wanderer. Dear aunty, my heart is filled with gratitude to you both," and Ethel threw her arms around Mrs. Methurn and kissed her many times.

The voice of Vernor was heard from the hall below, impatiently calling on Ethel to descend and mount her pony. She hurried to don her riding gear and join him. She scarcely glanced at herself in the old-fashioned mirror, though the unwonted brilliancy of her appearance might have tempted an older person to linger a moment before it. But she remembered Vernor's impatience, and she was afraid to delay a moment longer than was necessary.

Vernor surveyed her approvingly, and lifted her to her saddle as he gaily said:

"Titania on horseback, I declare. Ethel, the Dryads will be envious of you to-day. Sir Hugh must see the effect of your outfit; let us ride past his windows and salute him."

He sprang into his own saddle, and taking the reins of her pony, led him to the side of the house in which Sir Hugh's chamber was situated. He was sitting beside the open window, and when Ethel called out to him he smiled, and said:

"You are pleased with your birthday present, then, my dear?"

"Pleased! oh that is a poor word. I am enchanted; you could not have given me anything else I should have liked half so well."

"Then I am satisfied, Lady-Bird, for I only wished to gratify you."

"Dear Sir Hugh, what have I done to deserve all this kindness?"

"You have been a bright and happy little sprite to us all, Ethel, and in future you will be more to us than you have ever been. Take your ride, and be as happy, my child, as I wished to make you."

There was a tone of paternal tenderness in his voice which deeply touched the little girl, for Sir Hugh was a consummate actor when he had anything to gain by playing a part.

Vernor touched his pony lightly with his riding-whip, and they cantered away under the shadow of the old trees, the flickering sunlight flashing at intervals over the gorgeous dress of the young rider. Ethel had practised riding a little under Gerald's tuition, and she soon gained confidence enough to manage her pony herself. He seemed perfectly gentle, and her fears were soon sufficiently allayed to permit her to prattle to her companion with the freedom and vivacity of her years. Vernor had no cause to lose his temper, and they made the circuit of the woodland, and came in sight of the Gipsy's camp.

"Shall we ride toward the camp?" he asked.

"Oh, no—I am afraid of those wild people. Let us keep as far from them as possible."

A discordant laugh arose from a thicket near which the pair had halted, and a voice which both recognized as that of the Gipsy Queen said:

"Ha! ha! danger from us you need not fear, little butterfly; but it is near to you—your evil fate rides by your side, and I bid you beware of him. The dark shadow in your line of life which I would not tell you of when we last met, is settling over you. Poor little dove! where shall she

find shelter when the hawk is making ready to pounce upon her?"

The woman issued from her covert, and stood directly in their path. Vernor angrily spoke:

"Move aside and leave your warnings to those that fear them. How dare you speak thus to this young lady?"

"It is a very tiny young lady," replied the Gipsy mockingly. "I should call her a baby, but since she is decked out thus some good fortune must have come to her. Something for nothing is not your father's motto, nor yet yours, young sir. Little girl, you were born to bright fortunes; do not mar them by giving a bad man power over you. I see that evil threatens you; evil that will culminate in woe in time to come if you do not heed my warning."

Ethel had grown very pale, and she faintly said:

"Pray get out of our path—let us ride on."

"Ho, you fear *me*, and yet you would ride away with one who has more power over your fate for evil, than is exercised by the imps of the Inferno. Go on then, but the day will come in which you will recall my words in anguish and bitterness of heart."

She stepped aside, and Vernor after casting a threatening glance upon her, rode rapidly forward, again grasping the bridle rein of his young companion. When they were out of sight of their encampment, he slackened their pace and said:

"That woman has some strange grudge against my father, and she hates me because I am his son. Do not heed her words, Ethel, for they were only dictated by malice."

"Yet it is said that these people claim the power to read the future."

"Do you then believe that *I* would become your evil fate?" he reproachfully asked.

"No—no—there indeed she must be mistaken. I will not think of what she said, for I do not believe it."

"No, Ethel, you must not give credence to her idle words, for you will soon find that I intend to become your best friend. Sir Hugh has lately come in possession of quite a large sum of money, and he has made me a munificent present. Out of that he bought your beautiful pony, and from mine, I am going to give you something else you will like."

The child laughed, then checking herself she gravely said:

"The pony is quite enough, Vernor. You will have a use for all your money for yourself."

"But it pleases me to use a portion of it for your gratification. I tell you this, that when pretty things come to you, you may know who is the giver. But you have not named your dainty steed yet, Lady Bird. What shall we call him?"

"Lightfoot," she quickly replied, "for he scarcely seems to touch the ground as he skims over it."

"Ha, by my faith, a pretty taste you have in names. Lightfoot merits his cognomen if ever pony did. Now let us canter to the Priory, and show Aunt Agnes how much you have profited by your equestrian lesson."

Ethel gathered the bridle in her small hand, and they swept rapidly forward. Sir Hugh and Mrs. Methurn were both near the hall door, watching for their return. During their absence the lady had been vainly endeavoring to discover the origin of Sir Hugh's sudden change toward her protégée. That both the baronet and his son were moved by some motive which was sedulously concealed from her, Mrs. Methurn felt convinced; but for the present she found her brother impenetrable. He only assured her that it had long been his intention to place Ethel in the position

of an adopted daughter, and the savings he had made enabled him to indulge in the extravagances which so much surprised her.

Sir Hugh furthermore added that he had resolved to fit up an apartment for Ethel's especial use, and he had ordered the furniture from London. Mrs. Methurn listened in silent astonishment, convinced that beneath this liberality lay some deep design in which the fate of her protégée was implicated. She quietly asked if Col. Clifton was dead, and Ethel the next in succession to her grandfather's estate, that such changes were to be made in her favor. In reply, Sir Hugh assured her that Col. Clifton was living, and was likely to live many years yet. That he had reasons for the changes he meditated, which, in due time, should be made known to his sister-in-law; for the present, he only asked her to allow her young charge more freedom than usual, that she might be more of a companion to Vernor.

The absence of Gerald was the reason assigned for this, but Mrs. Methurn knew that only to Ethel was his departure a cause of regret, for Vernor had evidently regarded the presence of her son more as a restraint than a pleasure.

That evening, on going into her room, Ethel found an elegant work-box fitted up in the most costly and beautiful manner. This was Vernor's birth-day present, and beside it lay a pin-cushion worked by Mrs. Methurn, and a copy of verses written by Gerald.

Over the last she shed a few tears, but they were soon wiped away to plunge into the recesses of the box, and bring out the various feminine treasures it contained. These filled her with delight; but the crowning joy of all was a case fitted in the centre of the box, which, on being opened, displayed a *parure* of sparkling rubies set with the simplicity suited to one of her tender years.

Mrs. Methurn watched her rapturous delight, and she was

filled with disquietude as to the meaning of this sudden change toward the child who had been rather tolerated than welcome at the Priory.

In a few more days the furniture which had been ordered arrived. The walls of a large room adjoining Mrs. Methurn's were covered with rose silk hangings, and a set of heavily carved furniture, which was a recent fashion imported from France, was arranged within it.

Everything was very grand, and Ethel moved about in this stately apartment looking more childlike than ever, but she unconsciously began to feel a new sense of importance in the attentions lavished on her. Vernor dexterously made her believe that the change was due to him, and her young heart began to cling to him with as much tenderness as she had once felt for Gerald.

A beautiful wardrobe next arrived, filled with articles which a young princess might have worn, and the exquisite embroidery and fine laces with which the clothing was adorned increased Mrs. Methurn's astonishment at the sudden caprice of Sir Hugh to elevate the hitherto neglected little waif into a person of such importance. She could not penetrate the mystery, yet it filled her with uneasiness as to his real intentions toward the child of her affections.

Vernor was using every art to ingratiate himself with Ethel, and with deep pain Mrs. Methurn saw that her artless and affectionate nature was strongly impressed by his newly awakened interest in her affairs.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE SECRET CHAMBER.

SIR HUGH replied to the letter of Hoover & Co., assuring them that an agent clothed with full powers to settle the estate of the deceased Mr. Winston would be sent over to Amsterdam in a short time, and expressed the hope that the lawyers would have everything arranged for a speedy transfer of the property to his possession.

The change in his son's prospects had a beneficial effect upon his own health, and he found himself rapidly recovering his powers of locomotion. This was especially agreeable to him, as Vernor every day inquired when he would be able to conduct him to the secret chamber, for the young man still pertinaciously dwelt on his desire to explore its mysteries.

Sir Hugh vainly endeavored to evade the promise he had made, for he shrank with nervous dread from the thought of entering the place with which so many dark memories were connected. But Vernor would listen to no excuses, and he declared that on the fulfilment of his father's pledge rested his acceptance of Ethel as his future wife. If Sir Hugh forfeited his word, he would also retract, and seek his fortune in his own way: after all, he would probably do better for himself than to give his freedom in exchange for the wealth it would purchase. He did not really care for the child, and he but played a part toward her to please his father.

Thus goaded on, Sir Hugh nerved himself to the task of entering the vaults beneath the old building alone at a late hour of the night. He provided himself with a dark lantern, and selected several keys from an old bunch that had lain for years unused in a closet in his room.

By opening doors which had long been closed he could descend to the vaults, and he preferred this to skirting the park to the outlet through which the gipsy had penetrated to the place.

When the household was buried in sleep, Sir Hugh lit his lantern, and crossing a narrow room which divided his own apartment from the cells once occupied by the monks, he fitted the rusty key in the lock, and with much effort succeeded in turning it. At length the door opened and a damp mouldy scent greeted him from the badly ventilated corridor.

He stepped in and flashed his light over the dusty floor, and heavy oak doors which closed upon the dormitories once occupied by the monks. The walls were covered with cobwebs, and bats disturbed by the light fluttered wildly through the long and narrow passage.

Summoning all his natural hardihood, Sir Hugh walked rapidly forward and gained the door at the farther extremity of the corridor. This opened into the chapel, a gothic temple of considerable size, which was falling into decay. The altar was broken down, and the pictures which had once adorned the walls were cut and defaced by the violence of the soldiers who had first desecrated its holy precincts.

More than a century had elapsed since that event, and time and neglect had nearly finished what man began.

Tradition said that the altar steps had been stained with the blood of the officiating priest, who refused to yield to the orders of Henry VIII. the property which had been consecrated to God.

The feeble light that glimmered on broken chalices, and fragments of consecrated candles, showed that a struggle had taken place on the spot dedicated to the very holy of holies; but the present visitor had no reverence for the relics of a faith which he and his had long repudiated, and he strode

past the altar to the crumbling remains of a reading desk, and placing his lantern upon the floor, kneeled down to examine the flagging beneath.

He drew out a dagger, and scraped away the accumulated dust around a smooth, square stone, and then, pressing hard upon the edge, it slowly arose, and revealed a flight of steps which seemed to have been rudely cut from the solid rock.

Carefully guarding his light, the baronet forced his burly form through this aperture, and propping back the trap-door, descended into the labyrinth of vaults below. A person unacquainted with the locality must soon have become hopelessly lost in their windings, for the subterranean apartments extended beneath the whole of the old building, and were arranged with bewildering disregard to architectural rules.

But Sir Hugh was familiar with every foot of the route he must traverse, and he strode forward without pausing to note the dreary echo of his steps as they reverberated through the desolate waste he was traversing. He at length stopped in front of a damp, mouldy looking wall, and turning his light upon it saw that the entrance he sought was already open. It was an oblong block of stone, much larger than the one he had recently lifted, which had been sprung back and left resting upon the cunningly concealed hinges.

With an oath, Sir Hugh muttered that the Gipsy had been there to open the way for him, and, without hesitating, he thrust his lantern in the vault, and then followed it himself. He straightened himself, and looked around with a shudder, for he recalled the moment when a corpse-like form had been borne through that aperture, and taken by him and his accomplice to the living death that awaited her.

The room was about twenty feet square, and nothing was seen in it but a flight of steps, which wound upward to a trap-door in the floor above. Sir Hugh recovered himself, and, drawing a deep breath, approached the stairs. Slowly

and reluctantly he mounted them, for as he drew near the bourne of his pilgrimage, even his cold, hard heart failed him.

"It is too bad of Vernor to exact this from me," he muttered, as he stood with his arm lifted to touch the spring which would open the way above him. "My heart fails me at the thought of what I may find there."

At that moment his knees tottered, his face blanched, and his hair was glued to his temples by the cold dew that rose upon them, for he heard the muffled sound of a death chant coming from the sealed apartment above. He sat down on the steps, breathless and appalled; the dirge swelled louder, and he despairingly asked:

"Oh, Arabella, has your outraged spirit been permitted to return to chant your own requiem in the ears of him who slowly murdered you? Yet I *must* go on; I can never go back without fathoming this mystery."

With sudden desperation he lifted his arm, thrust back the door above his head, and a dazzling flash of light streamed upon him from the apartment he had expected to find as silent and dark as the grave it had become.

Sir Hugh was no coward, neither was he superstitious, and after the first moment of stunning surprise, he gathered courage to lift himself through the aperture and look upon the strange scene the room presented.

It was brilliantly illuminated, and the light fell upon walls draped with faded damask, on rich old-fashioned furniture covered with the same material. But what fascinated the eye of the visitor was a niche in the wall from which the hangings were drawn back, exposing a heavy stone sarcophagus before which a kind of altar had been made by a table that was drawn in front of it, on which the candles that lighted the apartment were placed.

A small square of velvet was thrown over the coffin, on which was embroidered:

ARABELLA VERNOR—LADY METHURN—AGED 23.

The chant still continued, though no one was visible, and Sir Hugh glared upon the heavy satin hangings of the bed, which were closely drawn, and hoarsely said:

"Come forth, Minchen, for to you I owe this shameful mockery. You are concealed behind those curtains, wailing your cursed death-song. Come forth, I say."

At this peremptory command, the Gipsy put aside the heavy folds of silk that sheltered her, and stepped out into the light.

She was dressed in white, and wore a wreath of scarlet flowers twined around her gray locks. The dress was also embroidered with gay colors, and its youthfulness contrasted in a ghastly manner with her worn and faded appearance. She made him a mocking reverence, and said:

"Yes, Hugh Methurn, I am here, celebrating the obsequies of your wife in the festive dress in which you first saw and loved me. See how carefully I have preserved it; every flower is unfaded, and *I*—am what you see me. Strange isn't it, that the work of human hands should last longer than that of the divine architect? If God did not intend the spirit to live in another form, he would have fashioned the casket to endure longer. What does he mean to do with your spirit and mine, Methurn? Have you any idea?"

"I neither know nor care," replied the baronet, roughly. "What does this mockery mean? and why have you assumed that dress, which is as unsuited to you as to the corpse in yonder coffin. Ugh! the trappings of youth on age and wrinkles is too hideous a sight."

The woman laughed wildly.



"Yet when I first wore this dress you swore to love me eternally; you vowed that your passion should know no change. Oh! Hugh Methurn, it is well for me that nothing you can *now* say has power to wound me. Come—let us chant together the services for your dead wife. They have been long delayed, but that was because the chief mourner was absent—ha! ha!"

Again her discordant laugh rang out, and the listener shuddered.

"Woman, how did you know that I would come hither? and why have you prepared this scene to greet me?"

"Because it chimes with my humor, Sir Hugh; and I divined that you must come hither to prepare the room for the inspection of the young heir. I made my preparations, and I have awaited you here every night since I learned that your health was mending. Oh! it was brave to watch beside that stone sarcophagus in which my rival lies, and know that she can never again step forth to the light of the day; though it was little of that she saw for months before her death."

"Then she is really *there*?" said Sir Hugh, pointing to the coffin, with a cold dew bursting from his brow. "I feared as much; but this niche can be closed up. The hangings can be made to conceal it, for Vernor must know nothing of the tragedy they conceal."

"Of course she is there, Sir Hugh; for how could I have removed her without assistance? and you refused to come hither after her death. It was lucky that the penitent's couch had been left by the old monks; it made a capital mausoleum for the Lady of Methurn; and she withered away to such an anatomy through fretting for her freedom, that I lifted her into it as easily as I would a child, after the breath left her body."

"And she has lain there for fifteen years unheeded—

might have lain there through all time—but for the words which aroused the curiosity of my son. The secret of the chamber might have died with me but for that. Now, Vernor insists on knowing it, and I have no alternative but to show him the entrance. But, after all, it may be useful to him in the future."

"In the same way, Sir Hugh?" asked the Gipsy, significantly.

The baronet started, and he quickly asked:

"What do you mean?"

"Only that as you married a woman for her fortune, and put her away to get possession of it, your son may follow in your footsteps."

"He will not do that, for he will have no devil to tempt him to the wickedness as you did me," he fiercely replied.

"He will be sure to find one," retorted the woman. "'Like father, like son,' says the old proverb, and your son is as hard and unscrupulous as you were in your youth—nay, as you now are. Of late I have seen him dancing attendance on the little girl who seems suddenly to have become an object of importance to him and to you. I have heard of the presents heaped on her, and I know that *you* do nothing without a motive. Is the child already Lady Clifton, Sir Hugh?"

"No—nor ever likely to be, as far as I know; but I do not choose to be called to account by you. Assist me to remove from this room every evidence of my wife's stay in it, and then let us part forever."

"They are already removed, Methurn. I performed that service for you before you came, for I knew that would be your object in coming hither. But we are strangely neglecting the funeral rites; the relics have long waited them; but it is never too late to perform a duty."

She darted behind the bed curtains, and again appeared

wrapped in a black cloak which covered her person to her feet, and her gray hair, from which she had removed the scarlet wreath, floated in silvery masses upon her shoulders.

"It's as good as a masquerade," she lightly said, as she again stood before him. Eh, my dear baronet, how do I sustain the character of chief mourner at my lady's funeral?"

There was a mingling of the grotesque and the horrible in the scene that made even Sir Hugh's iron nature quail, and he sunk down upon a chair which had been drawn in front of the table.

"That is the very seat I prepared for you," said the Gipsy, "and here is the prayer-book. You can read the service, and I will make the responses. It will be nothing like the gorgeous burial that filled the parish church with mourners on that other day; but this will be real, and the other was only a sham. Who but you and I knew that the coffin they entombed with so much state was filled with stones, and the living Lady Methurn was incarcerated in this chamber? Ho! ho! Sir Hugh, you got the money, but I got what was better to me—revenge—revenge upon my rival."

She placed a book before him, but now, aroused to a pitch of uncontrollable passion, he dashed it to the other side of the apartment, and furiously said:

"Have done with your mocking bewilderment, and shut out that thing from sight. Drop the hangings over it, and put out your lights. I cannot tarry here all night listening to your babbling."

"So you refuse to give the poor lady Christian sepulture? Well—it's no business of mine; she is safe enough yonder without it, and if you are satisfied, so am I."

Sir Hugh covered his face with his hands, and his strong frame quivered with emotion. He could remorselessly con-

demn his wife to the captivity that destroyed her, but when brought face to face with the stony receptacle in which she lay, a trembling dread seized him, and he asked of his inmost soul if some terrible retribution would not yet overtake him.

The marriage settlement of Lady Methurn had given him the entire control of her fortune in the event of her decease; the woman who now stood beside him, deeply as he now loathed her, had at that time unlimited power over him, and he yielded to the temptation to rid himself of his wife, urged on by his own cupidity, and the furious jealousy of her rival.

Lady Methurn had no near relatives, and when she lay ill in her secluded country home, Minchen in the disguise of a nurse, was placed in charge of her. The report was spread through the country that she was attacked with that terrible scourge in those days, the small pox, and the Priory was avoided by every one. The servants feared to enter the suite of rooms appropriated to her use, and Sir Hugh and the nurse were her only attendants.

The infant was removed and placed in the care of a healthy countrywoman, and the two deadly enemies of the poor lady had the field clear to themselves. A leaden coffin was procured, in which sufficient weight was placed, and then sealed up to prevent the contagion of the disease from spreading. The man who tremblingly performed this service really believed that the body of Lady Methurn was within it, and he escaped from the apartment as soon as his task was completed.

In the meantime the hapless victim had been placed under the influence of narcotics, and conveyed to the room whose existence was only known to the two who had prepared it for her use. One of the deserted apartments had been denuded of its furniture, and by night, Sir Hugh and

his accomplice conveyed it to the secret chamber and arranged it themselves.

Lady Methurn awoke from her long and death-like sleep to find herself a prisoner, shut out from social life, from light, from hope. She never again beheld her husband, and her late nurse appeared before her in her true character, that of a jealous and vindictive fury.

The Gipsy, liberally supplied with money by Sir Hugh, remained in the neighborhood of the Priory, and every third night she came to visit her charge, to supply her with food, and to watch over her rapid decay. Broken in health and crushed in spirit, the struggle did not last long. Within a year from her incarceration the helpless woman died, and the being that hated her had the satisfaction of placing her worn and wasted body in the stone coffin which had been placed by the monks in this chamber of penance as the couch of its occupant.

At every visit it had been exhibited to the unfortunate lady by her relentless enemy, with the assurance that it was to become her tomb; that such was the unalterable will of her husband. Lady Methurn had great pride, and a very high spirit combined with little real strength of character. She soon sunk into a state of apathy from which even the taunts and insults of the Gipsy could not arouse her, and she gradually faded away until one night when the persecutor came she found her lying lifeless on the bed. She placed her in the sarcophagus, and with immense labor closed the heavy lids upon her wrongs and woes.

Then Minchen sought Sir Hugh and demanded as the price of her services that he should redeem his pledge to make her his wife if she would enable him to grasp the fortune he coveted. He refused; threatened her with the penalties of the law for what she had done, and commanded her to leave England. Even while trampling upon her, he relied

upon her love for him to save him from exposure. He knew that she would never denounce him, and she never did. He gave her money, and she again betook herself to the vagabond life of her people.

In obedience to his commands, for years she wandered in foreign lands accompanied by her son; but suddenly the wish to return to the Priory seized her. The son of her rival was now approaching maturity, and in her heart was a feeling of bitter hatred toward him who occupied the position which should have been filled by the eldest born. Melchoir was a nameless and homeless wanderer, while Vernor held the station which should have been his.

Again the gipsy's camp appeared in the old woodland in which Minchen and Sir Hugh had first met, and with a heart filled with bitter memories, mingled with no feeling of remorse for what she had done, the prematurely aged and wrinkled woman again stood face to face with the man she had so adoringly loved; so recklessly aided to commit a crime of even deeper dye than that of murder.

That meeting has been described, and here she had awaited him for a final settlement of her claims upon him. Minchen picked up the book which the baronet had so furiously dashed from him, placed it on the table, and began to loosen the cords which held back the hangings in front of the sarcophagus. Suddenly she paused and asked:

"Wouldn't you like to look upon your dead wife, Methurn? In this atmosphere, by this time she has withered away to a brown mummy, and I would like you to see that her beauty is gone as well as my own. Come, let us raise the stone lid and look in upon her."

Sir Hugh lifted his face with an expression of horror, and hoarsely said:

"Are you a demon, or a woman? Do you think I would dare to look upon the creature I so fearfully wronged?"

"I am what your cruelty has made me," was the fierce response; "a tigress, perhaps, but I am no worse than you, though I have the nerve to face the consequences of my own acts. You could bring hither the living form in your arms and thrust it in this den, yet you shrink from looking on the dead one from which the spirit that suffered has long since fled. Ho! ho! Methurn, that is a nice distinction, and by making it I suppose you claim to be more humane than I am; but neither of us have much to boast of in that line."

"No," replied Sir Hugh, in a subdued tone. "We have both played a terrible part. Arabella's temper made me hard and cruel toward her. She irritated me every day by her arrogant opposition to my wishes, and I was easily wrought on to rid myself of her by shutting her up here. I have sometimes thought of it with remorse, but I believe that you have had no such feeling."

"That may well be, for she loved *you*, but she rivalled *me*; then wherefore shall I feel remorse? You will say that you were *wrought on* by me, I suppose; let it be so; it has been so from the beginning of creation; the first man cravenly said to his Maker, 'the *woman* thou gavest me tempted me.' Follow the example of the father of the human race, and throw the blame of your own greed upon me; I can bear that as I have borne so many other wrongs at your hands."

"Minchen, this recrimination is useless. Let us put the room in order, for to-morrow I have promised to bring Vernor hither and show him the secret of the entrance."

"How will you account for the presence of the furniture?"

"I have already told him that the chamber was used by refugees in Cromwell's time, and he will naturally think the furniture was placed here for their comfort."

He arose, drew down the hangings and hurriedly arranged them against the wall. Then he said:

"I will place this heavy table against the recess, and no one will imagine that anything is concealed behind it."

The table was lifted back, the lights extinguished, all save one, which the Gipsy carried, and looking around the apartment, Sir Hugh raised his lantern to depart.

"Come," he said, "daylight must not find me here; let us leave this dreary place."

"Not till you have done something for my son, Sir Hugh. Is it just that Melchoir should be a wandering vagrant, while every indulgence is granted to his younger brother? If you can afford such presents as you have lately lavished upon your ward, you can also give to your own son."

"I gave you money when we last met, and I shall soon have it in my power to give you much more. What else can you demand?"

"I ask an annuity for Melchoir's life. Settle on him a sum sufficient for his wants and mine, and I will leave you to repent in peace."

"If you will pledge yourself to lay aside your enmity to Vernor, I will comply with your demand. You hate the boy; you would do evil to him if the chance arose."

"I promise it—I will do him no wrong," said the woman in reply, for the thought arose in her mind that the blows given by Vernor to his half brother had made him a far bitterer and more reckless enemy than even she would have proved; but of this Sir Hugh knew nothing. "Give me the means of living, and we will again go far from you."

"They shall be yours," replied the baronet. "In a few weeks I shall have it in my power to provide for you liberally, and I pledge myself to do so. In the meantime, I command you to keep clear of my son. I would not, on many accounts, have Vernor know the history of that portion of my past life in which you are concerned."

"It would indeed be a pretty record to lay bare to the child of her who lies yonder; but I warn you that unless you keep your word to me *this* time, I will bring him hither, and tell him the whole story."

"I shall not fail; but even if I should, I would not advise you to attempt that," said Sir Hugh, in a threatening manner. "I would crush you, and all your tribe, as remorselessly as I would deal with a nest of vipers. You know of old that I am not to be trifled with."

"And you also know that I am not one to regard threats," was the retort. "If I were to tell *my* story to a magistrate, and lead the way to this spot, what would be the result to you, Methurn?"

He turned savagely toward her, and the gleam of his fierce eyes made her cower in spite of her natural hardihood. He hissed between his set teeth:

"Do you offer a temptation to me to strangle you, and throw you into yonder sarcophagus to keep company with her you placed there? If I believed that you could denounce me, you should never leave this spot alive."

"If a struggle between us were to take place, Hugh Methurn, I should not die easy. I am younger and more active than you, and I believe that I should come off the winner; besides, I came prepared for every emergency," and she drew a sharp poniard from her bosom, the fine point of which was slightly discolored.

"The point of this steel has been dipped in a poison so subtle, so deadly, that one scratch from it will be as fatal to life as the sting of the asp. One blow from it would paralyze your arm, and in a few seconds the fatal venom would rush through your system, carrying death through every artery—through even the minutest vein. In one hour you would be a swollen and loathsome corpse; then think of the risk of such a blow dealt by a strong and desperate hand, and be more sparing of your threats, Sir Hugh."

The baronet glanced with a shudder at the weapon, then at the ruthless face of the speaker and hastily said:

"Enough, Minchen. Let us not bandy threats which neither will attempt to carry out. Your life and mine are bound with the same cord, and the rope which cuts one short will be very apt to end the other. Put up your dagger; you will have no occasion to use it on me."

"I will put it up when you have descended the staircase before me. In dealing with such a man as you, one cannot be too wary."

"But how do I know that you might not strike me from behind with that infernal weapon of yours?"

"Because I have nothing to gain, and much to lose, by your death. The reverse would be the case if you could put me out of the way. Descend, Sir Hugh; you know that I would never harm you, unless compelled to do so in self-defence."

She motioned imperiously toward the opening in the floor, the poniard flashing in the light of the candle she held, and Sir Hugh thought it best to obey. He descended the steps as rapidly as his infirmities permitted, and the Gipsy, after placing her candle in a lantern that stood upon the floor, followed him, and carefully closed the trap-door.

When she gained the floor, her companion was already at the entrance, but she rapidly overtook him, and together they shut the door which closed in the wall so perfectly, that one unacquainted with its locality would never have suspected its existence. The Gipsy turned toward Sir Hugh, and said:

"For the present here we part, Methurn. Comply with my just demands, and I will wander away and leave you at peace. There lies your path, and here is mine; they diverge as widely as you could wish, and if such is your will, they need never cross each other again."

"It is my will. The annuity I have promised shall be regularly paid through my lawyer, Mr. Barstow, of Taunton, to any one you may designate; but after what has this night passed here, I never wish to see you again. We have done each other evil enough, Minchen, and it is useless to meet to call up the irredeemable past. I would bury it beneath the deepest, darkest tide of oblivion if I possessed the power to do so."

"And my son? the child you once declared the noblest boy that ever blessed a father's heart—have you no wish to look on him?"

"No," was the hasty reply. "I have no desire to see him. Since that unfortunate blow Melchoir has hated me; then why shall I pain myself by seeing him? He has grown into a handsome savage, I suppose, for he had little good from either you or me; and when my hand fell so heavily upon him, it crushed the intellect that might have guided him to a higher career than that he must now fill. Poor lad! I have often regretted the results of my passionate temper."

"The boy is good, and true to me, and that is quite enough," said the Gipsy, with a frown. "Had he retained his early brightness, you would probably have sought to take him from me; but now he is all my own. When I tell him that you have provided for our wants, he will be glad to leave your lands forever, for he feels and resents the injuries of his mother. Adieu, Sir Hugh; day approaches and we must part."

"In one month you shall have the first instalment of your annuity," was the response, and the two separated.

Sir Hugh paused for a few moments to watch the receding figure of the Gipsy till the faint circle of light cast by her lantern faded into a dim spark, and was then lost in the abrupt windings of the vaults. With a sigh of relief he turned upon his own course, and slowly and thoughtfully retraced his steps toward the chapel.

The unusual excitement and his long walk had exhausted him, and he was glad once more to reach his own apartment and throw himself upon his bed, where he soon fell into a profound slumber, from which he did not wake till a late hour on the following morning.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TERRORS OF THE SECRET CHAMBER.

SIR HUGH usually took his breakfast in his own room, and the late hour at which he rang did not excite any surprise. Vernor came in with the servant who brought him his tea and toast, and inquired with much solicitude concerning the state of his father's health. The baronet replied with a faint smile:

"I am quite strong again, and to-day I shall be able to do what I have promised. I will accompany you whither we proposed to go after I have finished my breakfast."

Vernor nodded and looked pleased; but he said nothing more till John had retired and closed the door after him. He then eagerly spoke:

"Father, if we would carry out our plans with reference to Ethel, we must invent some story to satisfy Aunt Agnes. She has been annoying me with her inquiries until I am quite out of patience, and she evidently suspects our motive for the change toward the child. It is my belief that she will oppose the marriage, unless some better reason is found for it than either you or I are prepared to give."

Sir Hugh burst into a volley of curses, and having exhausted his irritable feelings in this congenial manner, said:

"Mrs. Methurn has no power to stop it, and, if she attempts to circumvent me, I will threaten to remove my ward from her altogether and place her in a boarding school."

"That might silence her, sir; but it will be better to make her believe that it will be to Ethel's interest as much as my own to let the marriage ceremony be performed between us."

"But how is that to be done?"

"I have turned the affair over in my own mind, and I think I can manage it, if you do not object."

"Why should I object to anything that is to serve your interests? What do you propose to do?"

"Only to forge a letter which is to be shown to her in place of the one that came from Mr. Winston. From that she shall learn that the fortune is left to Ethel on the condition that she shall become the wife of your son, as it was the only method left to him to show his gratitude for a service rendered to him by you many years ago."

"Service? What service? I never heard of the man till I got that notice from the Amsterdam lawyers."

"Pshaw! Sir Hugh, how dull you are! How is my aunt to know that? You have mixed largely with men, and I dare say have sometimes done a favor that did not cost you much. This man may as well have been the recipient of some such kindness as any other; at all events, you can say he was, and who is to contradict you? Leave the management of this to me, and I will prove to you that I have a pretty talent for mystifying."

"Oh, well, if you can make as shrewd a woman as Agnes Methurn believe your assertions, I can have no objection. If she knows Ethel to be an heiress she may wish to keep her free for her own son; the lad was always fonder of her than you were, at any rate."

"Yes; if Gerald were here I should have a far more difficult part to play. Ethel was very much attached to him, too; but she is learning to like me quite as well as she once liked my cousin. After we have visited the Secret Chamber I will compose my letter, and I can disguise my hand so that Aunt Agnes will never recognize it. It will be some amusement in this dull old den to play this trick on my dignified and stately kinswoman."

"Well, well—arrange it to suit yourself. When your own interests are at stake, you will have shrewdness enough to serve them well, I dare say."

"Never fear, sir. I have quite a talent for invention, and this is as good a field as any other to try it in. My aunt will probably consider Mr. Winston as a romantic old fool, but that is no concern of ours. Luckily he is safe in his grave, and cannot contradict anything I may make him say."

Sir Hugh laughed and patted his son on the shoulder as he said:

"Then you begin to see the thing as I do, and you no longer wish to throw away this chance to win a fortune?"

"Well, the fact is, sir, Ethel is a more attractive little puss than I believed her to be. I have set myself to studying her good points, and she will develop into a very passable woman. She's deucedly small, but I hope she will take a sudden start, and grow tall. But large or small, pretty or ugly, I must take her, for I see no escape from my dull life here but in gaining possession of her fortune. Besides, it will be many years before I shall be compelled to claim her. By that time I shall have sown my wild oats, and I shall care very little who is the mistress of my establishment."

"Bravo, Vernor! for so young a man I must say that you are quite a philosopher. Carry out your plan; win



Ethel's consent to marry you on any terms, and I am content. Our fortunes are at a very low ebb, and if we cannot mend them by getting possession of hers, we shall be utterly ruined. New claims, which are imperative, have lately come against me, and they must be provided for, even if I sacrifice a portion of my small income to liquidate them."

"I was not aware that you have contracted debts, Sir Hugh. I thought that of late years we have lived meanly enough to keep within bounds."

"So we have, but this is a long neglected claim. It comes to me in such a form that I cannot set it aside. It is useless to explain to you, only enable me to settle it and all will be well."

"If it depends on me, sir, you shall have that power before very long. Will it not be better to make our visit to the chamber at an early hour of the day? I am quite ready now to accompany you."

"Yes—we will go at once," replied Sir Hugh, with a show of willingness, yet his heart sank within him at the trial before him, and he would gladly have postponed the performance of his promise; but since he must go through the ordeal, he nerved himself to the task, and with seeming alacrity drew the keys from their hiding place.

"These," he said, "will unlock the doors through which we must pass; I have also provided a lantern to light us through the labyrinth of the vaults."

Vernor took up the lantern, and remarked:

"This has been lately used, for the candle in it is burned to the socket. Have you already visited the place, Sir Hugh?" and he fixed his eyes upon his father as if he would read his inmost soul.

"Pooh! why should you suppose that I would go through the subterranean apartments alone, when you were ready to

accompany me? I ordered John to bring me a lantern, and probably this one came from the stable."

"Then John is very extravagant, for we cannot afford to use wax candles in the stable."

"You are very prying, Vernor," said Sir Hugh, in an irritated tone. "The candle ends are good for nothing, and doubtless Old Maud gave him that. Take the fragment out, and put in yonder piece from the candle-stick. I am quite ready to go, and quite anxious to get through with this visit."

Vernor obeyed him, and lighted the candle from the brazier over which the tea-kettle was boiling; but his suspicions were aroused, and he was on the *qui vive* for any discovery he might make.

They passed through the empty, echoing room that joined Sir Hugh's, and the old man unlocked the door that led into the corridor. When they stood beneath the low oak ceiling, Vernor paused and flashed his light in every direction. He plainly saw the marks of recent footsteps on the thick coating of dust that lay upon the floor, and in his own mind he felt convinced that his father had preceded him to the Secret Chamber, but for some reason that was inexplicable to him, desired to conceal the fact. He made no comment on his discovery, but became even more watchful than before.

When they reached the chapel, although the windows were boarded up, the light of a brilliant day struggled through crevices and broken places dimly illuminating the desolate spot. The altar was broken and defaced, but the choir was perfect still, and the lofty arched roof, whose beams were made of oak, still defied the ravages of time. Vernor glanced around on the defaced pictures, and he said in a tone of regret:

"It is a pity that the barbarians who came here at the

Tudor's command should have destroyed these paintings. Some of them were fair specimens of the Italian school of art, and if they had been preserved they would now be worth their weight in gold."

"True," replied Sir Hugh. "But in that case, neither you nor I would have been benefited by them. They would long since have been sold by the lords of the manor, for the owners of Methurn have always been a reckless and extravagant race."

"We have hot blood and strong passions, Sir Hugh, then why expect of us the virtuous self-denial of the Puritan? Yet I am surprised that this chapel, which is a fine relic of the past, should have been shut up for more than a century, and allowed to become the abode of rats and spiders."

"The new masters had no use for the popish chapel; besides, the successive lords of the Priory lived at Court, and until my father's time it was seldom inhabited. He added the new wing in which our apartments are situated, but he preferred building a parish church to renovating this old ruin. But we are losing time; let us descend into the vaults."

Sir Hugh pointed out the exact locality of the flag stone beneath which the staircase lay, and showed Vernor the spot on which to press to raise it. After a few attempts the young man succeeded in elevating the trap-door himself; he then preceded Sir Hugh in the descent, and held the lantern so that he could see where to place his gouty feet.

At length they stood side by side upon the ground, and Vernor looked about him by the feeble light he carried, with intense curiosity. Three avenues, leading to different points, branched off from the foot of the stairs, looking like black gulfs, from which damp and mouldy vapors exhaled. Sir Hugh struck into the one on the left, and pursued its tortuous windings, always turning in the same direction. He said to Vernor:

"Remember that you must always turn to the left, for if you were to take the opposite direction, you would lose your way, and probably perish in these lonely vaults. If you flash your light upon the wall, you will see a cross cut in the stone at intervals, and they indicate the road to the Secret Chamber. Even the old monks found it necessary to mark the way."

"It seems to me, sir, that we are circuitously approaching the modern portion of the house, and the place we seek must be situated somewhere near it."

"That may be. I never speculated on the position of the room. It is so constructed that its existence would never be suspected, and it served a friend well in the days of Cromwell. A great man found refuge there, and I caused such furniture as was suited to his habits to be removed thither. You will not find a bare room, though it will probably be desolate enough in your estimation."

"I thought the secret of this room was known only to yourself and the woman who referred to it so strangely; yet you now speak as if others aided you to place furniture there," said Vernor, carelessly.

"That is true—two faithful servants helped me; but they are long since dead. All are dead who knew of it except the Gipsy; she guided Lord Trevor from the unfortunate field of Edgehill, and besought me to conceal him. I did so, and he finally escaped to Holland."

This was not an entire fabrication, for the nobleman in question had found refuge in the vaults of the Priory, and been concealed in the lower chamber while the Roundheads sought for him through every nook that was open to them; but he was never made aware of the existence of the upper room, for he sat in darkness till the search was ended, and then issued from his hiding place to make his escape to the sea-coast.

At length they reached the termination of their pilgrimage. Sir Hugh bade Vernor remark that two crosses were cut in the rock very near each other, followed by a figure five, and a straight line a few inches in length. He said:

"The double cross indicates that we have gone far enough; the figure and the mark tell you to measure five feet in a direct line, and the entrance is found. See if you can indicate it."

Vernor had a quick eye, and he ran his finger along in front of the rugged wall till it rested on a slight protuberance.

"I have found the spring at the first trial," he said. "Is not this the spot, Sir Hugh?"

"Right! You are quick-witted and observant, Vernor; you will make your way in the world."

"I hope so, sir. I intend to try, at all events. And now what shall we do next?"

"Observe how I press downward—so. See the wall, that seems so solid, gives way, and leaves an open space. Let us pass into the vault, from which we will ascend to the chamber we seek."

"Is there no way of opening the door from within? It would be rather awkward for us if the door were to fall back in its place while we are above."

"There is no danger of that; but if such a thing were to happen, I know how to open it, and I will show you the way to do it."

Vernor entered, glanced around the empty room with a vague feeling of oppression, and followed his father up the staircase.

They had no sooner disappeared, than the Gipsy glided through the opening, and muttered:

"Oh, ho! you will show him how to open it, will you? You would never show me, for you had a vague idea that

some day you would shut me up here and leave me to perish of starvation. But I'll find it out now, in spite of you, and it may be, use it to good purpose in time to come."

She was wrapped in a black cloak, beneath which she concealed her dark lantern, and she stepped lightly upon the staircase, and stood where she could hear all that passed in the chamber above.

Vernor walked around the apartment, critically examining every article it contained, and freely commenting upon them.

"Sumptuous tastes your friend, Lord Trevor, must have had, Sir. The furniture looks more as if designed for the use of a fine lady than a man."

"That may well be, for it was taken from the chamber that was furnished for my Aunt Blanche Methurn; she eloped from her house with a man of low degree, and her room was closed by the orders of her father. As the furniture could not be missed, I had it brought hither."

"My Lord must have been a great personage indeed, to have such preparations made for him. There are books too, that are suited to a lady's taste. Spencer, Dryden, Chaucer with Shakspeare and the Bible, the last looking as if it had been long in use. Lord Trevor must have been a bit of a Puritan in spite of his sufferings in the royal cause."

He had paused in front of a niche in the wall in which a prayer desk was fitted on which rested the volumes he named. A crucifix still hung above, dangling from the nail that sustained it, and a worn hassock covered with hair cloth, was upon the floor in front of it.

Vernor spurned it with his foot, and said:

"There is a strange reminder of the original use to which the room was put. But if this was constructed as a chamber of penance there must be a recess with the stone coffin which the penitent used as a couch. The hangings conceal

it, but you must know where it is to be found, father. I must see all the horrors, and I shall be glad if you will point out the place to look for this model bed of torture. What a time the poor devil that lay in it must have had! shut out from all human sympathy, severed from the light of day. Oh! I should go mad under such a fate as that!"

Sir Hugh felt his heart faint within him at this demand, and he was strongly tempted to deny the existence of the sarcophagus, but he knew that Vernor would return to that apartment again, and examine every nook in it, therefore he thought it best to tell the truth. He lifted his shaking hand, and pointed toward the recess behind the table. Vernor pushed it aside, and was lifting the hangings, when the baronet suddenly remembered the square of velvet on which the name and age of his wife were embroidered. This would give to his son a clue to the terrible secret connected with that chamber, and he rushed forward, clutched the hangings which he almost tore down in his eagerness to grasp the fatal evidence of his crime. He succeeded in getting possession of it, and thrust it in his bosom, while Vernor regarded him with astonishment, in which much suspicion was mingled.

"Really, sir, you seem greatly excited, and I perceive that the secrets of this room are not all to be confided to my keeping. Pray, what tell-tale trophy have you wrested from this stone concern, which it seems some one has taken the pains to cover. I expected to find the lid resting against the wall."

The old man again drew on his invention:

"It was open till Lord Trevor came hither. A young girl, disguised as a page, fought beside him in the battle of Edgehill. In serving him, she received a fatal wound, and he held her before him on his horse when he fled from the field. She died a few hours after entering this room, and was placed in that coffin. The body is still there."

"And the velvet rag you were so anxious to keep from my sight has her name upon it I suppose. I should think that it can be no object to you to conceal that from me, sir."

"Yes, it is my desire to do so; for she belonged to a noble house, and the world has never known her fate. There is no need to betray her name even to you."

Vernor listened to this explanation with evident incredulity, and after a pause, said:

"I have half a mind to look in on the remains of this faithful damsel. I am interested in her history; but I think you would have done better to make her a grave in the vault below."

"There was no time to do that. Come, I am weary and sick. Let us leave this spot, for I feel as if I should have another attack of my late malady if I remain here much longer."

The young man looked at his pale face, and saw that he really seemed ill. He knew that if Sir Hugh became helpless, he could never get him back to his room without assistance, and he at once said:

"Let us go, then. But I may take these books with me, I suppose. They came from the library and should be restored to it."

"Not to-day. You must assist me, for I feel quite overcome with the unusual exertions I have made. Let us descend at once, for the air in this room stifles me."

With a last lingering glance around, Vernor offered his arm to his father, and they prepared to descend the stairs.

The watcher flitted silently before them, and stood just without the entrance while Sir Hugh pointed out to his son a spring above the door which would open it from within. The two then issued from the aperture, but the dark spectre that dogged their steps flitted beyond the circle of light made by the lantern, and watched them without being herself seen.

After closing the door, Sir Hugh said:

"The way to the open air is shorter than that through the chapel, and I must regain it as soon as possible. Besides, you should also know the outlet toward the woodland."

Sir Hugh leaned heavily upon the arm that sustained him, and more than once he paused to regain his breath, for the confined atmosphere of the vaults choked his lungs, and caused the blood to rush in a torrent toward his brain.

They went on to an abrupt turning, where two passages crossed each other. Sir Hugh paused here, and impressively said:

"Hitherto we have turned to the left; from this point, at every intersection of these corridors, take the right hand passage, and you will safely reach the outer world."

Vernor promised to remember, and they went slowly forward, now followed by a dim figure that stole out of a passage in which she had secreted herself until they passed on. Occasionally they passed openings from which the doors had been broken down in the search for refugees during the civil wars. These elaborately constructed vaults it was supposed had served as wine cellars and depots for provisions in the feudal ages, when every castle and monastery was a kind of stronghold, in which their dependents might gather for security from a sudden raid; for the Priory had belonged to a wealthy order, and many were entitled to an asylum from the monks in the times of trouble.

After many windings, they reached the outer wall, which had crumbled and fallen in around the low door, that afforded egress to the park. For a hundred feet the ground sloped gradually towards this entrance; and the bright light of day struggled through the thick underwood that grew close around it.

The door hung loosely upon its hinges, and the father and son passed out into the broad glare of sunshine. Green undulations swept away from the walls, covered with rank vegetation, and the old trees rustled their unpruned branches against each other. Vernor extinguished his light, and the two walked on in silence till they gained Sir Hugh's chamber. He sunk into his chair, and wiping the gathered moisture from his brow, said:

"I am glad it is over. Never ask me to go to that den again, for such a jaunt quite overcomes me."

"Many thanks, sir, for the effort you have made to gratify my curiosity. I shall make a memorandum of your directions for finding the place again, though that will scarcely be necessary, for every step of the route is indelibly imprinted on my memory. I feel a presentiment that this chamber will be of use to me in the future, and it is well to know how to enter it. I only wish that the secret of its existence was confined to ourselves. How came the Gipsy to know anything about it?"

Sir Hugh had expected this inquiry, and he was prepared to answer it with another falsehood.

"She came as the attendant of the young lady who died there. You need have no fear so far as she is concerned, for she is faithful to my interests."

Vernor would have given much to penetrate the mystery which linked his father with this wild wanderer; but he felt assured that Sir Hugh would not reveal the truth, and he refrained from further questioning.

Minchen tracked them to the outlet, and then producing the dark lantern which her cloak had veiled, retraced her steps to the spot they had left. In a few moments she stood within the room, and she laughed aloud as she said:

"Sir Hugh took my word that every memento of his lady wife was removed; but these books would have told more

than he cared to have revealed if the young one had persisted in looking over them. I'll put them out of sight, and choose my own time for divulging the darkest horror of this lonely place."

She gathered the volumes together, and lifting the lid of the reading desk, thrust them in a recess in the bottom so contrived as to escape observation. Then descending to the lower room, she raised her lantern and examined the casing of the door till she found the knob which Sir Hugh had pointed out to his son.

"I now know all I care to find out," she muttered, as she passed out and closed the wall behind her. In a short time she gained the outlet, and passed through the park toward the encampment.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### SIR HUGH'S PLOT THICKENS.

WITH silent sorrow Mrs. Methurn saw the influence which Vernor was daily acquiring over her young protégée. She felt assured that some deep motive lay concealed beneath this sudden devotion, and she vainly tried to gain some light which might guide her to its solution.

Both Sir Hugh and his son were impenetrable, and all her endeavors were baffled to discover whence came the money which was lavished to gratify the slightest caprice of the young orphan.

Letters came from Gerald in which he informed his mother of his safe arrival at Oxford, and of the energy with which he had thrown himself into his studies; but he did not forget to speak of Ethel, and to say how much he missed her,

how tenderly he remembered her. The child read the letter, and she gratefully said:

"Dear Gerald! I only wish he could look in on us, and see how things have changed with me. I should like to show him my beautiful pony, and the lovely dresses Sir Hugh has given me. He would hardly know me again in all this finery."

"Do you then think that fine clothes would change you so much that a loving heart could not recognize you, Ethel? I am afraid the change you rejoice in will prove sad news to Gerald."

The little girl opened her eyes in astonishment.

"Why should it?" she asked. "I am far happier than I used to be, and if Gerald were only here, I should be as gay as a singing bird."

"My son will not return to the Priory now. His lot is cast far from it, and perhaps it is well that you have learned to be happy without him."

"But I am not *quite* happy, Aunty. I miss Gerald every day, in spite of Vernor's kindness. Tell him that, please, and besides, I mean to write him a long letter myself—I shall tell him of all my beautiful presents, but I wish Sir Hugh would divide the money he pays for them, and give Gerald half. I have no right to all these things, and his own nephew has."

"My son does not need his uncle's assistance, my dear. I have saved the means to educate him myself, as I did not wish him to become a burden on Sir Hugh's limited fortune."

"He can't be poor any longer," said Ethel, "for if he was, he couldn't afford to buy so many pretty things for me."

"Perhaps those things are intended to purchase something infinitely more precious, my child. Your young



heart is to be won over for some end that is unfathomable to me. You will soon cease to think of Gerald in your increasing attachment to Vernor."

The child flushed deeply, and she quickly said:

"Oh, I love them both. They are my dear brothers, and Vernor only takes the place left vacant by Gerald's absence. But for his kindness, I should have been so lonely—so lonely."

"That is quite true, my love, and I am wrong to speak thus. Go to your studies now, and after I have attended to my housekeeping, I will come up and give you my usual assistance."

Ethel ascended to her room, and listlessly turned over her books, but her thoughts were with the absent collegian, and she wept a few tears as she recalled the words of his mother. She felt that she *had* thought more of Vernor of late, and she knew that she was unfaithful to her best friend in permitting any one to usurp his place in her affections.

Ethel had scarcely left the room when Vernor entered it, and arrested the departure of Mrs. Methurn.

"If you have time to listen to me, I have something of importance to say to you, Aunt Agnes."

"I was going on my usual rounds for the day, but I can stop long enough to hear you, Vernor. I hope your communications will have more point than any you have lately made to me."

He laughed gaily and said:

"You resent being kept in the dark about Ethel, and it is very natural that you should do so; but now the time has come for an explanation. My father has sent me hither to communicate a strange piece of news, which involves possible good fortune to her and myself."

Mrs. Methurn sat down, and composed herself to listen. She asked:

"Why do you blend Ethel's fate with your own? I cannot see in what way they can be linked together."

"That is precisely what I am to show you. Your protégée has become the heiress to a very handsome property, on the condition that it shall be shared with myself; that is, that she shall become my wife."

Mrs. Methurn uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Pray how long is it since this became known to you, Vernor?"

"About the time that Gerald went away," he carelessly replied. "Since so much was at stake both for Ethel and myself, I thought it best to win my little bride's heart before betraying the cause of my sudden devotion. I flatter myself that I have succeeded thus far, and if you do not influence her against me, she will not refuse to comply with the wishes of her mother's uncle."

"I was not aware that she had such a relation; the inheritance then comes from him?"

"You are right. Mr. Winston was the brother of her grandfather; he has lived in Amsterdam for many years, engaged in trade. He cared nothing for his family till he felt that he was dying, then he caused inquiries to be made for them, and he learned that Ethel is the only descendent who is still living; and that she had been taken under the protection of my father. By a curious coincidence, Sir Hugh had befriended Mr. Winston in early life; he had furnished him with letters of introduction to the commercial house in Amsterdam by which he was first employed as clerk. He finally became its head, but he never forgot the kindness of his early friend, and he has taken a most romantic and unusual way to prove his gratitude. This letter, written a few days before his death, will explain his wishes. It was forwarded among some other papers to Sir



Hugh by the lawyers of Mr. Winston; and at the request of my father I have brought it to show to you."

Mrs. Methurn took the offered letter and carefully perused the scrawled and blotted lines purporting to have been traced by the feeble hand of a dying man.

"SIR HUGH METHURN:

"DEAR SIR,—Go back to the days of your early manhood, and recall a pale, friendless man who casually attracted your notice when you called at your lawyer's office many years ago. I was seeking employment, and asked a recommendation from the lawyer who had known me from my childhood. He refused, on the ground that of late years he had known little of me, and could not judge of my qualifications to fill a post of trust.

"You heard this refusal, followed me, and satisfying yourself that I was qualified to become a clerk, you obtained from a friend of yours a situation for me in Amsterdam. Though it expatriated me, I gladly accepted the employment, for I was on the verge of starvation.

"I came to this city, and for thirty-five years I have never left it. I eventually arose to be a partner in the firm into which I was received as a clerk, and I have accumulated wealth. Just as I thought of retiring to enjoy my fortune, my health broke down, and nothing remained to me but to settle my worldly affairs and die.

"I had left a brother with one child in England, but after a few years of absence all communication between us ceased. Thirty years had nearly elapsed since I heard from Thomas Winston or his daughter; but I wished my earnings to go to the pretty child I remembered with interest. I caused such inquiries to be made in England as resulted in the certainty that my brother and his child were both dead—that the latter had married into a noble family which

refused to acknowledge her, and after the untimely death of her husband, she died of a broken heart, leaving a little girl, who, but for your noble generosity, would have been thrown upon the world without a protector.

"You took the orphan to your home, treated her as your own child, and deep is my gratitude for the benevolence which rescued her from poverty and wretchedness. I have since pondered deeply on the means of serving you, and at the same time securing the future welfare of my grand-niece.

"I have ascertained that you have one son, a handsome, promising youth, who is of suitable age to become the husband of Ethel Clifton. He must be worthy of this trust if he resembles you [Vernor winced a little when he wrote this], and I wish to secure my heiress from the snares of a fortune-hunter. Marriages among minors in England have been of common occurrence, and it is my desire that Ethel shall become the wife of your son as soon as the marriage can be conveniently celebrated. Thus they will jointly be endowed with the fortune I wish them equally to enjoy.

"I have made my will in conformity with this wish; to my niece I have bequeathed my estate on the sole condition that she accepts your son at once. If she refuses to comply with my wishes, the whole of the estate passes unconditionally to Vernor Methurn, and Ethel will only have a life annuity from it of fifty pounds per annum.

"But she will not refuse to comply with the wish that is nearest the heart of her dying uncle. She is too young to have a will of her own in such a matter, and it will be best for her to grow to womanhood with the certainty that her allegiance is due to the husband I have chosen for her.

"I have directed that she shall remain in the charge of Mrs. Methurn, who I am informed has been a second mother to her, till she attains her eighteenth year. Then

Vernor Methurn will claim her as his wife, and they will come in possession of the real estate which is situated in Amsterdam. The ready money, which is much the largest part of my fortune, will be under your control till then, and it is my desire that the income arising from it shall be equally shared between Ethel and your son, provided she accepts the terms on which it is bequeathed to her.

"I have bequeathed to you, my best friend, a thousand pounds as a feeble testimonial of my gratitude, and all that now remains for me to do is to return my thanks for your kindness to my orphan niece.

"Your old friend,

"JOSIAH WINSTON."

Beneath this was written in a different hand :

"Three days after writing the above, Mr. Winston died, and his will is in conformity with the statements made therein.

HOOVER & BROTHER."

Mrs. Methurn perused these lines with a feeling of utter bewilderment, and a strong impression that the writer must have been slightly insane when he penned them. He must have been utterly ignorant of Sir Hugh's reckless and improvident life, or he would surely never have placed the person and fortune of Ethel so entirely in his power. Vernor watched her face as she read, and he was prepared for the question she abruptly asked :

"Could Mr. Winston have been in his right mind when he laid such an absurd injunction upon a child who is too young to judge of what will be best for her future happiness? He must have been aware that marriages between minors have rarely led to anything but misery to both parties."

"I do not perceive any evidence of insanity in this production; on the contrary, I think it is clearly expressed, and evinces much forethought for the destiny of Ethel. *This* marriage, I flatter myself, will prove a happy one, in spite of your doubt, Aunt Agnes."

"Then, it is really your purpose to accept the terms, and irrevocably bind this poor child to you, before she can possibly know what her feelings towards you will be when she is old enough to choose a partner for life."

"What other course is open to me? If I refuse to comply with the conditions of the will I disinherit her, for nothing is said except with reference to her refusal."

"You can, when you are of age, restore her inheritance to her, and allow her to grow up, even to accept or reject you as her heart may dictate. A fortune trammelled with such conditions is scarcely worth accepting."

"Thank you, for your disinterested advice," replied Vernor with an ill-concealed sneer. "I need this money even more than Ethel does, and I am quite willing to risk the future with her as my wife. I shall not find it difficult to love her, and she seems as well disposed towards me as I could wish. That is, since Gerald went away, and I shall not trust to the chances of being rivalled by him in the future. Once mine by an indissoluble tie, Ethel will know that to me belongs her allegiance, and she will grow to womanhood feeling that it is her duty to love me."

Mrs. Methurn flushed slightly at the allusion to her son, and fearing that opposition from her would lead Vernor to misconstrue her motives, she said :

"If such is your resolution, I, of course, can do nothing to defeat the wishes of the deceased Mr. Winston. My son and Ethel are strongly attached to each other, but it is as sister and brother. You need fear no attempt at rivalry from him. Gerald wooed the friendless child, but the heiress he will never seek."

"Ah, well, I don't pretend to be such a *preux chevalier* as my cousin. I am deucedly in want of money, and this comes just at the right moment. I think Ethel is a charming little creature, and I become quite romantic when I think of our future. I shall go abroad immediately after our union, leaving her to your care till she attains the age prescribed by her uncle. I shall keep alive her interest in myself by writing to her the most tender letters, and her imagination will naturally deck me in the most attractive garb. When I return to claim her, I shall find her more in love with me than if we had remained near each other."

"And if you do not fill the ideal she has formed, what will be her fate? It is a fearful risk, Vernor, and may wreck both her happiness and your own."

"It is a risk I am willing to take. I shall return a polished man of the world, fitted to win the heart of any woman, and to Ethel, the devotion of my life shall be given."

Mrs. Methurn sighed deeply.

"So you think now, but in all these years your child-bride will be forgotten. You have strong passions, Vernor, and you will love desperately. Leave yourself free to choose. Divide Ethel's fortune with her, and wait till she is grown. By the conditions of the will this seems to be in your power."

"That would be a positive injustice to Ethel, and I am unwilling to accept any portion of her inheritance unless she becomes my wife. But, as I said before, I need this money too much to relinquish it."

"It will be a much greater wrong to make her yours at her tender years. But I have said all that I can to move you from your purpose. I see that you are inflexible, and much as I deprecate this haste to rush into a net that may yet bind you both as with bonds of iron, I can say no more."

"It is a wise determination, Aunt Agnes; for my mind is made up, and if you do not interfere in any way, I shall gain the consent of Ethel without much difficulty. Promise me that you will let the affair take its own course."

"I must see Sir Hugh before I pledge myself to anything," she replied. "Possibly he may see the force of my objections."

"You are mistaken there, Aunty. See him by all means, and he will show you that my immediate union with Ethel is our only salvation from utter ruin. I will see my little love and show her the brilliant prospects that open before her as my future wife."

Vernor took up the letter, and lounged out of the room. Mrs. Methurn, in a state of intense excitement, went at once to Sir Hugh.

She found him seated before a table covered with papers, over which he seemed to be gloomily pondering. He looked up on her entrance, and said: "Is that you, Agnes? Sit down and tell me why you look so pale. Has anything unpleasant happened?"

"You are aware of what Vernor has just communicated to me, Sir Hugh. Is not that sufficient cause for excitement? I have come to you in the hope that you can be induced to see how much evil may spring from the marriage Mr. Winston so strangely desired. This fortune is a poor boon to Ethel if it must be won by the sacrifice of her freedom while she is yet an infant."

"Really, Mrs. Methurn, you take a very singular view of this affair. Mr. Winston wishes to secure the happiness of his niece, and estimating my son as I do, I think he has taken an excellent method of doing so. I shall manage my ward's fortune; you will educate her for her future position; Vernor will be preserved from the snares of the world by the responsibility he thus early assumes."

"But, Sir Hugh, they are unsuited to each other. But for this bequest your son would never have thought of Ethel as his wife. He will not love and cherish her as so tender a creature should be cherished. The day will come when Vernor will loathe the tie that binds him to her."

"Really, Mrs. Methurn, I was not before aware that you are a sibyl who can foretell the future. I see no such probability; on the contrary, my son is strongly attached to the child. He will make her a suitable husband, and it is my wish that the marriage shall take place without delay. Only through gaining control of this money can I escape ruin. It will come just in time to save the Priory from falling into the hands of my creditors; and without it we shall soon be without a roof to shelter us. No windfall could have been more opportune."

Mrs. Methurn listened in surprise.

"I thought we had lived so as to save money, sir. I had no idea that you are again embarrassed."

"I have endeavored to economize, but some claims of long standing have recently come against me with their accumulated interest; my estate is not entailed, and if I cannot meet these demands all will be swept away. Ethel's fortune will enable me to redeem the old place; but I will never touch a penny of it until she becomes Vernor's bride. It would be a breach of trust that would cover me with infamy."

Sir Hugh spoke as if he were the most honorable and high-minded of men, instead of one who was planning a most shameful fraud for the purpose of imposing on the only true friend possessed by the poor victim he intended to immolate on the shrine of his avarice.

Mrs. Methurn firmly said:

"I am sorry that your affairs are so much deranged; but I still think it will be better to use your own bequest of a

thousand pounds to extricate yourself for the present; when Vernor is of age he can claim a portion of this money and help you out of your difficulties. It is the most singular will I ever heard of, and leaves painful doubts on my mind as to Mr. Winston's capacity to make one at all."

"It is made, at all events, and there is no one to dispute its validity. The bequest you refer to would not suffice for my present necessities; Ethel, as my daughter-in-law, can save me from ruin. Simply as my ward, I should have to account for every penny of her fortune; for Vernor shall never accept any portion of it unless he becomes her husband. He likes the child; she is evidently fond of him, and everything can be speedily settled on a satisfactory footing, if you will do your part."

"My part, Sir Hugh, if honorably performed, will be to set before Ethel all the wretched possibilities of the future in entering into such a covenant as this. It promises nothing but misery to your son and your ward."

The baronet's face became purple, and with much difficulty he repressed an explosion of wrath. With extreme stateliness he replied:

"I have only to inform you, Mrs. Methurn, that if you circumvent me in this affair, I shall remove my ward from your care and place her in a boarding-school. I have the entire control of her person, and I shall carry out my plan of uniting her to Vernor in spite of any opposition you may make."

Mrs. Methurn arose; she was very pale, but she saw that further remonstrance was useless. She said:

"That is sufficient, Sir Hugh. I see that the wrong you meditate will be consummated at all hazards, and I can only pray for my poor child, and prepare her to face the cruel fate which takes from her the first privilege of womanhood—that of choosing the companion of her future life. I

shall not risk having Ethel removed from me, for I am her only true friend. I yield to necessity, and I promise to say nothing that can prejudice her mind against the marriage on which you have determined. You can trust me, for you know that I have never violated my plighted word."

Sir Hugh knew that he could trust her, and he blandly said:

"I was sure that you would listen to reason, Agnes. It would have pained me deeply to remove the child from your maternal care; but I must have done so if you had arrayed yourself against the interests of my son."

"You will require a copy of the will to be forwarded to you, of course. I shall be glad to see it when it arrives."

"Certainly; *when it arrives* you shall examine it as carefully as you desire. Prepare your protégée to give her hand to Vernor before the close of the present month, for it is necessary to send him to Amsterdam as her husband, that he may have full authority to settle up the estate of Mr. Winston."

"So soon! Yet if it must be, what difference can a few weeks make? I shall obey you, Sir Hugh; but I do it with extreme reluctance; and on your conscience must rest the evil that may result from this most unsuitable alliance."

"I am quite willing to bear it. Perhaps if *your* son were the prospective bridegroom you would have fewer scruples to overcome."

Mrs. Methurn calmly regarded him as she replied:

"Perhaps I should; for Gerald and Ethel are tenderly attached to each other. He is less erratic in his disposition than Vernor, and he would deeply feel the responsibility he would thus assume. But were he the bridegroom, I should equally oppose the plighting of children's hands before their hearts have had an opportunity to speak. It is a cruel injustice, for which no material prosperity can atone."

"Enough, Agnes; let us end this discussion. You understand my wishes, and you know of old that I am inflexible where I have determined on a course of action."

He waved his hand, and Mrs. Methurn retired, feeling the futility of any further attempt to move him. She walked to and fro in the wide hall, endeavoring to compose herself and lift from her heart the oppressive weight that had fallen on it. She knew that Vernor was selfish, hard-hearted, sarcastic and self-indulgent; that few restraints of principle withheld him from any course that promised enjoyment or aggrandizement; and his career as a man, with the means of dissipation in his hands, she felt assured would not be such as to fit him to become the guardian to the sensitive and refined child he wished to bind to himself by bonds which only death might sever.

Yet she was powerless to prevent this great wrong to Ethel. Sir Hugh possessed unlimited control over her fate, and he would use it to the utmost in support of his own views. To retain her darling with her, she must acquiesce in his plans bitterly as she was opposed to them.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE GIPSY ATTENDS THE WEDDING.

MRS. METHURN went upon her daily rounds, gave orders for the dinner, sent medicine and nourishment to the sick poor in the neighborhood, and then, with a sad heart, ascended to her chamber.

Mrs. Methurn had seen Vernor riding across the park, and she knew that Ethel was alone, yet she shrank from seeing her—from learning how she had received the communication

he had made to her. When the child heard her enter her room, she came through the door which opened into her own apartment, looking pale and bewildered. Her eyes met those of her protectress, and she threw herself upon her bosom with a burst of weeping.

"Oh, Aunt—dear Aunt—what shall I do? Vernor says that I must marry him; that my uncle has left me money on the condition that I shall do so. But I am such a little girl; and what will Gerald say? He always called me his little wife, and—somehow I thought that—that I belonged to him, and to you."

"My Ethel, you are too young to have thought of marriage with any one, and I am sorry that such a decision is pressed upon you now. I can only tell you to pray for guidance, and He who loved little children will show you the right path."

The child lifted her head, with a faint smile through her tears. She softly said:

"Yes—I will pray to God, and He will comfort me. Vernor says that I shall stay with you; that till I am eighteen I am not to go with him. But he is going away very soon, and I shall be left without either of my friends. If I only thought that Gerald would like me to marry him, I should not mind much, for Vernor is very good to me of late, and he promised to send me the most beautiful presents from Holland, where he means to go."

This childish prattle, in the most momentous crisis of her life, pained the listener deeply; but what was to be expected of so young a creature, but that she should be dazzled and won over by the promises of so smooth a talker as Vernor. Mrs. Methurn sat down, drew Ethel beside her, and gravely said:

"Put Gerald out of the question entirely, my love. He loves you as a brother, and will rejoice in the news of your

good fortune. I have promised Sir Hugh to say nothing against this marriage, precipitate as it seems, and it only rests with you to decide whether you will obey your uncle's wishes, and give your freedom away, or accept the alternative of relinquishing your fortune."

"But Vernor declares that he, too, will lose all; for he will accept nothing that I do not give him as—as my—Oh, Aunt— isn't it ridiculous to talk of a husband for such a little thing as I am!" and, with childish thoughtlessness, she laughed aloud.

"But that is what he said, and he showed me so much that he can do with this money; he can save his father from ruin if he gets it, and it seems to me wrong to let poor Sir Hugh want what I can give him. Yes, if you think Gerald will not care very much, I believe it will be right to do as Sir Hugh wishes."

Mrs. Methurn sighed heavily; she knew it would be a severe blow to her son, but she could say nothing. She had plighted her word, and Ethel must be yielded to the fate that had been decreed to her, without interference on her part. The child naturally interpreted her silence into acquiescence, and she prattled on:

"Vernor says that he will get me a harpsichord, and I shall learn how to play on it; that he will travel on the Continent with me when I am old enough; and oh! Aunt, he has promised me a pony phaeton, with a footman in livery. Won't that be grand? then we can drive about the country in style."

"Yes, my dear; you will be able to afford all those things," replied Mrs. Methurn, absently. "No doubt Vernor will be liberal enough toward you, so far as money is concerned. He is naturally lavish."

"Yes, he is very generous; and—and I think I can love him, Aunt. He says I must think of him always as my



dearest friend, for he will love me as his child-bride, and look forward to the time when we can always be together. Shall I write to Gerald, and tell him myself what a strange thing I am going to do?"

"If you choose, Ethel. I shall write at the same time, and explain to him what has happened to render such a course necessary."

"I am afraid he won't like it; but what can I do? I wish my uncle hadn't made such a strange will. If he had left me his fortune to do with as I please, I would have given Sir Hugh enough to pay his debts; but he wanted me to marry Vernor, and I suppose it is my duty to do so."

"It is your fate, Ethel, and no one can escape that," replied her friend, sighing deeply. "I could say much that my heart dictates, but it would be useless; and if I oppose the wishes of Sir Hugh and his son, I risk being separated from you altogether; therefore I refrain. You have become as dear to me as my own child, and I could not bear to have you torn from me and placed among strangers."

"Oh! if there is any fear of that, I will do whatever they wish. Could Sir Hugh remove me from you?"

"He is appointed the guardian of your estate and person, and if he desired to send you away, no one could interfere. He told me that he should send you to a boarding-school if I set myself in opposition to him."

"Then I *must* marry Vernor, for I never could bear to be taken away from the dear old Priory, and you, whom I love so dearly. Yes, Aunty—I see that I must marry Vernor. I will go now, and write to Gerald."

She arose, and slowly went toward her own room, all the brightness faded out of her face, all the elasticity gone from her childish steps. She sat down, and wrote the following lines:

"DEAR GERALD:—I have had a fortune left me by my mother's uncle on the condition that I shall be Vernor's little wife and not yours. I hope you will not take this very hard, though at first it seemed hard to me to change you for him. But Sir Hugh says it must be so, and I shall be sent away to a dreadful boarding-school if I refuse to do what he wants me to.

"I shall always love you as my dear brother, and I hope you won't think me ungrateful. This is a very poor letter, but my heart is so full that I do not know what to say. Your Ethel, no—Vernor's Ethel, but your fast friend.

"ETHEL CLIFTON."

Mrs. Methurn enclosed this artless epistle to her son; the days went on, and Ethel was kept in a continued state of excitement by the bridal presents that were brought in for her. Everything that could enchant a childish heart was ordered from London, and at last came a fairy-like dress covered with silver spangles and embroidery, in which she was to appear at the altar.

No one was bidden to the bridal, for Sir Hugh did not care to have the event canvassed in the neighborhood. Others might learn the contents of the will really made by Mr. Winston, and comprehend why he married his infant ward to his son.

The pony phaeton arrived, and in it Mrs. Methurn and her young charge were whirled to the parish church, where the ceremony was performed by the curate. Mrs. Methurn had taken care to exact from Vernor a written pledge that he would leave Ethel under her charge till she attained her eighteenth year. This he readily gave, for he knew that once secure of her fortune, he should be in no hurry to claim his bride.

At the church door the young couple parted, and Vernor



set out for London whence he was to embark for Holland. Ethel wept a few tears but she was soon consoled, and Mrs. Methurn returned to the Priory to find a letter from Gerald, in reply to hers. One passage ran thus :

"Oh, mother, I loved this little child too, too dearly, to think with calmness of the fate my uncle has prepared for her. Vernor will make her miserable, and my own heart feels as desolate as if the grave had closed over my dearest friend. Ethel is but a child, and I am very young to feel a profound attachment, but she has wound herself into my heart by showing, unconsciously, all the sweet and tender impulses of her nature, until I felt as if she was soul of my soul, life of my life. Her uncle's bequest has proved a fatal gift to her, I sadly fear; but I must cease to think of the possible evil in store for her. My cousin may mature into a better man than his youth promises, and I pray to God that it may prove so. If he only makes Ethel happy, I can forgive him for wresting her from me."

A few lines were enclosed for Ethel, in which he wished her much happiness in her new position, and spoke of himself as devoted to his studies. The child read them over and over with a feeling of disappointment she could not conceal. She said to his mother :

"Gerald thinks that I have treated him badly, but how could I refuse to obey Sir Hugh? Dear Gerald, I hope he will become a great man some day."

Mrs. Methurn kissed her, and replied :

"Think no more of Gerald, my love. He is wrapped up in his books, and your duty is now due to Vernor. He is half jealous of your fondness for my son already, and you will do well to forget your early friend."

Ethel flushed deeply, and she quickly replied :

"That I never will do. Gerald taught me nearly all I know; he was always gentle and kind with me, and Vernor shall never make me forget him. He shall always be my friend and brother."

"As a devoted brother you may indeed regard him, Ethel, for in every strait in life be sure he will stand firmly by you, as if you were indeed his sister."

Before leaving the Priory, Vernor had again visited the Secret Chamber, and to his intense chagrin found that the books from which he hoped to discover something concerning its last tenant were missing. He concluded at once that Sir Hugh had removed them, but he knew it would be useless to ask him why he had done so.

His suspicions were confirmed that the truth had not been revealed to him, and he again sought the Gipsy, in the hope that she might be induced to betray something.

He found the encampment broken up, and the band dispersed. As he rode slowly over the ground they had lately occupied, the woman of whom he was thinking suddenly emerged from a narrow pathway, and accosted him :

"I knew that you would seek me, and I have tarried here to await your coming. What have you now to say to me?"

"I sought you to renew the offer I lately made. Tell me the whole mystery of this concealed room, and I will nobly reward you. *Who* was its last occupant, and is Sir Hugh's assertion true, that a young girl, slain in defence of her lover, lies in the coffin?"

"So-o—you doubt the word of your father, young man. A most dutiful son, truly, but how should *I* know who lies buried in that receptacle? Yet I will enlighten you thus far; the remains of a fair woman who died in her youth, *do* lie there; let that suffice for the present; the day may come

when you shall learn more, but you must win your right to know, by a deed similar to that which laid her there."

"You speak in enigmas. I shall never take part in a civil war, as Lord Trevor did, and still less should I hope to have a devoted woman thrust herself between me and danger."

The Gipsy laughed sardonically.

"Never fear but that you will rush into danger when it is to be found, and the air in the land thickens with portentous clouds. When the king lays down his crown at the feet of death, it will be snatched at by both son and brother. Strife, deadly peril will ensue, and *you* will mingle in it. Your line of life is crossed with many dangers, but you will not perish in the battle-field."

"How then shall I meet my doom?" involuntarily asked the young man.

"A jealous and outraged woman shall be the minister of fate to you."

He laughed aloud:

"The gentle child who shortly becomes my bride, will never have nerve to strike a fatal blow. Go to—you are but a blind prophet."

"Wait, and see what time will bring forth, then judge of my skill in divination. It is true, then, that you are to marry the child who has inherited wealth from an old dotard who had not the wit to secure his earnings to her. Harken to my words—*When the same fate comes to Ethel Clifton as was given to her who lies in the stone sarcophagus, I will reveal to you the mystery of the secret chamber, not before.*"

"Then I shall never know it, for Ethel will never be called on to expose her own life in defence of mine."

The wild laugh of the woman again rang out, and without further adieu, she disappeared by a winding path that led into the heart of the woodland. Vernor felt that it

would be useless to follow her, for she could easily evade his pursuit in the windings of the forest, and he rode rapidly away.

On the morning of the marriage, Minchen and her son stood outside of the church, and listened to the merry peal the bells were ringing in honor of the event. As the bridal party passed into the house, Melchoir spoke to his mother in suppressed tones:

"The blows he gave me yet burn upon my flesh, yet you bid me hold my hand. He goes away to-day, and I may lose his track for years. Why then shall I not strike him when I have the chance?"

"Bide your time, my son, for the chances of fate will yet place his destiny in your hands. I have read it through my skill, and until he comes within the net himself, you will be powerless against him. Life is before you both, then wherefore seek to hurry events? They will happen in their own good time."

"Are you *sure* that I shall yet have him in my power? I can wait years, years, if *that* day will come at last," he savagely replied.

"It *shall come*, trust to me," and the two moved away as silently as they had come.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### VERNOR'S AMBITION.

VERNOR reached Amsterdam in safety, and found no difficulty in getting possession of the money left by Mr. Winston. In anticipation of his decease, that gentleman had nearly wound up his affairs, and the young gentleman found nearly

forty thousand pounds lying in his banker's hands ready for use. Six thousand more were invested in English securities, and the remainder in real estate in Amsterdam.

The lawyers were much astonished when Vernor presented himself as the husband of the heiress, and demanded the unconditional possession of her fortune: but he bore from Sir Hugh such authority as compelled them to surrender it to him. The baronet possessed unlimited control over both Ethel and her fortune, and evident as it was to the shrewd lawyers that the child was to be defrauded of her inheritance, they had no right to refuse to obey the conditions of the will.

Vernor had brought letters of introduction to several of his father's old friends who were living at the Hague as political exiles, and as he had a desire to see the court of the Prince of Orange, he went thither as soon as he had possessed himself of the means to make a brilliant appearance.

He was received with the courtesy which was extended to all Englishmen of good position by William and his wife, who, as the eldest daughter of the Duke of York, was in the direct line of succession to the English throne.

After a few weeks of dissipation and sight-seeing, Vernor wearied of the monotony of Dutch life, and flitted over to a more congenial locality. He spent the winter in Paris, and from there travelled into Italy in company with a party of gay young men who were as devoted to pleasure as himself. He spent his newly-acquired wealth with a free hand, seldom thinking of her from whom it was derived; but he was careful to write every month to Ethel, and to send her such things as he thought would please her childish fancy.

His letters showed the tact with which he could accommodate himself to the thoughts and feelings of one so much younger than himself, and Ethel thought them the most

charming productions, especially as they were always accompanied by elegant and tasteful gifts both for herself and Mrs. Methurn.

The latter Vernor usually sent to her, that she might have the gratification of presenting them herself to his aunt; and the child appreciated the thoughtful kindness which enabled her to show her gratitude to her second mother in so agreeable a manner.

Mrs. Methurn could not refuse these offerings, yet she sighed over the numerous evidences of Vernor's extravagance, and justly feared that Ethel's fortune would all be dissipated before she was old enough to enjoy it rationally. She soon penetrated the shallow fraud practised on her by Vernor, with the concurrence of his father, for when pressed to show her a copy of the will of Mr. Winston, Sir Hugh finally drew forth the real document and coolly informed her that the letter purporting to have been written by that gentleman had been composed by Vernor himself for the purpose of disarming her opposition to the premature marriage of her protégée.

Mrs. Methurn expressed her indignant surprise at such unprincipled conduct, but Sir Hugh only laughed at her scruples, and assured her that she had most antediluvian ideas of honor and good faith; that all strategems were fair in love and war.

She replied with emotion:

"If *love* had been the motive of Vernor, I might forgive him for sacrificing my darling. But by your own confession he was moved only by the desire to gain possession of the wealth which I sincerely wish had never been bequeathed to Ethel. You have carried your point, Sir Hugh, but I sadly fear that the future will cause you to repent bitterly of the course you have pursued."

"Oh, well, let the future take care of itself; my care was

to provide for the present. I have secured a home to you and Ethel, and freed myself from my most pressing embarrassments. The child seems very well contented with her lot, for she blossoms like a rose in the sunshine."

"Yes—she is happy with me; but the question that is most important to her is, will she be happy with Vernor? Will he care whether she is so or not?"

"Really, Mrs. Methurn, you are ingenious in tormenting yourself. My son is forming himself into an elegant and accomplished man of the world; when the time comes to claim Ethel as his wife he will treat her with the courtesy due to her as such. As to romantic devotion, and all that nonsense, of course their early marriage precludes all such demonstrations. If you rear her with correct ideas of duty, she will step into the sphere for which she is designed, and make herself contented, even if her husband does not profess to adore her. Vernor likes her well enough, and if she shows that she properly appreciates him, he will always treat her well."

This was promising little enough, but Mrs. Methurn was far from believing that Vernor would even come up to that standard. The utter want of principle he had shown in the whole affair convinced her that his only object was to obtain the means of ministering to his own gratification, without a thought or a care for the future happiness of his young victim.

She retired from the interview with a heavy foreboding of evil pressing upon her heart, which subsequent events did not tend much to lighten.

As time passed on, vague rumors of Vernor's continental career reached her which confirmed her worst fears; but these were carefully kept from Ethel, who was conscientiously learning the lesson set for her, and the image of Vernor gradually blended itself with every hope or aspiration for happiness.

Gerald remained two years at Oxford, and then entered the office of Mr. Clyde, who, in consideration of his early friendship for Captain Methurn, received him without the usual fee, and pledged himself to advance his interests as rapidly as possible. He thought the young man possessed abilities of a high order, and he predicted great success for him in his future career.

This cheered the heart of his mother, and delighted Ethel, for her affectionate heart still clung to Gerald as her first and best friend. She felt no wrong to Vernor in the tender feeling she cherished for him she called her brother, and innocent, and inexperienced, she carried within her heart the germ of a passion which might yet arise and overshadow every other feeling. Should Vernor prove faithless, or indifferent, in the recoil of the affection she cultivated as a matter of duty, she would naturally turn for consolation to him who had been her truest and most valued friend from infancy.

Vernor was so much charmed with his continental experience that he remained abroad six years, merely making two brief visits to the Priory during that time. He had become dashing, brilliant, fastidious, and *ennuye*, and the freshness and simplicity of Ethel was sufficiently attractive to him to induce him to keep up a show of regard during his short stay; but, child as she was, she vaguely felt the want of something, she could not tell what, in the handsome and distinguished man into which he had matured.

When the sudden and unexpected death of Charles II. occurred, he came again from the Hague, where he had been residing for the last year, as one of the gentlemen attached to the Duke of Monmouth's train. That nobleman had been implicated in one of the many plots that convulsed England during the merry monarch's reign, and he had retired to the court of his cousin, the Princess of Orange.

At the Hague the many genial qualities of Monmouth rendered him extremely popular, and the brilliant fêtes given at the court in his honor, attracted many such idlers as Vernor Methurn to its precincts. Accident enabled him to perform a trifling service for the Duke, and on learning who he was, and what part of England he came from, Monmouth took some pains to attach him to his person.

He remembered with interest the progress he had once made through the western portion of his father's dominions, when the enthusiasm of the people had arisen to a height seldom witnessed among them. The roads through which he passed were lined with shouting multitudes, and his pathway was strewn with flowers. Both gentry and yeomen turned out to meet him, and he entered Exeter with an escort of five thousand horsemen.

Monmouth knew that he was the idol of the people; that among them existed a wide-spread belief that a marriage had really taken place between Charles and his mother; and he cherished the belief that the masses in England would gladly elevate him to the throne in preference to his uncle, the fanatical and cruel James.

The sudden death of Charles, while apparently in the enjoyment of robust health, filled Monmouth with despair; for with its announcement came the news that his uncle had been proclaimed King of England, and no party had arisen to assert his own claim to the throne.

For a season he retired to Brussels, and withdrew himself from all intercourse with the exiled Whigs, who were constantly plotting to regain their footing in their native land; but such influences were brought to bear upon him, as re-awakened his old ambition, and he gradually lent his ear to the plans of these plotters. He despatched confidential agents to England to mingle among the people, and, as far as was practicable, to ascertain their feelings toward him in the event of a descent on the country.

Vernor was one of these, and he performed the mission entrusted to him with perfect faith in the right of his patron to ascend the throne of England. The contents of the celebrated black box had been shown to him under the strictest seal of secrecy, and the papers it contained, proved, if genuine, that a marriage had actually taken place between Charles Stuart and Lucy Walters.

It was to Vernor's interest to believe them genuine, for Monmouth promised the most brilliant rewards to such of his immediate followers as would serve him faithfully in the attempt he contemplated making.

Vernor thought it best to take Sir Hugh into his confidence, but the old man listened with consternation to the plans developed by his son, and protested vehemently against his becoming involved in them. Vernor derided his scruples, and asked him if he had forgotten his own devotion to the cause of Charles I.

"That was a different case," replied Sir Hugh. "I took up arms in defense of the reigning sovereign; you propose to exclude the lawful heir from the throne, and elevate to it a man of doubtful legitimacy. However depressed in fortune Charles Stuart may have been during his wanderings on the Continent, he would never have given his hand to a woman of low birth. Besides, we have his positive assertion, made to his council, that no such marriage took place. My dear Vernor, James is a hard man, and a tyrant in grain. This raid must fail, and those who take part in it will be punished with the utmost severity. Do not again return to Holland, but write to Monmouth that it will be madness to undertake to wrest the crown from his uncle."

"But, Sir Hugh, that would be a falsehood. I have travelled through many counties, and I have found the people everywhere devoted to the gallant Duke, and mistrustful of the morose King who has seized on the reins of

government. My colleagues make the same report of the sections allotted to them, and I can safely assert that before many months have rolled away, the masses will be ripe for a revolt against the authority of James. He does nothing to conciliate, and much to exasperate those opposed to him."

"That may be so; but if a change of rulers be found necessary, the Princess of Orange will be chosen in preference to the illegitimate son of Charles."

"She has no hold on the affections of the people, and Monmouth has. Besides, it would be a shameful thing for Mary to dethrone her father and step into his place."

"Princes think little of those things, and her husband is not a man to relinquish his just rights. Monmouth will have two adversaries to contend against; the present King, who holds the reins of government with a tenacious grasp, and a great and experienced statesman like William of Orange, who will never suffer his claims to be passed over. Believe me, the odds are too greatly against your hero ever to permit him to succeed. He will only involve himself and his followers in irretrievable ruin."

Vernor smiled incredulously.

"Age has made you over cautious, sir. I throw my fortune on the tide of events as you did in your youth, and I have few fears as to the result. We shall not hurry our plans; we will secretly mature them, while James is alienating all classes from him by the arbitrary measures he has already commenced. In a short time it will be good policy to make a descent on England; and I, for one, shall not shrink from the venture. You will yet see me wearing the ermine as a peer in the Court of King James III."

"If I thought such would be the result I should not oppose you; but I have had much experience; I have seen one civil war, and I shrink from the mere thought of

another. Since you do not contemplate immediate action, I am better contented; for I shall live in the hope that something will arise to prevent the outbreak altogether. Without the strongest inducements from men in power, the Duke will risk everything by landing on these shores and raising the flag of rebellion."

"He will have the support of all classes, Sir; I am convinced of that. But nothing will be done without due deliberation, I assure you."

"In that case nothing will be attempted, if Monmouth has capable advisers. What great English lords are pledged to his cause?"

With some hesitation Vernor replied:

"None are exactly pledged to him; but the whole Whig party has so long been crushed under foot that they will gladly avail themselves of the opportunity to rise against the present government. Many men of talents who are exiles in Holland have joined the Duke's party; they are willing to risk every danger for the chance to return to their own country."

"Therefore they are not safe advisers. Those men have nothing to lose and everything to gain if the attempt should prove successful. Name a few of them, that I may judge of their ability to serve so desperate a cause."

"There is Lord Grey of Wark."

"A man of respectable abilities and pleasing address, but whose influence is weakened by his immoral character. There is not much to hope from him."

"There is Ayloff."

"A man of courage and talent, but unreliable; and the Puritan element on which Monmouth must chiefly rely has long since pronounced him unworthy of trust. He will add little strength to your party. Who comes next?"

"Richard Goodenough, who was once under-sheriff of London."



"And was also a base time-server, who did all the dirty work of his party. You have not yet named a man whose personal character carries any weight with it."

"Well, sir, what do you say to Richard Rumbold? I am sure that he is a man of courage and parts."

"Yes—he possesses fiery enthusiasm, tinged by the discipline of a trained soldier. But he fought under Cromwell; nay, he was one of those who guarded the scaffold when Charles I. was executed. He was implicated in the famous Rye House plot, though I do not believe he was aware of the intentions of the conspirators to murder the King and his brother. He is a violent party man, though I believe in the main that he is an honest one. All the men you have named are reduced to the condition of penniless adventurers, and can afford little efficient aid to the enterprise the Duke contemplates."

"What then do you say to McCallum More? The Earl of Argyle is a refugee in Friesland, from the infamous sentence that condemned him to death because he would not yield his jurisdiction over the Highlands at the command of the Duke of York. He goes with us heart and hand, and he will make a descent on Scotland simultaneously with that made by Monmouth on England."

"He would do much better to stay where he is safe from the sentence pronounced against him, for if he again enters Scotland he is lost. It is inconceivable to me that the Duke should listen to such evil counsellors."

"For a season, after the death of his father, he seemed to think as you do, sir, for he withdrew himself from the counsels of his friends and retired to Brussels; but they found means to reach him again, and, backed by the influence of Lady Wentworth, who is wild to see him King, he again entered into all their plans."

"And his wife—where is she, while he travels with this ambitious lady?"

Vernor shrugged his shoulders.

"On her estates, I suppose, consoling herself for his desertion as well as she can. Monmouth considers Lady Wentworth as his lawful wife, and I confess that I do not blame him for refusing to give up the woman he loves because his hand was plighted to a baby while he was still too young to resist the will of his father."

"I hope you do not speak thus as an excuse for acting in a similar manner yourself."

"By no means, sir. Ethel is not the style of woman I particularly admire, but since I have been bought with a price, I must abide by the rather hard bargain I made. If I had retained my freedom, I flatter myself that I could now make a much more brilliant marriage. But necessity has no law, and I yielded to it in taking the incumbrance with the fortune. However, I shall defer claiming her as long as I decently can. The free and easy life I lead is too agreeable to be exchanged for the trammels of domestic bliss, as long as it can possibly be avoided."

The speaker yawned wearily, for already the Priory was a prison to him from which he longed to escape. The monotony of existence in that secluded country place was insupportably tedious to him, and he found no relief from the ennui that oppressed him in the society of Ethel.

She was now nearly sixteen years of age, but she was small and childish in appearance, and although she was gentle and intelligent, her manners contrasted so strikingly with those of the practised women of the world with whom Vernor had of late years been thrown, that he could find little charm in them.

During their long separation, he had rarely thought of her, except when the time rolled around for writing an occasional bulletin; for after the first year of absence, his correspondence fell off, and Ethel noted with mortification



and pain that his letters now scarcely alluded to the time when he should be entitled to claim her as his wife.

Within the last few months retrenchments had also been made in the style of living at the Priory, for after the marriage of his son, Sir Hugh had established something like the old hospitality of his house, and the family mingled with their wealthy neighbors on a footing of equality. The allowance of Ethel had even been reduced one-half, which was painfully significant to Mrs. Methurn. She felt assured in her own mind that Vernor had squandered the greater part of the wealth he had so unscrupulously obtained, and she saw that he would now gladly repudiate the tie that he had so hastily cemented.

Ethel felt the change in his letters very keenly for she had gradually wrought herself into the belief that she was very much attached to Vernor, but when he wrote to her that he was coming back to England especially to see her, she forgave him for his late neglect.

He came, and the elegant and accomplished courtier into which he had matured, at first dazzled and charmed her young imagination. For the first few days he was tender and kind to the little unformed creature who had few ideas or feelings in common with his own; but he soon wearied of the part he had assumed, and his old sarcastic selfishness shone through the brilliant varnish of worldly tact which rendered him so acceptable in society. He felt that he had thrown himself away on a child who was incapable of appreciating him, and he permitted her to see that he thought so.

This consciousness checked Ethel's natural vivacity. She became timid and constrained in his presence, and in his heart Vernor pronounced her stupid, and unworthy of the position his wife must hold in the future. He bitterly regretted the sacrifice he had made, and thought all the advan-

tages he had gained from it must be paid for at an exorbitant price if this fair piece of nonentity must hang forever as a clog upon his destiny.

But Ethel was far from stupid. She had quick intuition, and singular insight into character for one so young. As a matter of duty she had taught herself to love the ideal Vernor, but the real one soon revolted her, and her heart recoiled from him more deeply with every hour they passed together. His hard worldliness; his devotion to the pomps and vanities of life, found no response in her tender and true nature, and a chill as of death came over her as she remembered that her fate was indissolubly linked with his; that for her there was no escape from a loveless marriage.

She now comprehended the bitter wrong that had been done her, and she would gladly have surrendered all her fortune to be freed from the tie that bound her to Vernor. Her only comfort was, that he seemed to be in no hurry to claim her, for he had voluntarily renewed his promise to Mrs. Methurn to leave her protégée with her till she attained her eighteenth year. His life, he said, must be that of a wanderer for several years to come; he had plans to carry out which would not permit him to settle down as a quiet country gentleman, and Ethel was still too much of a child to be removed from her protection.

Mrs. Methurn gladly assented to this arrangement, for she had feared that Vernor's object in visiting England at this time was to violate the pledge he had given, and remove her darling from her. She saw with regret that the years of his absence had only improved him outwardly; his imperious and hard nature remained the same, and she sadly felt that there could never be any affinity between these two so disastrously linked together for life.

## CHAPTER XII.

## NEW HOPES.

VERNOR soon detected the change in Ethel's feelings, and he was rather rejoiced than otherwise, for he had ambitious plans of his own connected with a wealthy German heiress, with whom he had become acquainted in his travels, and the encouragement which Fraulien Von Ardenburg had given him induced him to believe that she would readily bestow herself and her fortune on himself, if he were free to ask them. The heiress was neither beautiful nor aristocratic, but she was brilliant, witty, and worldly wise; such a wife could advance his interests, and for them Vernor cared more than for anything else.

On the day before his departure from the Priory, he openly spoke of his wishes to Sir Hugh, in spite of the assurance he had lately given him that he would be true to the vows he had plighted to Ethel. He coolly said:

"I have reaped from Ethel's fortune all the advantages it is likely to afford me, and I own that it will be a terrible sacrifice for me to fulfil the contract. Is there no loop-hole in the law, through which we can both escape from the bondage which I can see is as galling to her as to myself."

"And prove yourself a villain in the eyes of all men," replied his father, angrily. "Are you mad, Vernor, to risk the loss of the Barony of Clifton, with a rent-roll larger than you are ever likely to gain in any other way?"

"That is a most uncertain prospect, sir. The old lord seems inclined to live as long as Methusaleh, and his son must succeed him. He may marry; he will probably do so when he feels the want of a nurse, and have heirs of his own to inherit the estate. *That* contingency is too uncertain to

have any weight with me; nor does the first one move me. Few in *my* world will know that I have repudiated the silly tie I formed in my inexperienced youth; or if they do, they will think that I have done right. Besides, Ethel will thank me for freeing her; she can then marry my cousin, for in her heart she has always liked Gerald best."

"How much of her fortune is left?" abruptly asked the baronet.

"Very little I am afraid," Vernor lightly replied. "The six thousand pounds in English securities were transferred to you, and you know best what use you have made of them. The remainder I have used, and nothing is now left to me but to raise money on the real estate in Amsterdam, for I am deucedly hard up for cash. If I could only get a divorce I could marry a million of guilders, and with them get a wife that will suit me far better than this baby ever can."

"This is even worse than I feared. You must have been very extravagant, Vernor, and I can see no possible chance to renovate your fortune as you propose. No English jury would give you back your freedom under the circumstances."

"Then I must give up the Ardenburg, I suppose, though it is deucedly hard, I must say. But as to my extravagance, Sir Hugh, I think I have done remarkably well to make forty thousand pounds last so long. I have heard that my mother had quite as much, sir, and yet you managed to get rid of it all in less than four years."

The baronet's purple face became almost pale, and he stammered:

"Who has told you that? What have you learned of my affairs?"

"Not much, sir, so do not be alarmed. I encountered your old friend, the Gipsy Queen, in Spain, and a heavy

sum of money bribed her to tell me a few things that you have concealed from me."

The listener fell back, half paralyzed with affright. He stammered:

"What has she revealed? What has she dared to say of me?"

"Nothing to excite you thus, sir. She only told me what I vaguely knew before; that my mother was an heiress, and you had spent her fortune. She said that for a few days the secret chamber was her prison, till you wrenched from her the control of her fortune, and she pined away and died of chagrin at the thought that her son would be impoverished."

"And—and what did she tell you of her death?" gasped the excited listener.

"Was there anything to tell beyond that?" asked Vernor with slight surprise. "On my conscience, I think it was enough for an English gentleman to incarcerate his wife for a single day in such a den as that; and if you had not always been a very indulgent father to me, I do not know how I could forgive such violence toward my mother."

Sir Hugh breathed more freely; the worst was yet unknown to Vernor, and after a pause to recover himself, he said:

"Let by-gones be by-gones, Vernor. The fortune is spent, but with the sum I received from Ethel's estate, I have improved this property until it is now more than doubled in value. My income is now nearly a thousand pounds a year, and from it I can afford you an allowance, which, with the rents in Amsterdam, should be sufficient to support you handsomely."

"You are very generous, sir; I will defer the mortgage yet awhile, for I do not really like to strip Ethel of the whole of her uncle's fortune."

"If you waste thus, Vernor, what are you to live on when the time to claim your bride arrives?"

He yawned wearily.

"When that direful necessity drags me hither, I suppose I must vegetate here, provided my other plans should fail."

"And they surely will, if they are founded on Monmouth's success. How long is it since you saw the Gipsy?"

"About six months ago I last encountered her; but do you know, sir, that I have so often met with her and her son that I fancied they were dogging my steps for some purpose of their own. I once struck the young man, and he has glared on me ever since like a chained tiger."

"You struck him; and wherefore?"

"He was insolent, I thought, and I lashed him with my whip; but that is long ago, and since they have done nothing in revenge as yet, I suppose my fears were groundless. At any rate, the liberal sum I paid his mother for the little information she gave me, disarmed his wrath, I presume."

"That is a strange presumption, when you know that he is of gipsy blood. Men of his race never forgive a blow, and you will do well to be on your guard against this man, for he may yet inflict a deadly injury upon you."

"Never fear, sir. I think he is a half-idiot, and incapable of planning any mischief."

"But his mother can plan, and he can execute. It was an evil chance that made him your enemy."

"Oh, well, sir, I must take my chances. His thews and sinews are more than a match for mine, but my wit is more than a match for his. Since his wrath has slept so long, I scarcely think it will take a fatal turn in the future."

"I hope not; but you will do well to be on your guard against both mother and son; and it is my especial wish that you tamper no more with her concerning my affairs. My life, you know, has not been that of a saint; but I am

striving now to repair the injustice I have done you as far as lies in my power. If I squandered your mother's fortune, the inheritance I hope to leave you will make amends for it. It is my earnest wish that you shall remain true to your plighted faith to Ethel. She was well disposed to love you, and you can win her over if you choose to make the attempt. She will develop into a charming woman; these quiet girls often become the most attractive and brilliant of the sex when the shyness of extreme youth is past. You know that I am a good judge of women, and you may trust to my opinion."

"I can only hope that it will prove correct, sir, for there is great room for improvement in Ethel."

At that moment Ethel passed the window near which they were sitting, with her hat falling back, and the glow of health upon her cheeks. She had lately been pale and languid, but exercise had recalled the lovely rose hue to her complexion, and with more animation Vernor added:

"I believe you are right, Sir Hugh. There is the making of a fine woman in Ethel, and if she were only *sure* of becoming Lady Clifton, I should prefer her to Gertrude von Ardenburg, with all her guilders. I have, of late, been careless and unkind to her; but I do not think it will be best to leave a bad impression behind me. I must join her, and learn what has brightened her up so much."

He passed out, overtook Ethel upon the lawn, and found her reading a letter which seemed to possess a deep interest for her.

"Who is your missive from, fair lady mine?" he sportively asked as he approached her.

She flushed, then grew pale, and faltered:

"It is of little interest to you, Vernor; my letter is from Gerald in reply to a question I asked him."

"From my cousin; then surely there can be nothing in

it which I may not see," he said, with his imperious air. "If you write secrets to Gerald, I have the *right* to pry into them," and he held out his hand for the letter.

Ethel still tenaciously grasped it, and, with more firmness than he expected, said:

"You are not yet my master, Vernor. My aunt always reads Gerald's letters, and I have no right to show them to you."

"Might makes right, little one, and I can take your letter from you if I choose; but I do not wish to be violent toward you. Show me the contents of that paper of your own free will, and if you do not I shall think you a most disobedient little wife."

"Don't call me by that name, Vernor, for I do not wish to maintain that relation toward you, nor do you wish me to hold to the vows we so wrongly made when we were too young to know all they involved. Since you will know, I will tell you that I secretly wrote to Gerald to know if Mr. Clyde, with whom he studies, cannot extricate us from the slough into which we have fallen."

"Really," replied Vernor, with an air of pique, "that was taking a great deal on yourself. So your distaste toward me is so great that you have actually written for advice as to the means of ridding yourself of me."

She looked doubtfully at him.

"I thought that you were even more anxious than I am to be freed from the bondage which can make neither of us happy. You have shown me plainly enough that you care very little for me."

The clearness and decision with which she answered him showed Vernor that he had underrated her capacity. Young as she was, she could both reason and act in such a crisis. He abruptly asked:

"Does my aunt know anything of this application?"

"Oh, no—I wrote without her knowledge."

"And what does Gerald say?"

"I have not quite finished reading his letter. If you will allow me to do so without disturbing me, I will tell you the opinion of Mr. Clyde."

"Read on, then; I will not attempt to take it from you."

Vernor was so much taller than Ethel, and he stood so near her, that, without being perceived by her, he could overlook the page she held before her, and he had no scruples in thus surreptitiously possessing himself of its contents. As his eagle glance fell upon it, his gaze became rivetted to one paragraph:

"If Vernor also wishes to be released from his early vows to you, he will be called on rigidly to account for the fortune of which he gained possession by marrying you. This would be but justice to you; but you will probably be in a position to act generously by him, and make him a present of all he has spent. Your grandfather is dead, and the health of the present Lord Clifton is so broken that it is likely that you may become the possessor of the title and estate before many months have elapsed."

Lady Clifton! and he was about to throw this chance to the winds; besides risking a charge of fraud in dissipating the estate of a minor. What could he have been thinking of to alienate Ethel so completely from himself as to goad her into making such an application?

When she again looked up at him, he was idly twitching the grass at his feet, and with an air of unconcern he asked:

"What does he say, *petite*?"

"That if we *both* concur in the petition for a divorce, considering our extreme youth when we were married, it

may be granted; but it will be a very expensive and tedious proceeding."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite; but the remainder is only of interest to myself."

"Then you will not permit me to read the letter?"

"I do not wish you to read it, and if you are a gentleman you will not insist. Let us seek the divorce, Vernor, however expensive it may be; money cannot pay for lost happiness."

"But if my happiness is centred in you, Ethel? I have had many cares pressing on my mind of late, much cause for deep anxiety; and I have failed to play the part of the lover as your romance led you to believe I would. But you are very dear to me, Lady Bird, and the thought of giving you up fills me with pain. If the application for a divorce is made, it must be done without my concurrence, for I am not willing to release you from the vows you have plighted to me."

While he thus spoke, Ethel became deadly pale; she had expected that he would eagerly grasp at a chance of release, and she faltered:

"Oh, Vernor, you do not love me—you know you do not; yet you will sacrifice me because you fear that a settlement may be required of you. Take all my fortune—use it as you please, but do not force me to fill the position of your wife."

"Am I, then, so hateful to you, Ethel? Your letters led me to believe that I held a different place in your estimation."

"Yes—I tried to love you. I fancied that I had succeeded, till you came. The illusion was kept up for a brief season, but you soon showed me how indifferent you are to me. You took pains to let me see how unlike we are in all

things, and at all times. I have seen and felt the contempt you showed for the country-bred girl who knows none of the arts of the fine ladies with whom you have of late years associated."

Vernor listened with surprise to this exposé of his real feelings, made by a child he had considered too obtuse to understand him. He took her cold hand in his own, and earnestly said:

"We have mutually misunderstood each other, Ethel. I thought you inferior to what your childhood promised, and at first I was disappointed. But you have won upon me daily; much that I have done was only to try you, but you have passed through the ordeal like an angel, and I estimate you more highly than ever. If my life is ever to become noble and true, it must be through your influence. Do not give me up yet; wait till the stipulated time has expired before I can claim you as my own, and *then*, if you still wish it, I will aid you in seeking a divorce."

She sighed heavily, and with effort prevented the gathering tears from falling.

"I have no other resource, Vernor; I cannot compel you to any course of action, and I must submit to your decision, however reluctantly I may do so."

"That is right; and Ethel, dear Ethel, try to love me a little. I will endeavor to render myself worthy of you. I hope to win a station which you will adorn, for I have plans and prospects which promise much in their fulfillment. Let us resume our old feelings toward each other, and I promise to try to make you happy."

His expressive eyes were bent full upon her; his handsome face wore its most winning expression, and Ethel suffered him to retain the hand he still held, as she faintly said:

"It is my duty to do as you wish. I will make the effort, but if I fail, you will voluntarily release me?"

"I will—I swear it; but you must be faithful in your endeavors to walk in the path of duty. You must not permit your old fondness for Gerald to come between you and myself."

She blushed vividly, and hastily replied:

"Gerald is my brother; we have rarely met since my childhood, and I have no reason to believe that he thinks of me except as the adopted daughter of his mother."

"So much the better, for if I were compelled to give you up, I would never permit *him* to be my rival."

She said nothing in reply, and they walked on in silence toward the house.

Vernor deferred his departure several days, during which he used every art to recover his lost ground with Ethel. Mrs. Methurn marvelled at this sudden devotion, but on the day of his departure she was partially enlightened. The formal announcement of Lord Clifton's death was forwarded to Sir Hugh by his lawyers, with the intimation that the annuity Ethel had hitherto received was secured to her for life; in a postscript was added:

"The new Baron is in very feeble health, and your ward will probably succeed to the estate of her grandfather before the year is out."

Mrs. Methurn felt assured that by some means Vernor had obtained this information, and she sighed as she thought that Fate itself was against her protégée. Like fairy gifts which suddenly turn to ashes in the grasp of the recipient, the probable accession of fortune that awaited Ethel only promised to render her life a desolation by tightening the hold of an avaricious and unprincipled man upon her destiny.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE INVASION.

THE seaport of Lyme lies on a wild, rocky coast, beaten by a stormy sea. It is a picturesque place, rising abruptly from the sea into a series of narrow alleys, on the sides of which the houses are perched.

At the time of which we write, the place was chiefly remarkable for an extensive pier, built in the days of the Plantagenets, which enclosed the only haven in an extent of many miles in which mariners could find shelter from the storms of the English channel.

On a bright morning in June, 1686, the inhabitants of this lonely place were surprised by the appearance of three ships of foreign build, on which no colors were displayed to show their nationality. Groups collected on the cliffs to watch the boats that went out with the officers of the customs, and their uneasiness and perplexity were increased when they did not return.

At length seven boats, heavily loaded with armed men, put out from the largest of the ships, and rowed toward the landing. In the foremost was a group of gentlemen, among whom was one conspicuous for the beauty of his person and the grace of his bearing. He wore upon his breast the blue ribbon of St. George, which proclaimed his high rank, and the stern men that surrounded him evidently looked to him as their chief.

As the boat touched the pier, he arose, and stepping upon the shore, kneeled down, and reverently returned thanks to Heaven for having preserved the friends of liberty from the dangers of the deep. He then implored the divine bless-

ing upon the effort he was about to make to restore freedom to his oppressed countrymen.

Then rising, he drew his sword, and led his followers over the cliffs into the town. A man among the crowd recognized him as the beloved Duke, and the cry of, "A Monmouth! a Monmouth! hurra for King Monmouth!" ran from mouth to mouth, and the wild enthusiasm of the populace was manifested in every possible manner. They gathered around the chieftain with cries and tears of joy, and shouts of "Long live King Monmouth!" were heard on every side.

Monmouth accepted these demonstrations with delight. Impulsive and enthusiastic in character, he regarded this reception as a prelude to the triumphs that awaited him in his progress to the throne. Deceived by his emissaries, he believed he had only to raise his standard, and all classes would rush to sustain his pretensions to the crown of his father.

He spoke to the gentleman who walked nearest to him—an aristocratic looking man of middle age:

"See, my lord, how much my good lieges love me. With such a hold on the hearts of the people, why shall I fear for my success?"

Lord Grey bowed, and blandly replied:

"This reception but fulfils the guarantees already given to your highness. Let us act with decision, and the throne of your ancestors will be yours."

"Yes—action—action is our only salvation now. I mean to strike a blow which shall be felt at Whitehall, and cause my uncle to feel that he has no place in the affections of the people he has so misgoverned."

Lord Grey bowed, and the party, which consisted of eighty men, thoroughly armed and equipped, passed on to the market-place of the town, and the ensign of the invaders



—a blue flag—was raised above it. Military stores were deposited in the town hall, and a repulsive looking man stood up before the people to read a declaration setting forth the object of the expedition.

He made many charges against the government, which were founded on justice, but these were mingled with personal accusations against James II., of such a nature as could never be forgiven by that monarch. He was accused of poisoning the late king; of causing the great fire which had desolated London a few years before, and many other crimes of the darkest dye.

The listeners were not in a mood to criticise, for they hated the tyrannical ruler, and had been so ground down by the oppressions of the dominant faction, that they were ready to throw themselves into any cause that promised a redress of their grievances. The dissenters had been relentlessly persecuted, and a deep and bitter hatred toward the reigning sovereign was widely spread among them. They eagerly hailed the advent of Monmouth, and pressed on him offers of service. The old Roundhead spirit still existed in the West of England among the yeoman, the traders, the artizans and peasantry, although the gentry were mostly attached to the court. But the invaders had sanguine hopes that they, too, would flock to their standard when they saw how unanimous the people were in sustaining the cause of Monmouth.

The masses remembered the brilliant progress he had made among them a few years before; they had then been induced to believe that the Duke was the legitimate heir to the crown, and they clung to this delusion, asserting that a vile conspiracy had deprived their idol of his own.

To the masses, Monmouth was the good Duke, the Protestant heir to the throne, and his landing at Lyme was no sooner known than crowds flocked to his standard. In

twenty-four hours he was at the head of fifteen hundred men, and a band of horsemen, headed by Dare, one of his most enthusiastic adherents, arrived from Taunton.

Vernor Methurn, as private secretary to Monmouth, accompanied him, and to him Dare brought a few lines from Sir Hugh, entreating him to resign his post, and take refuge at the Priory, while it was yet time to save himself from the consequences of this outbreak.

To this letter Vernor, after the lapse of a few days, returned the following reply:

“DEAR FATHER:—I am half inclined to follow your advice, for we have already so many dissensions among ourselves that I cannot see that the enterprise of Monmouth is to end in anything but ruin to us all. In place of concerted action, our chiefs are quarreling among themselves, and Dare, who bore me your letter, has been shot by Fletcher in an absurd quarrel about a cavalry horse. He then fled to one of the ships to avoid the vengeance of Dare's men, and thus we have lost one of our best leaders.

“Yesterday, Grey marched with five hundred men to attack Bridport, and at first our troops were victorious; but they were finally driven back, and Grey ingloriously fled to Lyme. Yet in spite of these disasters, recruits are coming in by hundreds, and if Monmouth is only as popular throughout England as he is hereabouts, there will be no such thing as resisting the legions that will crowd to his standard.

“The Mayor of Lyme, who is a strong Tory, fled and gave the alarm to Lord Albemarle, and information has come in that he is at the head of four thousand troops, and on the march to give us battle. I am only the Duke's secretary, and I do not think it advisable to expose my person to any unnecessary danger. We are now at Axmin-

ster, and if a reverse overtakes us here I shall take your advice. In the meantime, I will send you information of our movements whenever opportunity offers.

"We shall probably be in your vicinity before many days, as we contemplate marching on Taunton, if Albemarle does not crush us out at once. V. M."

The next missive ran thus:

"Albemarle was frightened at the display of our four field pieces and ignominiously retired before us. Monmouth thinks it advisable that his recruits shall be better drilled before going into action. We are now on our way to Taunton, which we are assured is enthusiastic in the Duke's cause.

"Since Albemarle showed the white feather we are sanguine of success, and on our arrival in Taunton, I beg that you will not fail to come hither and bring Ethel with you. It is my wish to present her to the Duke, who manifests a warm interest in my fortunes. Tell her it is my *will* that she shall come, and it is her duty to obey me. V. M."

The Priory was only six miles from Taunton, and Sir Hugh was aware of the ferment going on there. He visited the place himself, and was greeted everywhere with cries of "a Monmouth, a Monmouth! down with the despot."

The enthusiasm of the people communicated itself to him in some degree, and in spite of his former misgivings, he began to cherish the hope that the rebellion would be successful. He returned home, and bade Ethel get ready to take part in the ovation with which the townspeople were preparing to welcome Monmouth.

For several years past, Ethel had twice a week visited Taunton for the purpose of taking music lessons in the

female school established there, and the principal wished her to take a prominent part in the festival. All the pupils of Mrs. Malton were to walk in the procession, and strew flowers before the hero of the hour; the two eldest among them were to present him with a Bible and a flag.

Six years before, when Monmouth passed as a bright meteor through the country, Ethel had seen him, and the impression made by his beauty and the splendor of his appearance had never faded from her mind. In her young heart was cherished a romantic feeling of devotion to the cause of the young Duke, for she thought if justice was done, Monmouth would inherit the throne of his father.

Vernor could not have issued a command that she would more readily have obeyed, and in great elation she commenced her preparations for the part she was to play on the occasion.

In vain Mrs. Methurn remonstrated, and pointed out to Sir Hugh the possible danger that might ensue to all concerned in the rebellion. He seemed to have forgotten his own warnings to Vernor, and to have become as reckless of consequences as the youngest and most hot-headed of men.

He laughed at her fears, and said:

"I once thought as you do; but I am wiser now. Monmouth will be king, and those who welcome him with enthusiasm now, will be remembered and distinguished when he wields the power of the crown. The whole west is in a tumult of rejoicing at his advent, and I now think the flame will spread from county to county till the entire kingdom is in a blaze."

"That may be true of this section, Sir Hugh; yet I think it possible he may fail, and with such a chance, you should not expose yourself, nor this helpless child, to the vengeance of a government which has already shown itself relentless in more than one case."

"I repeat, that in my opinion there is no risk in showing our real feelings; and it would be a paltry government that would strike at a fledgling like Ethel. I promised that she shall present the Bible to the young chieftain, and I shall not fail to keep my pledge."

Finding Sir Hugh immovable, Mrs. Methurn would have persuaded Ethel to feign sickness to escape the danger she foresaw; but to her surprise, she was as eager to take a part in the ceremony as Sir Hugh could have desired. She said:

"Oh, Aunt, I would not be ill for the world. I remember that gracious and elegant man when he came among us long ago. I was but a child then, but I have always thought it a shame that he did not succeed King Charles. He is his son, and if his mother was a woman of low degree, the Stuart thought it right to make her his wife. I believe in the validity of the marriage, and I recognize the handsome Duke as my lawful sovereign."

"But if his attempt to win the crown should fail, Ethel, your appearance in the procession of which you wish to form a part, might cost you dear."

"Then I will abide the consequences," replied the young girl, with a bright smile. "Such a poor little thing as I am would not be worth punishing; and there is nothing wrong in presenting a Bible to any one, I am sure."

"In itself perhaps there is not, but you will be made painfully conspicuous, and I tremble for what may follow, for I have a presentiment that evil will come to us from all this turmoil."

Ethel threw her arms around her neck and playfully said:

"Put aside your fears, dear aunt, and enjoy the unusual spectacle as much as I shall. It will be a charming diversion to the monotony of our existence, and I own that I

enjoy the thought of taking part in the honors offered to my hero. You will come with me to witness the pageant, I hope."

"Since you will go, of course I cannot permit you to go alone. I am afraid that Gerald's legal skill will be called on to defend both you and Vernor from the consequences of these lawless proceedings."

Ethel laughed blithely.

"Then Gerald's ability shall save us, and he shall win his first laurels in the cause of his nearest friends. But why should you doubt, aunt? even Sir Hugh, since his visit to Taunton, seems to think the cause of Monmouth secure. The overwhelming enthusiasm he there witnessed has overcome his scruples."

"My dear, a tumultuous and enthusiastic outburst is rarely a successful one. As long as fortune smiles on Monmouth his adherents will cling to him; but if a single reverse falls on him his cause is ruined, and, if taken, he will lose his head."

Ethel looked aghast.

"Surely the King would never put his own nephew to death! that would be a worse crime than Elizabeth perpetrated when she took the life of Mary Queen of Scots."

"He both could and would. The man who commissions such a wretch as Jeffrey to slay his subjects judicially, is not likely to show mercy to him who has placed his life and crown in jeopardy. This very Jeffrey will probably be sent hither to sit in judgment upon the poor wretches who are deluding themselves with the hope of a change of rulers."

Ethel became slightly pale, but she presently said:

"The cruelties to which you refer have armed the people against the King, and now they have a chance to make their power felt, they will never give up till they have conquered. I believe that God will aid the just cause, and I

will offer His holy precepts to the good Duke as the guide of his actions."

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### MONMOUTH'S RECEPTION AT TAUNTON.

FINDING her efforts useless, Mrs. Methurn prepared to accompany Ethel to Taunton on the appointed morning, and thither the party went in such state as Sir Hugh's improved finances could afford. The pony phaeton was escorted by the baronet mounted on a magnificent horse, followed by two serving men in livery.

They passed through a country rich in orchards and green pastures, among which were scattered manor houses, cottages, and village spires. The people of Taunton boasted that they lived in a land flowing with milk and honey; and with truth, for the town was situated in one of the most fertile of English valleys.

The citizens of the place had long leaned to the Presbyterian divinity, and Whig politics; and in the great civil war, Taunton had steadily adhered to the Parliament. The town had been twice besieged, and was defended with heroic perseverance. The spirit of the people was still unbroken, and at Whitehall their stubborn adherence to the Puritan cause had excited such fierce resentment that, by a royal decree, the walls of the town were razed to the ground and the moat filled up.

Nevertheless, the descendants of those who forty years before had fought upon the ramparts of Taunton were now preparing to throw their lives and fortunes in the scale of the Protestant pretender to the throne.

As the party from the Priory drew near the town they overtook groups of people decorated with the badge of Monmouth—a green bough stuck in the hat, or worn upon the breast. All seemed to be in a state of joyful excitement, and cries of "Long live King Monmouth!" were heard in every direction, for by that title they distinguished him from his uncle, as his name was also James.

On entering the streets, every door and window was wreathed with garlands, and the wives and daughters of the best families of the town appeared at them wearing the colors of the insurgents. Bands of music filled the air with exulting strains, and every face wore an expression of joyful expectation.

Sir Hugh led the way to the town hall, where the pupils of Mrs. Malton's school were already gathered to form a procession to welcome the Duke. The girls were all young, the most of them under fourteen years of age, and, as the eldest and fairest of her pupils, Mrs. Malton wished Ethel to present the Bible which lay conspicuous upon the table around which the youthful group had gathered.

The Bible was one of great price; its leaves were enriched with exquisite illuminations, and its purple velvet cover glittered with costly jewels. A flag, gorgeously embroidered with emblems of royal dignity, was to be presented by Alice Digby, the chosen friend of Ethel, and the only daughter of a gentleman of ancient family, who resided in the outskirts of the town.

The girls were dressed alike in white robes, with blue tunics gathered back at the sides, and festooned with bouquets of flowers, as we now see them in the figures of shepherdesses in old paintings, or in china ornaments. They were too young to have their hair frizzed in the fashion of the day, so it was permitted to float in natural curls around their fair, rosy faces, and a more attractive

picture of youth and innocence it would have been difficult to find.

In the excitement of the hour, Ethel's character seemed to have undergone a complete revolution. In her enthusiasm she forgot her timidity, for she thought only of the great results she believed would flow from the events that were transpiring, and in her ardent desire to do honor to the hero of her imagination she forgot how conspicuous a part she had undertaken to perform in the pageant.

Underlying all the natural reticence of her character, was a power of self-control few would have expected to find in a fair and fragile girl of sixteen. Excitement gave her a most brilliant color, and the pale little girl was on that day almost radiantly beautiful.

A courier dashed up in hot haste to say that the Duke with his body guard was approaching. The trained bands marched out to meet and escort him into the town, and the bevy of young girls were arranged in procession, headed by the pages, one bearing the flag, the other the Bible on a cushion of purple velvet, embroidered with pearls.

Each one of the children carried a basket of flowers to be strewed in the pathway of the idol of the hour, and as the cavalcade appeared headed by the graceful and elegant Duke, at a signal the bands of music were silenced, and Ethel, blushing like a rose, but calm and self-possessed, stepped forward, took the Holy Book in her hands, and in a clear, distinct voice, said :

"To the saviour of our native land from the darkness of persecution, I offer the precepts laid down by the great Lawgiver as the rule of life. May they sink deep in your heart, ruler of our country's destiny, and enable you to combine the wisdom of Solomon with the mild teachings of the Prince of Peace."

With that winning courtesy which pre-eminently distin-

guished him, Monmouth alighted from his horse, and lifting the fair hand to his lips, after having received from it the elegant offering, he replied :

"Fair lady, I pledge my honor and knighthood to the fulfillment of my duty to my land, and people. With God's blessing I hope to win and wear my father's crown, and the blessing of good government shall be known to all. This Holy Book shall teach me such lessons of wisdom as shall lead me in the right path."

Shouts and vivas rent the air, and when they subsided, Alice Digby stepped forward, holding the flag. She addressed him, as if already king, in a clear, vibrant voice that penetrated the crowd with its silvery ring.

"Sire, we present to you the insignia of your royal rank, emblazoned on the field of blue, which is clear and spotless as the azure vault of Heaven. May good fortune perch upon its folds, and never may it be lowered before the foes of true religion and national freedom."

Monmouth received it with a flush of pride, and he waved it above his head as he said :

"Spotless will I maintain it as the honor of a true knight ; and when I am installed in the palace of my ancestors, it shall have a conspicuous place among the banners that adorn its walls."

The bands struck up their most exhilarating strains, flowers were showered over the uncovered head of Monmouth, who, bowing and smiling with graceful urbanity, won new suffrages from all hearts.

Thus he was conducted to the town hall, where a magnificent banquet was prepared for him and his immediate followers. Tables for his soldiers were laid in the open air, and as Mrs. Methurn and Ethel drove to Mr. Digby's, where they were to dine, the enthusiasm of the multitude was even greater than at the commencement of the day.

Vernor was in the suite of Monmouth, and he saw with delight the graceful manner with which Ethel acquitted herself of the task she had undertaken. As soon as he could leave the banquet hall, he hurried to the house of Mr. Digby to greet his aunt and herself. He was radiant with joy and triumph, and said to the girls:

"Young ladies, you have immortalized yourselves to-day. History will record the graceful manner with which you discharged the duties delegated to you. Ethel, darling, you were charming, and the Duke congratulated me on claiming such a gem as my own."

Ethel blushed at this praise, and then became pale, for the sight of Vernor had renewed the old conflict of feeling, and she felt that a deep and growing distaste to the idea of fulfilling her vows to him was becoming the dominant feeling of her heart. She faltered a few words in reply, but he scarcely heeded them and went on.

"The Duke has expressed a wish to have the two beauties who gave him so agreeable a welcome, presented to him. He is at the house of the Mayor, holding a levee, and I came hither to escort you and Alice Digby to his presence. A carriage is at the door, and you had better come before the crowd becomes too dense."

In a flutter of delight at this distinction, the girls were soon ready to accompany him; and Mrs. Methurn, at their earnest solicitation, agreed to accompany them, though she did it with many misgivings as to what might ensue from the incidents of this day.

The enthusiasm of the crowds seemed to increase with every hour, and such was the profusion of green branches that the town looked as if Burnham wood had come again as in the days of Macbeth. With some difficulty the carriage was driven to the Mayor's house, and our party alighted at the door, which was ornamented with garlands woven in the

form of a royal crown, beneath which appeared the name of Monmouth in illuminated letters, with a few lines of poetry describing him as the only hope of free born Englishmen.

Officers, and guards in gay uniform, thronged upon the steps, and elegantly dressed women were passing beneath the portal in a continuous stream to offer their homage to him they believed to be on the eve of becoming their king.

Sir Hugh was on the lookout for their arrival, and he offered his arm to Mrs. Methurn, while the elated Vernor moved forward with the two young ladies under his escort. After some delay they succeeded in reaching the reception room, which was also decorated with garlands of natural flowers, fit emblems of the evanescent triumph of him in whose honor they had been woven together.

Monmouth, surrounded by his staff, stood at the upper end of the large apartment, and as he caught sight of Vernor, he said:

"Open the way, gentlemen, for the approach of the fair ladies who first welcomed me to this loyal town."

Every eye was turned on the approaching group, and the Duke, stepping forward, received them with that cordial grace which rendered him irresistible to those he wished to please. He drew from his hand a ring containing a single large brilliant, surrounded by a circle of sapphires. This he placed on Ethel's finger, as he said:

"These stones are emblematic, fair lady. You are in the April of life; the diamond represents innocence, and therefore a fitting offering to youth and beauty. When I am master of my own, show me this ring, and ask such favor as you may desire; I pledge my royal word that it shall be granted."

She uttered a few fitting words in reply, which to her own surprise seemed to spring to her lips on the impulse of the moment. Monmouth then turned to Alice Digby, and presenting a second ring set with emeralds, said:



"In the May morning of existence, these stones denote happiness which I trust will be yours. If, in the future, I can aid you in any way, command me, lady; and feel assured that the banner you this day presented to me shall be borne from victory to victory, till it floats in peace over the halls of my ancestors."

Alice seemed carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, and she replied in her peculiar, ringing tones:

"Sire, the prayers and blessings of a great nation are with you. The royal blood that animates your heart will teach you to fulfil the duties of a great king, and all present will join with me in crying long live King James III."

The cry was taken up and echoed through the hall, whence it penetrated to the antechamber and descended to the streets, and the whole town seemed in a tumult of applause.

Ethel whispered to Vernor:

"Get me out of this crowd or I shall faint."

He looked at her and saw that she was very pale. Although vexed that she should become ill at so inopportune a moment, he succeeded after some effort in extricating them from the increasing crowd, and they gained the privacy of a smaller room opening from the hall of audience. In this they were joined by Sir Hugh and Mrs. Methurn: they had been presented to the Duke, and, after uttering a few graceful sentences to the lady, he said in a low voice to the baronet:

"The betrothed of your son is indeed a lovely young creature; when she becomes Viscountess Clifton I will see to the revival of an Earl's title in her family, which will be a fitting reward for the services of my friend Methurn."

Sir Hugh was greatly elated, and to Ethel's surprise addressed her as my lady countess. Vernor was angry with her, and he said in an irritated tone:

"She will never be fit to wear the ermine, till she learns

how to control herself. It was most absurd to grow ill in the midst of such a triumph. What on earth ailed you, Ethel?"

"I am afraid you will think me very foolish, but as the Duke referred to the signification of gems, I suddenly remembered that the sapphire is the emblem of repentance, and a voice seemed to ring in my ears, 'You shall dearly repent this hour.' I know it was fantasy, but I could almost have believed that the words were really uttered near me, so distinctly did I hear them."

"Nonsense!" replied Vernor, looking more annoyed than before. "Why should you become the prophet of evil to my friend and patron?"

"Sorry indeed should I be to prove such, dear Vernor. I have only told you the truth, and I regret that you should be angry with me for speaking it."

"Oh, I am not angry; I am only annoyed that you should have such absurd fancies, and suffer them to influence you at such a moment. Come—let us go down; I will put you in the carriage, and leave my father to escort you back, for I must return to the Duke."

"And we shall see you no more, till—till——"

She paused and shuddered. Vernor completed her unfinished sentence:

"Not till King James III. reigns in Whitehall. *Then* I will come to you in triumph."

"But there will be fighting; you may be killed."

"I shall know how to take care of myself," he coolly replied; and with little show of emotion, he bade them adieu at the carriage door, assuring his father that in a few weeks the struggle would be over, and the triumph of Monmouth complete.

After setting Alice Digby down at her father's door, the party drove back to the Priory, greeted on every side by cries of "Long live King Monmouth!"



## CHAPTER XV.

## THE FUGITIVE.

WEEKS of apprehension and anxiety passed over the family at the Priory—every day brought rumors, which made them heart-sick for the future. That brilliant ovation at Taunton was the last sparkle on the bitter cup the hapless Monmouth was to drink to the dregs. The forces of the king encountered his undisciplined troops at Sedgemoor, and completely routed them. He fled from the battle field, and Sir Hugh learned that his son bore him company—beyond that he could gain no information, and the family waited and watched for Vernor's appearance with weary and wretched hearts.

The work of vengeance had commenced with relentless severity, and Sir Hugh was in daily expectation of a visit from the rude soldiery who were permitted to be guilty of any degree of atrocity toward those who had been implicated in the rebellion.

Thus far he had been unmolested, and he began to cherish the hope that for Vernor's share in the outbreak his family would not be held responsible.

It was late in the evening, and the family had retired to their own apartments, when a worn and wasted figure approached the house in a stealthy manner, as if fearing pursuit. He reconnoitered the gloomy looking pile before he ventured to approach Sir Hugh's room. The window was partly open, and he glanced through the dimly-lighted room to ascertain if its occupant was alone.

The old man sat beside a table on which rested a bottle and glass, and the lip of the wanderer curled scornfully as he saw the source to which Sir Hugh had applied for consolation.

With a single bound he sprang into the apartment, and the baronet arose in alarm, and attempted to reach the bell cord, for he did not recognize in that ghastly, dirty fugitive, his handsome son.

Vernor sprang forward and seized his hand, as he exclaimed:

"Would you destroy me, sir? After toils and hardships that would have killed most men, I have gained this haven of safety; but if the servants know I am here, I am lost."

With a faint cry the old man sank back upon his seat, too much unnerved to reply for several moments. Vernor seized the bottle, placed it to his lips, and swallowed a long draught; then replacing it, he said:

"I am famishing. I have had nothing to eat for three days but raw vegetables that I gathered from the fields. Have food placed before me without delay. Ethel can wait on me, and no one but she and my aunt need know that I am here."

Sir Hugh feebly arose, for the events of the last few weeks had shaken him severely, and the potations he had imbibed did not tend to strengthen either mind or body.

Crying out, "Oh, my boy, my boy! did I ever think you would come to such a pass as this!" he went toward the door, and Vernor again applied to the bottle for consolation.

The old man knocked at the door of Ethel's chamber, and when she unclosed it she was struck with fear and astonishment at the apparition of Sir Hugh looking as pale as a wraith, with tears streaming over his furrowed face.

"What is it, dear sir? For Heaven's sake, tell me if you have heard evil tidings of Vernor?"

"He is here—he is in my room, starving, wretched—hunted! Oh, my God! Ethel, what is to become of us all?"

"*Here!*" was the response, in an accent of joy. "Then

he is safe, for we can hide him in the old house where no one will be able to find him. Let me speak to aunty, and we will soon supply him with food."

"Yes," he replied, in a dull tone—"tell Agnes, and lose no time in bringing the poor fellow something to eat. But be careful, Ethel; the servants must suspect nothing. If they are questioned they might betray him."

"I understand, sir. These are dreadful times, and we cannot be too cautious. I will speak to aunty, and in a few moments we will join you."

Sir Hugh returned to his son, and the young girl flitted into Mrs. Methurn's apartment with the welcome news that the fugitive had at last gained the shelter of his paternal roof. She heard it with gratitude, and in a few moments the two entered the baronet's room, bearing cold meat, bread and wine.

Vernor scarcely paused to greet them; he fell upon the food with the appetite of a famished tiger, tore it with his fingers, and drank from the bottle almost without noticing those who were weeping and lamenting over his deplorable condition.

At length his hunger was satisfied, and after washing his hands and face in the water which Ethel offered him, he said, with a ghastly attempt to smile:

"You see, Ethel, to what I have come by following my own headstrong will. I devoted my life to a mad enterprise, and now, unless I can escape the bloodhounds that are on my track, I shall lose it by the hangman's rope."

Ethel uttered a cry, and he bitterly went on:

"Aye—that fate is thought good enough even for *gentlemen* who have risen against the rule of James Stuart. Feversham's dragoons have already strung up hundreds of men, and I escaped them almost by a miracle."

"Sit down and tell us all your adventures," said Mrs.

Methurn, for Vernor, forgetful of his fatigue, was pacing the floor like a hunted wild beast. "We have been so wretched about you, that now we have you with us we can almost feel that the worst is past."

"Then you know little of the implacable man that rules this land, Aunt Agnes," he bitterly replied. "Danger overhangs us all; the royal troops are overrunning the whole country, and it is a wonder to me that they have not yet visited the Priory. They are probably giving me time to take refuge here before they come to trap me like a rat in a hole. But I will baffle them yet. I have a hiding-place *they* will never find; and now I am here, I feel quite safe."

"And the Duke?" asked Ethel, tremulously. "What of him? I trust he has escaped."

An expression of deep gloom overspread Vernor's face.

"He is taken. A reward of five thousand pounds was set upon his head; this stimulated the wretched knaves of his uncle to such activity that he was cut off, surrounded and made a prisoner. By this time he is in London. I fled from the field of Sedgemoor with him, accompanied by Grey and several others. We all urged Monmouth to take refuge in Wales, as he could have concealed himself in its mountain-fastnesses long before his defeat was known. From there he could easily have made his way to the sea-coast, but he was infatuated with the idea that in Hampshire he could lurk in the cabins of the deer-stealers, sheltered by the New Forest, till he could find means to escape to the Continent.

"When we reached Cranbourne Chase, our horses gave out, so we turned them loose, and concealed the bridles and saddles. We disguised ourselves as countrymen, and went on foot toward the New Forest. We passed the night in the open air, and during its long hours our pursuers were

setting their toils. Lumley sent out scouts in every direction, and Portman encircled our place of refuge by sentinels so placed that there seemed to be no possibility of escape.

"The next morning Grey was taken while attempting to reconnoitre. The rest of us found refuge in a large field intersected by hedges, and covered with rye and pease; and it was lucky for us that the latter grew there, for without them we should have perished of hunger. After Grey was captured, the search for Monmouth became more animated, for the soldiers were certain that he could not be far off.

"Every time we ventured to look through the hedge, we found a sentinel on the alert, and at last the poor Duke gave up all hope of escape. His courage seemed to fail him, and he wept like a child. In fact, we were all completely done out with fatigue and privation.

"I saw that all hope for Monmouth was over, and I naturally thought of saving myself. After he was secured I knew that the search would be relaxed, and I might have a chance to escape the toils that had mainly spread for him. There was a ditch at the back of one of the fields, overgrown with ferns and brambles; into this I crept, and watched and waited for the result.

"It was not long in coming. I had fallen into a light slumber, from sheer weariness, when I was aroused by a shout. I peeped out from my shelter, and saw a party of men carrying off poor Monmouth as a prisoner. He looked so wretched and downcast that I pitied him with all my heart, but it would have been my own destruction to join him then, though I was half tempted to do so; misery had made me reckless, and I cared very little what happened to me. The soldiers had secured the prize they sought, and my refuge was left unsearched.

"After a few hours, I found means to escape to a wood-cutter's hut, where I remained till the troops were with-

drawn. I then started for this place. I have skulked in by-places; concealed myself from every approaching traveller, and have lived — God knows how! for I dared not enter any house to ask for food, lest the people should arrest me as a suspicious character. That is all I have to tell. I am here at last, and I think I can secure myself from discovery, if food can be furnished me without exciting suspicion among the servants."

Ethel was weeping violently, and Vernor turned to her with an expression of surprise.

"Ha! little one—since I am safe and sound I do not know what cause for tears you can have just at this moment."

"Oh! Vernor, how can you say so, when that noble cavalier is a prisoner in the power of his greatest enemy. How could you desert him and care for your own safety in his hour of direst need?"

A dark frown gathered on his brow, and he harshly said:

"Don't be a fool, Ethel. I could have done the Duke no good by remaining with him. I feel much flattered that you have no thought for any one but the Duke, when I am in nearly as dire a strait as he is. Pretty conduct for my lady bride, indeed."

She shuddered and turned her face from him, that he might not see the repulsion that filled her soul at this title.

Vernor arose, and sank down again, saying:

"I am tired to death! Where can I rest, Sir Hugh, till the sleuth-hounds come, that are sure to pursue me?"

"A dormitory in the old house must be prepared for you. Agnes, you and Ethel bring bedding hither, and I will open the doors, and show you where to place it."

Mrs. Methurn and Ethel went upon this errand, and Sir Hugh unlocked the doors leading into the corridor. The nearest cell was selected as the one from which Vernor

could soonest hear the alarm, if one should be given, and retreat to the Secret Chamber.

The heavy door slowly yielded to their efforts, and they entered a narrow dormitory, lighted by a single window placed high up in the wall. Dust, which had long been undisturbed, lay upon the few articles of furniture it contained. There was a stone bench, which had served as a couch; an iron crucifix still hung against the wall, and the mouldering remains of a breviary lay upon the floor.

When Mrs. Methurn came in, carrying an armful of blankets, she demurred to placing them upon the bench, but Vernor said:

"It is no matter: there is no chance to clean the place, and I would rather let the dust lie where it is, than be choked to death with any attempt to remove it. Aunt Agnes, place the things that I may lie down, and I trust in Heaven that there will be no alarm to-night, for I am so weary that I shall scarcely have energy to fly to my hiding-place."

Ethel followed Mrs. Methurn, bringing sheets and pillows, and in a few moments a couch was spread on which Vernor threw himself, scarcely thanking them for their efforts to serve him.

As they were going away, Sir Hugh said to him:

"If there is danger of so pressing a nature that I cannot come to you, Vernor, I will strike a loud blow upon the door of my room which opens into the adjoining chamber. It will vibrate through these empty walls like thunder, and you may know that no time is to be lost in gaining your retreat. Here is a lantern and tinder box to strike a light if you should need one."

"I understand, sir," he drowsily responded, and by the time the door was closed on him, he was buried in the sleep of weariness and exhaustion, and the three returned to Sir

Hugh's room, in a state of extreme perturbation as to what next might happen.

Various rumors had reached them of the violence of the soldiery toward those who had shown favor to Monmouth, and a vague feeling of dread as to what the next few hours might bring forth was upon them all.

Sir Hugh had scarcely closed the door of communication and placed the key in its usual receptacle when a tap came upon the window which disturbed them greatly. The next moment a woman's face appeared at the opening, and a familiar voice spoke.

"It's only me, Mrs. Methurn. May I come in, Sir Hugh? I have something to tell you that is important."

The baronet recognized Mrs. Crofts, the Kate Conway of other days, and he replied:

"Certainly, Kate—let us hear what you have to say."

She glanced around, then stepped upon the broad window seat, and sprang into the room, crouching down close to the wall, she breathlessly said:

"I hope there is no one watching, for I would not have them see me for anything. My husband thinks I am safe in bed, but while he went down into the village, I ran all the way here in the darkness to tell you what is coming, that you may be ready to face the danger."

"What danger?" asked Sir Hugh, quickly. "Are the soldiers coming upon us?"

"Aye, that they are, sir; the men who are in the village alehouse swear that the young squire must be about here, and they have come to take him. The place is full of them, and they are drinking all they can get."

"Pooh! why should they think my son is here? Of course he will know this will be the first place searched for him, and avoid coming hither for a season at least."

"I hope so, Sir Hugh, but Mr. Vernor is not the only

one in danger," and she glanced significantly toward Ethel.

Mrs. Methurn changed color and threw her arms around the young girl as she faltered:

"Are we all to be arrested, merely for showing ourselves friendly toward Monmouth?"

"I don't know about you, ma'am; but Miss Digby has been thrown in prison, and many threats have been uttered against her for giving the flag. It mayn't go so hard with Miss Ethel, because she only gave the Duke the Bible which everybody ought to read. But *all* the young ladies that took part in the procession are in trouble, and I thought it best to let you know. Maybe Miss Ethel can manage to get out of the way awhile, or she can hide herself in this big house."

At the first intimation of danger to herself, Ethel had buried her head in Mrs. Methurn's bosom, but she now looked up, very pale, but with an expression of pride upon her young face as she said:

"I cannot thank you enough for your kindness, Kate, in coming all this way to warn me of danger, but I shall not hide. It would be useless, for I should be found easily enough, and so young a girl as I am will not be treated harshly for presenting the Word of God to one who aspired to become our ruler. What Alice can bear I also can endure. Let them come."

"But they may take you away to Taunton; they may remove you from me," said Mrs. Methurn in alarm. "Oh, would to Heaven we had never taken part in this fatal affair. Oh! my darling—my darling, what shall we do?"

"We can do nothing but wait and watch," said Sir Hugh with an oath. "Ethel is right; she must not conceal herself, for she has done nothing that men, worthy of the name, will punish. My good Kate, do you think the soldiers will be here to-night?"

"I cannot tell that, sir. I heard it said that they had ridden far to-day and were hungry and thirsty. Kirke's lambs don't often leave the flagon as long as there is a drop of liquor in it."

"Kirke! Good God! is *he* sent on this errand with his infernal band of cut-throats?" gasped Sir Hugh, quite overcome, for Kirke was known as the most reckless and unscrupulous of leaders, and he and his followers had perpetrated many atrocities, even in less evil times than those he had fallen on.

The flag which was borne at the head of his troop had upon it the picture of a Paschal lamb, and in derision the name was applied to his band of mercenary desperadoes. Many rumors of the outrages perpetrated at Taunton by these men had reached the Priory, but the family had indulged the hope that they were greatly exaggerated. Mrs. Crofts replied:

"Kirke is with them himself, for my father talked with him a few moments. He inquired the way to the Priory, and said he was coming here as soon as his men were sufficiently rested. He placed sentinels so that no one might leave the village to give you the alarm, for he is confident that Mr. Vernor has reached here by this time. Our house, you know, sir, is just out of the village, and when I heard it I determined to risk everything and let you know what is coming."

"Thank you, Kate; I shall remember the service. Did you hear what they have been doing in Taunton?"

She shuddered and changed color.

"Oh, sir, it is too dreadful to speak of. Kirke came in town from Bridgewater, bringing with him carts filled with wounded rebels, who were bleeding and dying without any attention being paid to their sufferings. He also had a long train of prisoners chained together in couples, and

many of those men were hanged without a trial, or without being permitted to take leave of their nearest friends."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Methurn, "can these things be done among free-born Englishmen?"

"Oh! that's not the worst, ma'am. He has had men hung and quartered every day since he has been there. If you go to Taunton you will see heads stuck on poles nearly all the way, or bodies hanging in chains, and no one is permitted to take them down. I heard father tell it all to my husband, and he got it from the dragoons themselves."

Sir Hugh groaned over this relation, and Mrs. Methurn clasped Ethel closer to her breast.

"They must come, if it is their will to do so," he said; "but they will find no one here, unless they are unmanly enough to seize upon this poor child. They may fine me; but they can prove nothing against me except that I was at Taunton on the day of Monmouth's reception there."

"That will be quite enough," said Mrs. Methurn, drearily. "We have all fearfully compromised ourselves; but there is no escape, and we must remain beneath our own roof and abide the issue of events."

Mrs. Crofts here arose and said:

"My errand is done, and I must hurry back before my absence is discovered. My husband would never forgive me if he knew that I had risked so much to warn the young Squire."

"The way is too long and lonely for you to venture back to-night. Remain here, and I will make your peace with your husband," said Mrs. Methurn.

She shook her head.

"No, thank you, ma'am; that would never do. I must return as I came, and, as I know every path through the woods, nobody will be likely to catch me. I would risk even that sooner than meet the anger of Tom Crofts if he knew

that I had been near the Priory. Good night, ma'am; I hope you'll all win through safely yet; and if I can serve you in any way, I'll gladly do it."

Ethel drew near her and took her hand as she warmly thanked her for the risk she had run to serve them; but Mrs. Crofts replied briefly, and withdrew her hand from her clasp as soon as she could do so without rudeness. She saw in Ethel only a rival who had won from her her first love, and her jealous heart had not quite forgiven her even yet.

After bidding adieu to Sir Hugh, she sprang through the window and swiftly crossed the lawn. The night was clear and starlit; but there was no moon, and her figure was soon lost in the shadows of the shrubbery.

There was no sleep that night for the three who sat together during its long hours watching and listening for the approach of those they so much feared and dreaded.

Toward morning, utterly worn out with fatigue, Ethel's head fell upon the shoulder of Mrs. Methurn, and she gained a few moments of oblivion from the perils that menaced them; but bitter were the tears shed over her by her fond protectress as she lay white and still within her arms.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SEARCH.

WHEN the sun arose, Mrs. Methurn and Ethel retired to their own apartments, and arranged their dress for the reception of those they felt assured would arrive at an early hour.

When breakfast was served, Ethel feigned indisposition, that an excuse might be offered for sending her food up to



her own apartment. She dismissed the maid that brought it up, and then with fleet steps carried the waiter to the apartment of Sir Hugh.

It had not been thought advisable to arouse Vernor on the preceding night, and it had been arranged that Ethel should seize the opportunity to take food to him while the servants were engaged in their morning avocations, and warn him to retire at once to his place of refuge.

With a fluttering heart, she took the rusty keys from their hiding place, and fitted one to the lock, listening every instant for the sound of an arrival. The doors opened before her, and she entered the corridor, but she was forced to knock thrice upon the door before Vernor made any response.

At length he spoke in a drowsy tone :

"Who is there? What the d—l do you want with me?"

"It is I, Vernor. Awake, and open the door quickly, for I have not a moment to lose."

There was the sound of a portentous yawn, then the shuffling of feet, and the door was lazily unclosed.

"Oh, it's you, Lady Bird. I thought Sir Hugh would have come to me himself. I have slept like the dead, although the couch was none of the softest; but it was so much better than any I've lately had that it didn't matter much. I hope you have brought me a good breakfast, for I am as hungry as a wolf."

"Yes, it's very good; please eat it as fast as you can, while I take these things away; for the soldiers are in the village, and we are looking for them here every moment. As soon as you can eat, you had better go to your hiding-place."

"The soldiers! who told you they are coming? It may be a false alarm."

"No, no. Kate Crofts came to warn us last night; but the men were drinking at the village ale-house, and Sir Hugh thought they would not be here till they had their carouse out, so we let you sleep on."

"And Kate came. She is a good creature, and I treated her badly once. She thought I would marry her, and I fancy you wish I had, Ethel."

"Don't stop to talk now, Vernor, for we have not a moment to lose. Pray hurry, and do not drop any food, as it might betray that you have been recently hidden here."

"Well, well, take away the bedding, then, and make things safe. I will devour my rations as speedily as I can."

While he was thus employed, Ethel removed the bed-clothes to Sir Hugh's room, and thrust them into the closet. She then returned for the tray; she paused to watch Vernor close the door of the dormitory, and gain the farther extremity of the corridor. As he was opening the door that led into the chapel, the tramp of many horses, approaching at full gallop, was heard. He cried out to her :

"Get back—save yourself, Ethel," and the next moment he had disappeared, and closed the door behind him.

She fled toward Sir Hugh's room, locked the doors with frantic speed, and replaced the keys where she had found them. Then hurrying to her own room she threw herself upon the bed in a paroxysm of terror.

In the meantime a squad of cavalry, headed by a middle-aged man, of coarse and brutal appearance, drew up in front of the house. A thundering demand soon came to open in the name of the king.

The affrighted servants rushed into the breakfast-room, exclaiming that the house was surrounded, and the lawn filled with dragoons. The knocking continued with great violence, and Sir Hugh angrily said :

"Open the door, fools; do you intend to let it be battered down? When the king commands we must all obey."



With a pale face the porter crossed the hall, and removed the bar that defended the door. Sir Hugh, assuming all his firmness, advanced to meet the intruders. The leader had dismounted, and as the door swung back, he strode in, angrily saying :

"Was it well, Hugh Methurn, with all the charges against you, to have your house barricaded against his majesty's troops. You are a cursed rebel, sir, and I mean to make your pay the penalty of your late acts before I am done with you."

"And I ask you, Sir, if this is the way to enter the house of an English gentleman?" demanded the baronet, with his usual fiery spirit. "You are Colonel Kirke, I believe, and I should be glad to know by what authority you invade the privacy of my abode?"

"By the authority of the king's warrant, sir. You have aided and abetted the late rebellion, you and all your family, sir. Your son is in hiding here, and he was one of Monmouth's nearest friends. You need not try to bluster with me, for I can beat the d—l at that dodge. Oh, I promise you, when Kirke's lambs come down on a man, they don't often leave him a loophole to creep through."

He threw himself upon one of the large hall-chairs, and a group of iron-looking men crowded through the doorway to listen to the colloquy. Sir Hugh also sat down, for he felt himself unable to stand, and after a moment's pause to collect his thoughts for the emergency, he said :

"I have had nothing to do with the rebellion. I used all my influence to dissuade my son from entering Monmouth's service, and he finally did so without my knowledge."

"So he confided his intention to you, and yet you did not warn the government," roared Kirke. "That is rank treason, sir—rank treason; and I'll make you smart for that admission before I am done with you. You were in Taun-

ton on the day of Monmouth's reception there; you and your sister-in-law were presented to him, and your son's wife gave him a bible. You are all a cursed set of rebels, and you may think yourself lucky if I do not order you to be strung up in front of your own door. I've had as much done to better men than you, sir."

Sir Hugh would have been alarmed at this rude address if he had not known that Kirke was among the most venal of men, and a bribe to him would enable him to escape the heaviest penalty of his late actions. He replied :

"I was at Taunton on the occasion you mention, and my ward obeyed the wishes of her husband in going thither. She is yet a child in years, and the utmost the law can do is to impose a fine upon me for weakly consenting to go there at all."

"Don't talk to me about a fine, sir. The whole of your beggarly estate will scarcely buy off such a double-dyed traitor as you have proved yourself. Where is your son? I have the surest information that he came hither last night, and I took such precautions as prevented him from escaping again. Open your doors, and let my lambs search for this young wolf; they'll prove more than a match for him, I'll warrant."

"The house lies before them; let them search it if they will; but you will not find Vernor Methurn here. He would not be so mad as to come hither, for he would be aware that this would be the first spot in which he would be sought. I trust he has ere this escaped by sea."

"Ho! ho! if that is your hope, you lean on a broken staff. I defy any of Monmouth's followers to get away from England in that way, for every spot on the coast is guarded. I know you of old, Hugh Methurn, and the truth is not often found on your lips. Since you say the young man is not here, I am convinced that he is concealed in this house.

Spread yourselves, fellows; search the inhabited portion of the building, and then come to me for further orders."

Twenty men rushed forward in a disorderly manner to obey his command. After the lapse of half an hour they returned, bringing with them Mrs. Methurn and Ethel as prisoners. The sergeant reported that no indications of Vernon had been found. Kirke turned to the two ladies, and, addressing the elder one, said:

"So, madam, you must hie away to Taunton to see the handsome Duke, who will soon be made shorter by the head; and this young girl must present him the Word of God as the guide of his life. I hope the gift will console him in the hour that draws near for him."

Ethel impulsively exclaimed:

"Oh! sir, I hope the King will have mercy on his own nephew. He has not surely condemned him."

Kirke regarded the young speaker with an expression of surprise mingled with admiration, for he was a connoisseur in female beauty.

"Eh! my lady, you're a young bird to chirp so bravely. You had better be thinking of your own life, for it may be in danger from your late actions. The Duke is doomed."

Ethel clasped her hands over her face and burst into tears. The ruffian arose, and, approaching her, drew her hands forcibly away, and looked upon her paling face.

"Eh, it's a pretty little thing, and it's a pity she risked her neck in this foolish affair. I hate to see pretty girls hardly dealt with; give me a kiss, little one, and I promise to speak a good word for you."

With indignant surprise she tore herself from his grasp, and passionately asked:

"How dare you insult me thus? Sir Hugh, can you not protect me from this man?"

"Ho! ho! I'd like to see him protect himself. You're a

spicy little d——l, and I don't like you the less for showing your mettle. I'm sorry that I shall be the means of taking your husband from you; but such a pretty girl as you will be sure to find another soon; that is, if you manage to escape the consequences of your late treasonable conduct yourself."

"I have done nothing that I regret," she proudly replied. "It is no crime to present the Word of God to any one, and he whose cause I thus endeavored to serve will protect me."

Kirke burst into a coarse laugh.

"Well, well—if your divine protector proves stronger than King James and his lawyers, I shall be mistaken. I arrest you, Ethel Clifton Methurn, in the name of his Majesty, and I shall take you with me to Taunton to await your trial for your late misdemeanor."

Mrs. Methurn here stepped forward, and said:

"Leave this young girl with her natural protectors; she shall be forthcoming at the proper time. Do not remove her from her home."

"Heigho, madam, you had better petition for yourself, for you too are implicated in this affair. I think I shall take you along also, for my orders were to arrest the whole family. I advise you to get ready to accompany me, without further words. Simpson, take the women to their own rooms, and place a sentinel before the doors."

This order was promptly obeyed, and then turning to Sir Hugh, Kirke went on:

"Now my jolly baronet, I'll trouble you to become our guide through the older portions of the house. These old rat-traps have plenty of hiding-places, but my men are keen at finding their way into them. Come—move on, sir; I am not accustomed to wait when I have once issued an order."

Sir Hugh slowly arose as he said:

"A little more courtesy would not be out of place, I

think, sir, from an officer in his majesty's army to a gentleman in his own house; but since you are invested with absolute authority, nothing remains to me but to obey you. Search every nook upon my premises, and you will find no vestige of my son. Thank God! he is beyond your reach."

"Perhaps so—but I shall not fail to make the most minute investigation. Your word is not as good as your bond, Sir Hugh."

"I have no doubt the last will prove more valuable to you," replied the baronet, with a look which gave additional emphasis to his words. He moved toward his own apartment, followed by the eager troopers, and in a few moments they all stood in the gloomy corridor. The bats, startled from their repose by the unusual clamor, circled around the heads of the men, who wildly struck at them with their matchlocks.

The stern voice of their commander arose:

"Cease this idle strife, and open every door leading into this place."

In a few moments the order was obeyed, and the tenantless cells were laid open to inspection. At a glance it was seen that no inmate was concealed in them, but the keen eyes of Kirke detected recent footprints in the one which Vernor had occupied the preceding night.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "a bird has been here, but has flown at our approach. Who has occupied this place lately, Sir Hugh? If you will not answer, probably your ward can, for here are footprints that I dare swear were made by her dainty feet."

Sir Hugh looked down and saw the small tracks made by Ethel in her late visit, distinctly defined upon the dusty covering of the floor, and he internally cursed the thoughtlessness that had suffered them to remain. He replied:

"My sister and Ethel desired to visit this portion of the

house, and did so a few days ago; they entered this cell, but no other. If we had expected such a visitation as this, we might have taken the precaution to obliterate these marks. They prove nothing. Let us proceed with the search you wish to make."

"I shall proceed, and I shall find what I came to seek," replied Kirke, significantly.

They next entered the chapel, and carefully examined every portion of it. Sir Hugh then led the way to a large hall, which had served the monks as a refectory room. The abbot's apartment opened from this; but all was in such a state of dilapidation, as showed how long and completely they had been deserted.

At the end of an hour every nook had been explored, and the leader gruffly said:

"Our quarry is in none of these; but there are vaults beneath. All these old religious houses have a perfect honeycomb of cells beneath their foundations. Show us the way to them, if you please, Sir Hugh."

They were then in the refectory room, and the baronet pointed to a heavily barred door.

"Through that you will gain access to the vaults."

On opening it, a flight of stone steps appeared, which Kirke narrowly scanned by the light of the torches he ordered to be brought. He saw no evidence of their having lately been used, nor had it escaped him that the cobwebs were unbroken over the bars his men removed.

He began to fear that Vernor would evade him, for a large reward was offered for his arrest, as it was believed that he had papers of importance to the government in his possession. Kirke swore at his men, and rated Sir Hugh in the rudest manner; and although he saw that he was ready to sink from fatigue, he forced him to go on as the pioneer of the party. Every avenue was passed through,

every door opened, and a thorough search made for the fugitive. Sir Hugh's heart beat painfully, and the blood rushed to his brain in a seething torrent, as they passed in front of the wall in which the concealed door was situated, but he breathed freer when they left it behind them without a suspicion of its existence. Kirke said:

"*Diable!* it seems that there is no one here. Now lead us to the subterranean outlet, if you please, for I am aware that such a one exists."

Sir Hugh gladly obeyed, for he had managed to avoid the staircase leading into the chapel, and the whole party followed him through the winding way to the broken entrance which opened upon the park. On issuing from it, he saw that sentinels were placed at intervals around the whole place. He drily said:

"In this instance, Colonel, you have found that my word was to be taken; come with me to my room, and let us settle how much my bond is worth."

Kirke nodded intelligently, and gave his order to his men to return to the lawn in front of the house, while he conferred with its master. Disappointed and chagrined at their want of success, the soldiers sullenly obeyed, and Sir Hugh led the way to that side on which his own apartment was situated, followed by Kirke.

When they gained it, he rang and ordered ale to be taken to the troopers, and then threw himself upon a seat to regain his breath after the severe exercise he had taken.

"Well, sir," said Kirke, "what have you to say in private to me? Your son has evaded me in a strange manner, for I am not often at fault in the information given me. He spent last night in this house, of that I am certain; and if I had not permitted my men to stop at the village, I should have trapped him. I shall do it yet, be sure of that."

"If you find him, take him; that is all I have to say on that score. And now as it regards this arrest for myself and my family, can we not evade it in some way? Are you certain that the warrant is really out for us, or only for my son?"

He fixed his keen gaze on Kirke, who laughed aloud.

"Ho! by the mass, you are a shrewd fellow, Sir Hugh. No warrant has been issued for you, but I have authority delegated to me to take charge of all suspicious persons. I consider you a very suspicious character, and therefore I take it upon myself to arrest you in the name of his Majesty. Remember, sir, that with my troopers at my back, my power is not to be disputed."

"It is not my purpose to do so; but I would make it to your interest to be as lenient as possible in its exercise. The utmost that can be done to me is to levy a fine upon my estate. I am old and infirm; it would go hard with me to be imprisoned, therefore I offer you a hundred pounds to leave me in peace, and to use your influence to prevent us from being farther molested."

"*Us!* am I to understand that all your family is to be included in this amnesty?"

"No, not all; for my son can care for his own safety. Only the ladies of my household and myself. It will be absurd to punish a child like Ethel for what she did the other day. She is romantic and enthusiastic, and her feelings carried her away. She and my son acted against my judgment, and to do Mrs. Methurn justice, she too opposed the appearance of Ethel in the procession at Taunton, but the wilfulness of the young people overruled us."

Kirke listened attentively, and after a pause said:

"Well, I'm sadly out at elbows just now, and if you will make the sum two hundred I will agree to leave you in your own house with a guard of two men to answer for

your appearance at the assizes, for every prominent man engaged in this affair must undergo some sort of a trial. Your offense and that of your sister was comparatively light, and a sop to Cerberus in the shape of a few hundred pounds will set all right; but your ward will suffer more heavily. That Bible will cost her a round sum, even if she escapes with that penalty."

"Ethel has money, and she can pay a reasonable ransom; but two hundred pounds is a large sum for me to give. I will pay you the one hundred I offered in gold."

Kirke laughed sardonically.

"I know your affairs pretty well, Sir Hugh, and I know that of late years you have managed to increase your rent roll till it now amounts to a pretty respectable sum. You are bargaining for your very life, for you can never live a week in the wretched prison in Taunton. An infectious fever already rages in it, and you will probably be detained a month or two before your trial will come on. Balance your life against your money, and make your decision. You go with me, or pay the two hundred pounds."

Sir Hugh looked at the inflexible face of the speaker, and with a heavy sigh, replied:

"Since it must be so, I will give you even that sooner than go to prison."

He went to a desk and from a private drawer produced a rouleau of gold.

"I had hoarded this for a different purpose, but I suppose it is as well employed to purchase indemnity for the present as in any other way."

The eyes of Kirke sparkled at the sight of the gold, and he weighed the parcel in his hand a moment before speaking.

"You're a trump, Sir Hugh, in spite of the hard things that are said of you. In this matter I can trust to your

word for you would not dare to deceive me. I will count over the money when I get back to my own den."

"You will find all right, and now how long do you suppose it will be before we shall be summoned to appear in court?"

"It may be a month, or it may be longer. Jeffreys is on his way to Taunton, and he will make expeditious work with the infernal rebels. The king is resolved to make the people afraid of another outbreak, and Gad! I think he chose well for that purpose when he sent me and my lambs to harry them and Jeffreys to sit in judgment on them. But time passes, Sir Hugh, and I must go on the track of that son of yours. He has papers that the government is anxious to secure, and I do not mind telling so liberal a person as you are that he may save his own neck by giving them up."

"As to the papers, I shouldn't care if they were in your hands now; but I hope Vernor will get safely out of the country. If he does, he will come to terms with the government and surrender the documents for—a consideration."

Kirke burst into a brutal laugh, and struck the old man smartly on the shoulder, saying:

"Like father, like son. Master Vernor has sold himself once for his wife's fortune, and now he will sell his master for the thirty pieces of silver. The young Judas!"

Sir Hugh flushed, but he thought it best to make no reply to the truth so bluntly spoken, so he arose with his unwelcome guest, and accompanied him to the hall.

At a sign from Kirke the troopers rushed in a disorderly manner to their horses, and the stern voice of their commander issued his orders. He beckoned a man toward him and said:

"Jones, you and Simpson will remain on guard here, and see that not one of the household leaves the premises.

Await further orders from me, and keep a keen lookout for the person we came to seek: send me a daily report of all that happens."

The man touched his hat with a slight show of respect as he replied:

"I understand, Colonel. The ale here is pretty good, and I shan't quarrel with my quarters as long as it flows freely."

"See that you do not drink too much of it, sirrah. You know me, and you comprehend that the neglect of your duty will be severely punished."

The trooper nodded and curtly replied:

"Tim Jones and Tom Simpson knows their duty as well as ere a lamb in your regiment, Colonel. We can take a gallon of the strongest tap, and be as fresh as if we had swallowed so much water."

Kirke smiled grimly, and turned to his horse, which a trooper was holding in front of the door. Springing into the saddle, he waved his hand to Sir Hugh and said:

"Good morning; present my compliments to your pretty ward, and tell her that if I can I will give her a chance to get a better husband. Ho! ho!" and his coarse laugh was lost in the clatter of hoofs as the troop swept away in the direction of the dell once occupied by the Gipsy's encampment.

Sir Hugh glared after them and muttered:

"So—you intend to search the woodland for your prey; but you'll not find him there, thank Heaven!"

He turned away and went toward his own room, closely followed by Jones. The servants were still huddled in a frightened group at the lower end of the hall, and the trooper paused and spoke to them.

"Look here, you men and women; this house is under military law, and I'm the provost marshal. Ef one o' you

does one thing that I don't permit, I'll be after you with a baggonet. You're to furnish me and my comrade with the best vittles and drink, and you're not to go outside o' the place without a permit from me. Do you understand?"

Faint murmurs came from the alarmed menials, but not one had courage to reply intelligibly.

Jones then followed Sir Hugh into his room. With an oath the old man turned on him and asked:

"Why do you come in here, fellow? Go to the kitchen and let them give you the best the house affords; I wish to be alone."

"I'm sorry to circumvent your wishes, Sir Hugh; but it's my business not to lose sight o' you. You heard yourself what Kirke said, and he'd shoot me if I was to let you get away from this ere rum old den."

He sat down as he spoke, and composedly crossed his legs. Sir Hugh was in a fever of anxiety to join Vernor, for he feared that when all was still, with his natural recklessness, he would venture forth and make his presence known by knocking on the door which communicated with the corridor.

After a few moments of perturbed thought, he said:

"I wish to visit my sister. Since your comrade watches before her door, you can order ale to be brought to you in the hall, while I go up to her room."

"Well, old fellow, that aint unreasonable, and I must say that you understand the duties o' hospertalerty. I'll accept your offer, but by your leave, I'll set by this ere door, and have it left open; 'cause the bird that lately perched in that cell beyond, may come back an' try to git through on this side."

The man was evidently as shrewd as a police detective, and with a strong effort the irascible baronet controlled the expression of his ire. Jones was soon established to his sat-



isfaction just without the door, with a huge tankard of ale, with bread and cold meat, before him.

Sir Hugh then slowly ascended the staircase, at the head of which he found Simpson slowly pacing to and fro in front of Mrs. Methurn's room. He touched his hat as the baronet approached him, and offering him a piece of money, the latter said:

"You can join your comrade below a few moments, where I have had refreshments placed for you. There is no way of escape from this floor, except by the way of the staircase, and we have no idea of attempting to leave the house."

The soldier surveyed him carefully. The purple flush had died out of his face; it looked wild and haggard, and he moved as if all the vital force had left his body. He roughly said:

"Well, old cock, I believe I may trust you, for you are in no fix to tramp anywhere yourself, an' ef them ere ladies tries that dodge, they'll be nabbed by some o' the men outside, for *my* Colonel aint a goin' to leave this wale of beauty till he traps the fox what earthed here last night. You can go in and tell 'em so, and I'll go down to the crater comforts."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE SENTINELS OUTWITTED.

SIR HUGH found Mrs. Methurn and Ethel clasped in each other's arms, and he sank into a chair completely unnerved by all he had gone through in the last eighteen hours.

"Their search was in vain," said Mrs. Methurn, "and Vernor has escaped them; but must we go with them? Is that dreadful man inexorable?"

"He is gone," replied Sir Hugh. "At a heavy price I bought from him the privilege to be held as a prisoner in my own house. Heaven help me! I had saved that money to enable Vernor to escape if things should go wrong with him in this venture; but nearly all had to go in the hands of that cormorant."

"Are they *all* gone?" asked Ethel, quickly. "Then we can seek poor Vernor and bring him among us again."

"No, child; two are left as spies upon us, and I believe that the whole troop will form a cordon around the place, as long as they think there is a chance to take my poor boy. I am dreadfully shaken, and if they should catch him, I believe it would kill me outright."

Ethel approached him, and tenderly taking his shaking hand in hers, stroked it gently.

"But they will not find him, Sir Hugh. Vernor is strong and shrewd, and he will outwit them yet. Be of good cheer; since his place of concealment was not detected he is safe, if we can manage to convey food to him. He can stay in hiding till the excitement is over."

"Aye—but how are we to communicate with him? Two men are left to guard us, and they are keeping watch upon my room. I am in dread lest Vernor should come up and apply for admittance. Yet I was forced to come here a few moments to speak with Agnes. What shall we do? My brain is not clear, and I cannot decide what course is best to pursue."

"Is there no other avenue by which we can enter the vaults except that through your room?" asked Mrs. Methurn. "I have heard that there is a door behind the tapestry in the dressing-room that was once Lady Methurn's. You must know if it is so."

Sir Hugh changed color and shuddered, for he recalled the hour in which a death-like form had been borne through



that door, and from that day it had been closed up by his own hands. He faintly said:

"There was an outlet, but—but, I had hoped never to be forced to enter that room again."

Mrs. Methurn was surprised at his emotion, for she did not give him credit for such tender affection for his departed wife as to withhold him from visiting her apartments. She asked:

"Did you not go in there with the men who searched the house?"

"No, they only required my presence with them as guide in the older portions of the building. The door of which you speak is concealed behind the tapestry, and has also a heavy wardrobe placed in front of it. Otherwise the soldiers must have discovered it."

"Then we can gain access to Vernor. There is a door in Ethel's room which communicates with Lady Methurn's apartments. Come with us, to assist in moving the piece of furniture of which you spoke; we must lose no time, for the sentinel may return to see if we are safe in here."

With much effort the old man arose, and led the way toward the rooms which had been so long disused. On that side of the house there was a suite of apartments, three of which were occupied by Mrs. Methurn and Ethel; the others had been appropriated to the deceased lady of the mansion, and had never been used since her death.

Mrs. Methurn carried the key with her, and in a few moments they stood in the deserted chamber. The heavy old-fashioned furniture stood exactly as when Lady Methurn had occupied it; the walls were covered with richly wrought tapestry, and the windows and bed had heavy brocade curtains falling over them.

The door opening into the dressing-room was unclosed and with a heavy heart and unwilling feet Sir Hugh entered it.

The wardrobe of which he had spoken was an immense armoire, brought from France, and the carved cornice reached nearly to the ceiling. With great effort, they succeeded in removing it from the wall sufficiently to permit them to pass behind it.

"The door gives into the garrets above the old house," said Sir Hugh, "and through them we can reach the chapel."

A few vigorous pushes sent the door open with a crash, but the way beyond was dark, for it lay under the eaves of the older portion of the Priory.

Ethel flew back to her own room to get a tinder-box and candles, but before returning with them she passed into Mrs. Methurn's apartment, and slightly unclosing the door, listened for the sound of the troopers' voices below.

They seemed to be enjoying themselves greatly, for their jovial chat was mingled with snatches of song, and she sped back with the assurance that for the present all was safe.

The candle was soon lighted, and the three passed through the immense garret, the roof of which was supported by a double row of dark-looking rafters. It was barely high enough for a tall man to pass through the centre, and the sloping roof came nearly to the floor on either side.

At the farthest extremity was a flight of decaying stairs, which Sir Hugh looked on with apprehension. He said:

"I am afraid they will never bear my weight, but I must descend them. At the foot is a sliding panel concealed behind one of the pillars that supports the roof of the chapel. I am terribly spent by the unusual exertions of the day, but my boy's safety is at stake, and I must risk everything to ensure that."

"Cannot I go down?" asked Ethel. "I am light, and

the steps will not be likely to give way beneath me. Tell me how to open the panel, sir, and I think I shall be able to do it."

"No, child, I must risk it myself, for you could not find your way to Vernor's hiding-place. Light the other candle, Agnes, and after you see me safe to the bottom, you and Ethel return to your room. Keep the men at bay for a half an hour, for I cannot be back in less time."

"Let me follow you to the lower step, and learn how to manage the spring," pleaded the young girl; "it may yet be necessary for me to use it."

"You are right, child; but I did not believe you had so much forethought. Bring the light, and follow me carefully."

Mrs. Methurn stood above, holding her candle over the dark aperture, and Ethel stepped lightly after the heavy form of the baronet, carrying hers. Sir Hugh placed his feet on each step with extreme caution, holding to a rough bar of wood that ran along one side. They creaked fearfully beneath his weight, but after a few moments of breathless suspense, he stood safely at the bottom, Ethel hovering just above him, like a spirit of light and beauty.

After a few trials the panel slid back, and he stepped into the chapel. With a sigh of relief he took the candle from her hand, and said:

"Return to your room now; I shall reach Vernor in safety."

She obeyed him, and Sir Hugh proceeded to the flat stone which opened into the vaults. At the foot of the steps he was compelled to sit down and take breath, and the deadly pallor that overspread his wrinkled face showed that he was suffering both physically and mentally. This fearful interruption to the even tenor of his life had given a shock to his system from which he felt he would never recover.

After a few moments he aroused himself, and moved with great effort toward the avenue in which the secret chamber was situated. More than once he fancied he saw a figure flitting before him, but on passing his hand over his eyes to steady his vision, he knew that it was only a fantasy produced by the state of excitement in which the events of the day had thrown him.

He reached the wall, touched the spring, and as the door opened Vernor stood before him, with an expression of fear and anguish on his white face that made him start back with terror.

"Why do you look thus?" he faltered. "Your face is enough to scare one."

"Is it?" said the young man, fiercely. "Then it only mirrors what is passing within me. I dropped my lantern on coming in, and the light was extinguished. I have been shut up in this dark hole three hours, unable to find the spring that opens the door, or I should have ventured out as soon as those cursed troopers left the vaults. I stood in here, and heard their blood-thirsty cries, but I was safe, ha! ha! *They* will never track me to my asylum, that is one comfort."

"Then why should you have been so much alarmed? You knew that I would come to you as soon as it was safe to do so."

"Aye—but they might have arrested you and taken you away. Then I should have died here, trapped like a fox; have died in darkness—of famine! Oh! I believe that I am twenty years older than when I came into this infernal den; besides, I have had a strange vision, Sir Hugh, which unnerved me as you see."

"A vision!" faltered the old man; "nonsense, Vernor. Why should a man of sense yield to such a fantasy? I thought you had more courage."

"I know it was folly; but if you had been shut up in a dark cell without the power to find the way out, I believe you would have suffered as intensely as I did. I passed my hands many times over the frame of the door, but I could find no means of freeing myself from this dreadful place. I exhausted myself with efforts to do so; and afraid to leave the opening, lest I should never be able to find it again, I sat down and leaned my head against the wall. A numbing stupor seemed to fall on me, which I could not shake off; I am not conscious that I slept, though I could not have been completely awake. I closed my eyes to shut out the darkness that encompassed me, and in a few moments a circle of light seemed to flicker in them, in which was distinctly mirrored the staircase that leads to the room above, and I saw descending it a tall woman clothed in white. She came toward me, and waving her hand above my head, wailed forth:

"Not now—not now is the hour of your doom; but in years to come beware of this room: it is fatal to me and mine—fatal to me and mine!"

As the last words were slowly repeated, she stooped as if she meant to kiss me, and I saw her face. Sir Hugh, it was not that of the stranger you laid in the stone sarcophagus above; it was the face of my dead mother, and I knew it by the portrait that hangs in the gallery. I cannot stay here. I will not go up to that chamber; I would rather risk being taken by Kirke and his myrmidons."

Sir Hugh was superstitious, as most people were in his day, and he listened with dread to his son's words; but he spoke lightly:

"Nonsense, Vernor! you were overcome with fatigue, and you slumbered lightly. In the strait you are in, you naturally thought of your lost mother, and the fantasies of dreamland are unaccountable to wiser people than you or

me. Two soldiers are left to watch the house, and you will expose yourself to extreme danger by leaving your place of refuge. I came hither at great risk to myself to warn you not to attempt to enter my room, for a strict guard is kept upon it."

"How then did you manage to evade them?"

"I came through the garrets by a way unknown to you; but you are safer here than you can be elsewhere. I will leave you a light, and Ethel will place food in the chapel for you. You can safely venture that far to obtain it, as I do not think the troops will invade the vaults again."

"I will brave such danger as there may be," said Vernor, recklessly. "The face of an enemy is familiar to me; but to stay shut up here with yonder dead woman I will not. I can return with you, sir, and take up my abode in the garrets you mentioned. It will be easier for you to communicate with me there."

Sir Hugh would have combated this determination, but Vernor refused to listen to him. A strange dread of the vaults had seized him, which he would make no effort to overcome, and together they at length went out and closed the door behind them. Vernor held the light close to the wall, and laughed as he said:

"No wonder the troopers missed it; I, who know where to find the entrance, would never dream of its existence from looking at this blank wall. Let us get away, sir, for you begin to look very ghastly; you have been forced to over-fatigue yourself by that brutal Kirke, and I shouldn't wonder if you had another dreadful attack of the gout. Lean on me till we get out of this dismal place."

The old man was very glad to avail himself of the strong arm of his son, for he felt scarcely able to sustain himself, and they went slowly toward the stairs. They passed safely through the chapel, and Sir Hugh showed Vernor how to fasten the panel.

With great effort the baronet ascended the narrow, mouldering stairs, and Vernor sprang after him. Ethel stood at the top watching for Sir Hugh's return, and she offered a surprised greeting to Vernor.

"Our sentinel has returned," she said. "He has knocked at the door and asked for you. I told him you were resting; but he seemed suspicious that something was wrong. We had better hurry into aunty's room, and Vernor can remain here till we can provide for his wants."

"He can come with us for a little while. After the thorough search the soldiers made this morning, I do not think they will return to this part of the house."

Vernor gladly assented to this arrangement, and they traversed the length of the garret, and entered the dressing-room. The young man glanced at the wardrobe and said:

"If I only had a saw to remove a portion of the back of this piece of furniture, I could secure a retreat at a moment's notice. We can then replace the wardrobe against the wall so that the existence of the door will never be suspected."

"Bravo, lad, that is a bright thought, and we will manage to get one from the tool house. But now I must get back and see what the spies are after. I leave you to Agnes and Ethel—they will take good care of you. You had better confine yourself to these two apartments, for if danger approaches them you can have timely warning."

A loud knock was heard on Mrs. Methurn's door, and Sir Hugh hastened to regain her apartment. He went out and haughtily said to Simpson, who wore a surly and suspicious face:

"After the fatigue I have undergone to-day, I think you might permit me to repose quietly a few moments. I feel that I am growing ill, for I am unused to so much turmoil."

"If you're sick you had better get to your own room, then. If I let you stay to plot mischief with the women you'll be

sure to outwit me, and Kirke will hold me and my comrade responsible for what happens here."

"Nothing can happen without your knowledge, my good fellow. You have searched my house and found no one concealed there; I have the pledge of your commander that we shall be unmolested for a season, and I will make it worth your while to be courteous to my family. My sister and my ward must have permission to pass about the house as usual; I cannot consent that they shall be mewed up in one room."

"As to your consent, it don't signify much; but, if you're liberal, I don't mind lettin' the women out o' their cage; but they mustn't go to communicate with any one outside o' the house."

"I pledge you my word that they will make no such attempt; they will confine their walks to the garden which lies behind the house, and the high wall that surrounds it effectually cuts off communication from without. You can come and see for yourself."

Simpson followed him below, and Sir Hugh led the way to a small parterre, in the corner of which was a ruined conservatory, which was now used as a tool-house. Into this Ethel must penetrate, and carry back with her a small saw which he knew was there.

After resting an hour in his own room, Sir Hugh again purchased of his guard the privilege of ascending to rejoin those above; but the careful sentinel seated himself at the top of the staircase and kept a constant watch upon the door.

Sir Hugh found the three together in Ethel's room, and she flew to sustain his tottering steps, while Mrs. Methurn placed a chair upon which he sunk with a weary sigh.

"I feel as if all this must kill me. I can't stand much more."

Vernor quickly said:

"Don't talk of dying now, sir; for if you were to slip off, the government would seize your estate, attaint my name as a traitor, and leave me nothing to live on. You must try and weather the storm for my sake."

"Yes, lad, I'll make the effort," he vaguely replied; "but I feel very strangely. All the blood in my body seems to be gathering in my brain and around my heart. Just now I went blind, and I begin to fear that I may fall down in a fit as my father did before me."

Mrs. Methurn anxiously regarded him. She insisted on bathing his head with cold water, to which he reluctantly submitted, for Sir Hugh had an aversion to being what he called coddled. He presently said that he felt better, and with more animation spoke to Ethel.

"You must be our stand-by, Lady-Bird. I have obtained permission for you to walk in the garden, and you must contrive to conceal the saw that is in the tool-house, under your dress."

"I can do better than that, sir. The windows of aunt's room look out on the garden, and she can let down a string, to which I will fasten the saw. We can bring food up for Vernor in the same way without being suspected."

"Eh! my dear, you have a shrewd head of your own, if it is a young one. That is a good idea—and I am sure we can trust Mrs. Tarpley with the secret of Vernor's presence here. She can supply you with food without any of the servants being privy to it. Both the troopers have walked around the garden and satisfied themselves that there are no means of escape from it, so they will scarcely think it is necessary to watch you. You will have sense enough to outwit them, even if they should."

Ethel smiled brightly as she tied on her hat, and threw a light mantle over her shoulders, which fell almost to her feet, while Mrs. Methurn sought for a cord sufficiently strong to sustain the weight of a basket.

As the young girl passed the sentinel, she cheerfully said:

"I promenade thrice every day in this garden. I suppose I may take my usual walk without interruption."

The man glanced at the sweet, young face, and respectfully lifting his hat, replied:

"In course, Miss. We aint sich monsters as to let sich roses as yours die out o' your pretty cheeks for lack o' exercise. I've been out with the old gent, and as you couldn't climb over the high wall, ef you was to try, I'm agreeable to your taking a walk in the sunshine."

She thanked him, and tripped down the staircase. The soldier in the lower hall also touched his hat as she passed, but he followed her to the garden door, and watched her a few moments as she flitted to and fro in the shaded walks.

She gathered flowers, attempted to imprison a humming-bird that fluttered above them, and completely disarmed his suspicions by her childish frolics. Jones went away again, and she made a rapid sign to Mrs. Methurn, who stood at the open window above.

To gain the conservatory, turn over the tool-box, and snatch up the saw, was the work of a moment. Again she was out, flitting to and fro, but gradually drawing nearer to a clump of thick shrubbery that grew beneath Mrs. Methurn's window. The end of the string lay upon the ground, and with nimble fingers it was attached to the handle of the saw. In another moment she was in the open walk, flitting to and fro, and not a moment too soon, for she saw that Jones had again appeared at the door to see how she was occupied.

Apparently satisfied that she was planning no mischief, he retired, and Ethel sprang toward the housekeeper's room, entering it through a door which opened on the garden.

The old woman was looking very doleful, and at the appearance of her young lady, she exclaimed:

"How did you ever get here, Miss Ethel. I thought them wretches had shet you and Mrs. Methurn up in yer own rooms, and meant to keep you there. The more shame to them, to treat ladies in such a way."

"Oh, they let me pass out without question; but I have something to say to you, Mrs. Tarpley, that is very important. You must not cry out, or do anything to betray what I am going to tell you."

"You may depend on me, child; I ain't agoin' to do anything to bring s'picion on you, nor any o' the rest o' the family."

"Thank you; I know that you are faithful, and can be trusted with a secret; it is one of life and death, Mrs. Tarpley, but we are forced to call on you for help."

The housekeeper looked greatly alarmed.

"O, Lor'! *what* is the child a drivin' at? Don't tell me nothin' these troopers may want to know, Miss Ethel; caze they may torter me, or hang me to find it out. They've done as bad things afore now."

"Yes, I know that, and I won't compromise you in any way; but this you must promise me. Every day place a basket of provisions in the bushes under the window of the buttery. Luckily it opens on the garden; and I can manage the rest."

The listener gazed on her with open mouth, and the color retreated from her rosy face, as she said:

"They weren't wrong then; the young master *is* here, sure enough, though they didn't find him. Oh, Lor'! they shall tear the heart out o' my body before they find *that* out from me. I'll be sure to fix the vittles, and—and—oh! Miss Ethel, this is dreadful! an' we've come to a fine pass that we has to be spied on by a pair o' rapsceallions like them yonder."

The tears rolled over the speaker's face in a torrent, and hurriedly pressing her hand, Ethel said:

"Be polite to them, and give them the best you have. I must run back now, but be sure to put the basket under the window where I can get it when I come out to walk."

"Yes—yes—I'll do my best, an' nobody shall suspect what is goin' on. Oh, Lor'! oh, Lor'! we've fallen on the evil times the parson preaches, sure."

Pressing her finger on her lip, Ethel was gone again, and in a short time she came into the hall, looking as fresh and innocent as the roses she carried in her hands. She nodded and smiled at the rough trooper as she passed him, and his weather-beaten face softened a little as he watched her light figure disappear through the door of Mrs. Methurn's room. He shook his head and muttered:

"That's a young thing to be 'rested for treason. I wonder what Jeffreys will do wi' a young slip o' a gal like that? Send her to the colonies maybe, or put her in prison here, till he gets all that's left o' her fortin. They say she had a nice one when that young chap married her to get it; but I s'pect *he's* made ducks and drakes of it afore now. Ef she's got 'nuff left to pay well, maybe they'll let her off easy."

When Ethel entered the chamber she found no one there, and passing to the other apartments, she saw that Vernor was already hard at work sawing out the back part of the wardrobe, while his father and aunt looked on. In a short time an opening was made sufficiently large to permit him to pass easily through it, and the room was restored to its usual appearance.

Vernor exultingly said:

"Now I can defy them to find me. I have provided a retreat they will never think of, and I can stay among you



unsuspected, while this cursed surveillance lasts. I should have died of the horrors in that dark den below."

"Yes, this is better," replied Sir Hugh, "and I can see you every day while you stay; for you must fly to Holland with the earliest opportunity. Oh! my son, I feel as if we are spending our last hours on earth together. You will be expatriated, and God alone knows what will become of us."

"Don't look on the future so gloomily, sir. We shall weather the storm yet; money will be extorted from you by the rapacious agents sent hither by the king, but you can save enough to live on in comfort in a foreign land. When I am safe beyond seas, you can join me with my aunt and Ethel. She has houses and land in Holland, and we can live there much cheaper than in England."

Sir Hugh shook his head gloomily.

"I shall never live to leave my native land; and but for your sake, I should scarcely wish to do so. I cannot speak their foreign lingo, and after all, England is the only country in the world that is fit to live in."

Vernor lightly said:

"I have not found living here half as pleasant as the free social life of the Continent. I have many friends there, and you would find exiles enough from this country to give you a larger circle of society than you mingle in here."

"*Exiles*, yes—men with one idea, and that is to get back home again. No—no, Vernor, I should very soon die there; but if I can only live long enough to secure to you the inheritance of your fathers, I shall be contented. I am a broken down old ruin, and all that is now left to me to do is to set my house in order, and get ready to leave a world in which, I am afraid, I have not done much good. I trust that the sins of the father may not be heavily visited upon the son, for all the pride of my life is centred in you, Vernor."

At that moment he thought of the elder son, with a twinge of remorse, but he sought to banish the image that arose before him, and seeing how deeply depressed he was, his companions used their utmost efforts to soothe and arouse him from the gloomy state of depression into which he was falling.

Dark care sat on the heart of each one, but they repressed its expression, and assumed an appearance of cheerfulness as they talked over their future plans, and devised schemes of escaping from the perils that environed them.

At length Sir Hugh, overcome by the exertions of the morning, slumbered in the chair into which he had thrown himself, and the ladies, with Vernor, passed into the next apartment.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A FOUL PLOT.

WHILE these scenes were passing at the Priory, one in which the safety of the family was deeply involved, was enacted in the Gipsy's haunt, as the woodland was called in which they had so often erected their camp.

Minchen—grown older, fiercer, more haggard—sat under the shadow of a tree, scanning with eager eyes a greasy pack of cards, which were laid in rows upon her lap. A gloomy, dark-browed man stood near her, watching her movements with a half contemptuous curl of his lips.

"What is the use of such mummary?" he asked. "The bird is safely caged, and all I have to do is to walk up to the old house, and tell Kirke where he is hidden.



He and his lambs are there by this time, but if you have spoken the truth they will never know where to find my precious brother. If *I* knew where that chamber is, I would hie to the spot, and deliver him up at once. I have waited long for vengeance for the blows he gave me, but that would pay for all."

The woman looked keenly up, and an expression of contempt swept over her face:

"And for such pitiful vengeance you would give up your just inheritance? You are the elder; Sir Hugh is completely in my power, and if he would save Vernor's life, he must comply with the terms I shall dictate to him. If the baronet refuses to bestow his lands on you, I will give the young one up to Kirke. The estate is not entailed; he can transfer it to you; and the time may come when I shall live with you as mistress of the house which he falsely pledged himself should be mine. Will not this be better than betraying the boy to those who are in pursuit of him?"

"Aye—if you can succeed; but you have so long deluded me with promises, that I begin to lose faith in your power to fulfill them. We have for years dogged the footsteps of this galliard; have seen him living like a nobleman on the money he fraudulently gained by his marriage with that child; and many times I could have struck at him with fatal effect, but you always interposed—always promised something grand in the future as the reward of my forbearance. Now you would let him escape, to secure the worn-out lands, and the grim old house, that looks as if it might tumble about one's ears."

"Ungrateful wretch! have I not always labored for your advantage? Have not *these*," pointing to the cards, "told me that your fate is linked with his, and if things were not warily managed you must perish with him? Had you

struck before, such would inevitably have been your doom; but now you can act with impunity. Vernor shall not escape. I shall lead Sir Hugh to believe that he can purchase his safety at the price exacted; but will it not be easy to betray him after the transfer I spoke of is completed? I give you leave to do so. Open a communication with Kirke, and let him know that you can deliver the young man to him; but he must give me time to carry out my own plans."

"How long do you require?" gloomily asked Melchoir. "Every hour of freedom from the doom that hangs over him is a torture to me. We may be of kindred blood, but mine is turned to gall against him. Before he gave me those blows my mind was torpid, and even you thought me stupid; but that outrage gave an impetus to my nature that changed me. Now, I possess craft, guile equal to his own; and all my powers shall be dedicated to accomplish his ruin; to bring him to the traitor's doom. Why should *he* be spared when his leader will be slain? His blood will not lie at my door, even if I do betray him to his pursuers; those who shed it will be accountable for it."

The woman earnestly regarded him; but as she unclosed her lips to speak the trampling of hoofs was heard, and she quickly said:

"Hark! the troopers are returning from their fool's errand. We must get out of their track, for we are not yet ready to face them. Make a circuit around the woods, and await me at the broken door that leads into the vaults beneath the Priory. I will meet you there in an hour."

Acquainted with every pathway thorough the domain, it was easy for these children of the forest to evade the dragoons, though they made a pretty thorough reconnoissance before returning to the village.

At the end of the appointed time, Minchen joined her son at the place of rendezvous. The sentinels had been with-

drawn, and everything was quiet. They entered the dark subterranean, and Melchoir lighted a lantern which he carried by striking a flint over a piece of tinder.

Silently they fittied toward the Secret Chamber, believing that they should find their prey there. Minchen had obtained glimpses of the dragoons, and she saw that they had no prisoners with them. Sir Hugh was then left at home, and she would meet with no delay in carrying out her plans.

She had never before betrayed the entrance to the chamber to any one; but now the assistance of her son was necessary to secure their captive, and she led him forward with the confident belief that their united strength would be more than a match for that of Vernor.

As Sir Hugh and his son entered the upper apartments, Minchen sprung back the door that opened into the lower vault and silently entered it, followed by her companion. She whispered:

"He must be above. I will ascend first and he will suppose that I have been sent by his father. While I speak with him, you can stealthily advance behind me, and spring upon him when he is unprepared for an attack. Your strength is more than a match for his, and if he attempts to use his firearms, I will give him a thrust with my dagger that will soon end all his cares."

Melchoir nodded and pointed impatiently upward; and his mother moved lightly up the steps. The trap door was bolted, and she muttered:

"This is strange—yet he must be there."

A vigorous push sent it back, and she raised the lantern and surveyed the desolate room. All was empty, and with a cry of disappointment she sprang toward the bed and threw back the curtains.

There was no evidence of him they came to seek, and the two regarded each other with an expression of blank disappointment. After a pause, Minchen said:

"He must have been here, for nowhere else could he have been securely concealed from those who have sought him. We tracked him to the house last night. I saw him spring into his father's room myself. He has only been in the lower vault; let us go below and examine."

They descended the stairs and flashed the light in every direction. Melchoir snatched up a fragment of paper on which some lines were written. It proved to be a part of a torn letter on which the name of Vernor Methurn yet remained; the date was also there, and he saw that it had been received within the last two months. This was sufficient proof that Vernor had been concealed there, and he asked:

"What are we to do now? There is no resource but to call the soldiers to our assistance."

"By no means; that is our last card. I know every nook in this house. I am familiar with every secret winding in it, and I can walk to the room in which our prey is now concealed. He only remained here while the search went on, and he has gone up by a secret staircase to the garrets of the old house, which communicate with the apartments once occupied by Lady Methurn. Ha! ha! Sir Hugh thinks he can keep him there in safety and comfort, leaving this place as a retreat in case of danger. And so he could, if I hadn't been on his track. He thinks we're safe on the other side of the channel, contented to vegetate on the trifling pension he pays us to keep out of his way. He'll soon see whether he has bought us off or not."

"What shall we next do?" asked her son. "Can we get into the house from here?"

"Nothing is easier. Follow me, and be as silent as death, for we must be wary in our approaches upon the enemy."

The door was replaced, and the young man lifted the lantern and carefully surveyed the localities. He counted

the steps to the first turning, and noted in which direction they moved, for he felt the assurance that the knowledge of this concealed retreat would yet be important to him.

They passed without hindrance into the chapel, and the Gipsy walked directly towards the panel through which the fugitive had so recently passed. Again impressing on Melchoir the necessity of extreme caution, she ascended the crazy staircase first; Melchoir followed her closely, and with stealthy steps they crossed the long garret and approached the open door over which the tapestry now fell.

The sound of voices within distinctly reached them, and the young Gipsy clenched his hands, and set his teeth savagely as that of Vernor was distinguished by him.

He had spoken truly of himself. His mind had outgrown the effects of the blow given him in childhood, but the intellect only had improved; the moral nature was still a barren waste, and for years but one burning desire had reigned paramount in his soul: to crush the brother who had superseded him, and to avenge the indignity he had put upon him.

In pursuance of their own plans, his mother and himself had separated themselves from their tribe, and through all Vernor's wanderings they had ever kept him in sight. They were aware that he had embarked with Monmouth, and they lost no time in following him to England, ready to avail themselves of any disaster that menaced him with ruin.

Fate itself seemed to have played into their hands. When the disastrous battle of Sedgemoor was fought, the two were at Bridgewater, and they lost no time in seeking the neighborhood of the Priory; there a constant and wary watch was kept upon the house, which was finally rewarded by seeing the hunted fugitive enter it.

The two now stood silently and listened to the conversa-

tion within the dressing-room. They heard Vernor's proposal to secure the means of retreating, and heard the party retire to the farther apartments. Then the Gipsy spoke to her son in a whisper:

"We will now return to the chapel, and I will tell you what next is to be done."

As stealthily as they had approached, the two regained the head of the stairs, and carefully descended. Melchoir asked in a surly tone:

"Why didn't we come on them when we were there? The women could have done nothing, and the old man hasn't the strength to help him. I could have made him my prisoner in a trice."

"You're a blind idiot, Melchoir, and have no finesse about you. If you will only be guided by me, I will make you your father's heir, as I before told you. Hie thee to the village; see Kirke yourself, and bring him with a party of his soldiers to the foot of the staircase that leads into the chapel. Watch there till your prey descends, for I will make him believe that he can only be safe in the Secret Chamber. I go up now to secure your inheritance."

Melchoir's face cleared, and he said:

"I see through your plan now. It is good, and I will follow it up. But how am I to get through those dark vaults without the lantern?"

"Take it and speed upon your way; I know mine well, and there will be light enough through the chinks of the old roof to guide me back."

Melchoir silently obeyed, and afraid to shut down the stone as he descended, lest he should fail to open it again, he left it lifted. Minchen hesitated a moment as to the expediency of closing the panel, but she reflected that the soldiers left in charge of the house would not be likely to penetrate into the chapel again that day, and she feared that

she might find it difficult to reopen it without a light, so the gap remained unclosed, and she again threaded her way through the dim obscurity above to a point from which a low grating sound now reached her quick ears.

Vernor was already at work upon the wardrobe, and she crouched down till he had completed his labors. She heard the heavy piece of furniture again replaced, and then drawing near the door, she took a knife from her pocket and cut open the tapestry. Thrusting her head through the opening she had thus made, she listened to the conversation that ensued, and patiently waited till the baronet was left alone.

Vernor closed the door behind him as he left the room, that the sound of their voices might not disturb his father's repose; and they were no sooner gone, than the Gipsy crawled through the aperture into the body of the wardrobe. She pushed the door, and found that it had been left unfastened; and after pausing a few moments, she cautiously unclosed it, and stepped into the room.

Sir Hugh sat in a cushioned chair, with his head thrown back, breathing heavily, and she noted that the hand which hung down over the arm of the chair looked lifeless and pallid.

As a measure of precaution, Vernor had removed the key from the lock, and placed it on the inner side of the door, that he might fasten out intruders from the other side, if danger approached, and secure time for a retreat. The Gipsy softly turned it, and then drew near the sleeping baronet. A smile of bitter irony and contempt swept over her features as she regarded him, and disturbed perhaps by the magnetic intensity of her gaze, he muttered a few words, and then started forward with staring eyes and panting breath. His lips unclosed, and an oath was starting from them, when her hand was placed over his mouth, and she rapidly whispered:

"If you speak aloud, your son is lost. I have come to save him."

He stared at her in dull surprise, and faintly said:

"Where did you come from? I thought you were in Spain, with your own people."

"I have lately been in Flanders; but when the scent of carnage is in the air, birds of ill omen are sure to follow it up. I am one of them; I tracked your son to this place; I saw him enter your room last night, and I have come to state to you the only terms on which I will spare him. He is utterly in my power, and I will be ruthless in its exercise if you do not comply with my demands."

Sir Hugh looked at her set face, into her flaming eyes, and he felt that she spoke the truth; there was no mercy in that wild heart toward him or his. He faltered:

"What do you wish? What must I do to save my son from destruction? Oh, Minchen, have you no mercy?"

"Mercy! ha, ha! Have *you* ever shown it, Hugh Methurn? Can you sit in *this* room and ask it of man or demon? Remember what you and I did in this place; in this hour I avenge on you your share in that crime. Who will avenge mine upon myself remains to be seen. I came hither with a purpose that is fixed—implacable. Do justice to *my* son, or yours shall be delivered over to those who seek his life. Do you hear?—*his life!* for it is forfeited to the laws."

"I have already given you money; what more can I do? You have had the means of living from me for many years past. What do you mean by justice to your son? I have never ignored his claims on me."

"You have been *very* liberal, Sir Hugh. You have paid over to us a paltry annuity that barely kept us above want, while the *heir* revelled in splendor. *My* son is the eldest born, and to him the estate of his ancestors shall

descend. Here is a deed I have executed—it has the signatures of two witnesses affixed to it, and your own name above them is all that is needed to render it valid. It's of no consequence whether they see it written or not; they will swear that they were present at the signature when the time comes to use it. Sign away the birthright of Arabella Vernor's son, or see him given over to the executioner."

Sir Hugh sank back perfectly unnerved. His eyes glanced upon the parchment he held before him, and he saw that it was a conveyance of his whole estate to Melchoir, to be held in perpetuity by him and his descendants.

"Ho! ho! Sir Hugh, have I circumvented you at last? In my bright youth you promised that I should be mistress of Methurn; you perjured yourself and took my rival to your home; but I shall yet reign as lady of the Priory, and my son, *our* son, shall rule in its walls, while the child of her who rivalled me wanders in poverty, an outcast from his native land. I am merry to-day, for at last I have snared you in the net I have been years in weaving—ho! ho!"

Sir Hugh stared at her in vague dread. His mind seemed to wander from him, and he caught but imperfect and fitful glances of her meaning. He spoke, in a dull tone:

"What do you ask me to do for Melchoir? He has never lived with me, and he does not like me. He has no right to supersede Vernor; I spent his mother's fortune, and the little I have left should be his to repay him for my prodigality."

"Of what use will your estate be to him if the hangman gets him? I will turn him over to him without remorse if you dare refuse me."

"But this will be forgery; the deed will be pronounced worthless, and you will be punished for attempting such a fraud."

"I will risk it. I have friends who will stand by me. I know what I am about. Sign the deed, or I call on those left here to guard you to arrest your son."

"How can I do so? there is neither pen nor ink in this room."

"I have provided against that contingency; see;"—and she drew from her pocket a case which held a vial of ink and a pen. The chair on which Sir Hugh sat had a movable stand attached to one of the arms, and this the Gipsy turned in front of him, spread out the deed, and placed the pen in his half-palsied fingers.

He deprecatingly regarded her, and asked in a pitiful tone:

"Is there no alternative? Must I ruin my poor boy to save his life?"

"You must. Write your name on the space left for it upon this parchment, and I forbear to betray him; nay, I will even help him to escape the perils that surround him. After all, you are only giving to your eldest son the inheritance of which the law unjustly deprives him."

Sir Hugh grasped the pen in his trembling fingers, and was about to trace his name on the spot indicated, when a cry came from the next apartment, and an attempt was made to open the door which we have seen had been locked by the Gipsy.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DEATH OF SIR HUGH.

To account for what now occurred, we must return to the trooper who had been left on guard below. Jones was a per-

son of inquisitive mind, and it occurred to him that while his comrade kept watch over the movements of the family above stairs, he would make a foray through the older portion of the building.

The key still remained in the door which gave into the corridor, and he traversed its length and entered the chapel. His quick eye soon caught sight of the lifted flag stone, and while examining it, the open panel also attracted his attention. He exclaimed:

"By Jove! the secret's out! That chap was hid in the garret, and he's somewhere about here, that's certain. The way's been opened for him to get out, and may be I can trap him before he gets away."

He rushed back to the inhabited portion of the house, called to his comrade, and in a few words informed him of the discovery he had made, at the same time telling him to remain in front of Mrs. Methurn's room, and in five minutes, to enter it, while he made his way to the opposite side, for he was certain that a communication existed between the chapel and that suite of apartments.

Jones ran back, swiftly mounted the stairs, and moved in the direction in which he knew the rooms were situated. The sound of voices soon guided him, and he crashed through the wardrobe at the moment that the cries from the next room warned him that a scuffle was going on.

The Gipsy turned like a lioness at bay, while Sir Hugh fell back, dropping the pen from his hand, as he gaspingly said:

"Lost! lost! All is lost!"

They were the last articulate words he ever uttered, for the shock had snapped the silver cord, and the hard and sinful soul of the baronet was wrenched from his body in that moment of supreme anguish.

Jones strode to the door, unlocked and threw it open.

Vernor was struggling desperately with his assailant, who had come upon him without warning, while Mrs. Methurn and Ethel, paralyzed by fright, looked on without even uttering a cry.

The new-comer grasped the arms of the young man from behind, and in a few moments he was securely bound and placed on a chair.

"Who locked that door?" asked Vernor, savagely. "But for that I might have escaped you both. What have you done with my father?"

"I believe he's fainted. Now we've got you safe, I'll look after the old gentleman. Don't be scared, ladies; we ain't a goin' to hurt you, though you did try to hide this young chap amongst ye."

Mrs. Methurn rushed into the dressing-room, followed by Ethel, and the young girl uttered a loud cry as she beheld Sir Hugh with fallen jaw and glazing eyes, sitting bolt upright, with his hands still stretched out over the little table.

The Gipsy and the deed had both disappeared.

"This last shock has proved fatal to him," said Mrs. Methurn, with emotion.

"Oh! he cannot be dead, aunty. We must try to bring him around again. Let us get him on the bed, and see what can be done for him."

Mrs. Methurn silently shook her head. She had gazed on death before, and she knew that the awful fixedness of look before her was the work of the grim conqueror alone. She placed her hand over the heart of Sir Hugh and found that not the slightest pulsation remained. His hands were already chilled and stiff, and she reverently said:

"God has mercifully removed him from trouble to come. Go to your own room, my child, for this sight is too painful for one of your tender years. I will attend to what must be done here."



But Ethel would not consent to leave her; by this time the two soldiers had entered the room, and in compliance with the request of Mrs. Methurn they lifted the corpse and placed it on a couch that stood in the room; they straightened the limbs, and Mrs. Methurn herself closed the mouth and pressed down the eyelids over the staring eyes from which all expression had fled. Vernor called out impatiently:

"What are you all doing in there? Sir Hugh—father, come out; I wish to speak with you. I suppose that privilege at least will not be denied me."

Ethel went to him, pale and trembling.

"Oh, Vernor—poor Vernor, this is a sad blow for you. He will never come to you again. Oh, no—never."

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a scared look. "Don't tell me that anything has happened to my father just now. Has that fellow murdered him?"

"He is dead, but not by violence."

Vernor covered his face with his hands, and she could see that he trembled in every fibre of his frame. Presently he looked up and hoarsely said:

"Then it's all up with me. A prisoner to those who know no mercy, and my father gone, there is no one to stand between me and destruction. I have ruined you too, Ethel; the remnant of property left to you will barely purchase your own safety."

"Don't talk of that now, Vernor," she gently replied; "I will stand by you to the last, and save you if I can."

Vernor was touched; he gloomily said:

"I have been a villain toward you, Ethel, and that is the truth. I bound you to me that I might gain possession of your fortune, which I have recklessly squandered. Yes—it is nearly all gone, poor little girl, and you will be left to poverty. The estate I should have heirloomed will now be forfeited,

and I shall have no means of restitution left. But you will be *free* again, Ethel, for my life isn't worth a rush."

For the first time for years Ethel voluntarily drew near him and kissed his pale brow. In that moment all his indifference to her was forgotten: he suffered—he had few friends to stand by him in the hour of his need, and her young heart overflowed with compassionate tenderness toward him. She put back his tangled hair and softly said:

"If the sacrifice of all I claim can save you, Vernor, I will cheerfully make it. Let us not anticipate evil; there is enough already around us to task all our energies to overcome. Don't give up, dear Vernor. Hope on; God is with us, and He will send us help in the darkest hour."

He bitterly said:

"You may trust in Him, for you are good and pure; but I—I dare not ask His protection, for in my hour of elation I spurned the thought that I should ever need it."

Ethel wistfully regarded him. She knew that he had been a habitual scoffer at religion, and this, as much as anything else, had alienated her from him. In the depths of her gentle nature was cradled deep reverence for sacred things, and the prayers offered by this simple heart might have been borne by angels to the throne of grace as an incense worthy of the infinite purity that overshadows it.

Mrs. Methurn came in silently weeping. She placed her hand on Vernor's head and reverently said:

"The Lord has dealt with his creature. Sir Hugh has escaped the evils we must rouse our courage to face."

"Oh, Aunt Agnes, if he could only have lived a few weeks longer, he might have been able to avert utter ruin from us all; but now, everything is lost. Make up your minds to go with me to prison, for Kirke will come back and take us all away with him."

"If it must be so, I can go. I will write to Gerald of



the strait we are in, and he and Mr. Clyde may be able to help us."

"If *justice* reigned in the land, perhaps they might, but I have no hope from that. Resign yourself to the worst, for Kirke arrests us, and Jeffreys will sit in judgment upon us."

Mrs. Methurn shuddered. The reputation of Jeffreys was well known to her, and the thought of even appearing before him filled her with horror.

The troopers here joined them, and rough as they were, they refrained from saying anything to the unhappy young man to embitter his captivity. Even they had some respect for the lifeless form of him who was so lately the stay and protection of those before them. Vernor haughtily regarded them as he said:

"I may at least be permitted to go in and look upon my dead father for the last time. Free my feet that I may walk."

"If you'll promise not to make a dash, young man, an' try to get off, I'll do that service," said Jones.

"Stupid! what can I do with my hands thus pinioned? Are not two of you here to guard a bound man?"

The trooper grinned—

"I don't mind your callin' me sich a name, caze I've proved sharper than you an' the old gentleman to boot. But I 'vise ye to keep a civil tongue in yer head, for the Lambs is used to a word and a blow, an' sometimes the last comes afore there's time to speak the first."

Vernor savagely regarded him, but he only pointed to the cord that bound his feet and said nothing in reply. Jones severed it with his knife, and he stood an instant balancing in his mind his chances of escape.

While Ethel talked with him alone, she had slightly loosened the handkerchief with which his arms were bound, for

the tension appeared painful, and a few cautious movements had convinced Vernor that he could release them without much effort. He said:

"Now I am ready; one of you can keep guard at the door, while the other goes with me in the dressing room. I shall not be long."

The troopers exchanged glances, and Simpson took his station close beside the door; Vernor walked forward, followed by Jones, and his rapid glance took in the condition of the room. He asked:

"Who guided you to yonder opening?"

"My own wit, and the carelessness of those that came before me. The woman that was in here got away while I was securin' you."

"What woman?" said Vernor, bewildered.

"How should I know? One of the servants, mayhap, what knew the way up."

But the prisoner knew better, and like a flash, the remembrance of the strange Gipsy woman came to him. That she had some mysterious connection with his father; that she knew all the secret places of the house he was aware, and his heart grew faint within him as he remembered how she had kept upon his track for years past. Could she have followed him to England to make his destruction sure? Why she wished evil to him he did not know, but that she was his deadly and uncompromising enemy, he felt assured.

He approached the couch and looked down on the inanimate form that lay upon it, thinking less of his bereavement, than of the means of escaping from the toils that were closing around him.

Jones peered through the opening in the wardrobe, and muttered comments on its ingenuity. He found the saw and said aloud:

"The gal got this, but how she brought it up I don't know. She's a sharp un, an' needs looking after a bit."

Vernor glared furtively at him; the door communicating with the outer room had swung partly to; Jones was on his knees groping in the wardrobe, and seizing the opportunity, he slipped the handkerchief from his arms, and at a bound, closed the door, turned the lock, and then sprang upon the trooper. As Jones arose, he struck him a heavy blow upon the head, dashed through the opening, and was half way across the garret before the man regained his stunned senses sufficiently to pursue him.

But Kirke's lambs were too hard-headed to be long bewildered even by such a blow as the one just dealt on the trooper's head, and as Vernor approached the stairway he heard his adversary in hot pursuit. Dashing wildly forward, he cleared the steps at a bound, landed on the chapel floor, and closed the panel.

As he paused to take breath, a figure emerged from behind a pillar, which he instantly recognized as that of the Gipsy Queen.

"What has brought *you* here?" he fiercely asked. "What were you doing in my father's room to-day? You have dogged my steps for years, and now you have come to deliver me over to destruction."

"You speak the truth," she recklessly replied. "The rope is made that will soon hang you, and I have done my best to put it around your neck, though you have bravely helped me yourself. The sleuth hound is on your track, and you need not hope to escape him. You are rushing now upon your fate."

"*Who* are you? and why have you pursued me thus for evil?"

"The dead man that lies above, can no longer stand between us, and since your race is almost run, I will tell you

what you wish to know. I am she who should have been Lady Methurn; to whom every sacred pledge was given, and ruthlessly broken. My son is the son of your father, and your own elder brother; yet *you* have dared to strike him. Go on, Vernor Methurn, and meet the retribution due to that cowardly blow. I do not attempt to stop you, hasten before the trooper breaks through the wall, for he is striking at it at a fearful rate."

Jones, in truth, was hammering against the panel with all his force, and as a crashing sound was heard as if it was splintering beneath his blows, Vernor again bounded forward, and disappeared through the opening in the floor. He had no thought at that moment for the revelation which had just been made to him; his only care was for his own safety.

The Gipsy again stepped behind the sheltering pillar, leaving Jones to force his way into the chapel. She knew that the fugitive was in her power, for by this time her son must be at his station with the party of which he had gone in quest, and since nothing else would be gained by the day's work, Melchoir might at least gain the reward offered for his brother's apprehension.

The trooper at length smashed the panel, and with the impetus of the last blow, rolled out upon the floor. As he regained his feet, a confused sound of voices and cries came up from the vaults, and before he could gain the stairs leading into them, a party of four men, led by Melchoir, came up, bringing the fugitive with them as a prisoner. Vernor had gone but a few yards below, when they closed around him, and pinioned him in such a manner as to render resistance ineffectual.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE BROTHERS FACE TO FACE.

WHEN Kirke left the Priory he divided his men into two squads, one of which kept watch upon the grounds, while the other proceeded to make domiciliary visits to some of the neighboring families who had also been implicated in the rebellion.

Melchoir found the pickets patrolling around the domain, and he speedily gave the officer in command the information that the quarry they sought was safely caged within the old house. The three men he requested were sent with him to the vaults, while the remainder gradually drew near to the walls and enclosed them with a cordon of armed men.

A messenger was sent to Kirke informing him of the state of affairs, and at the moment Vernor was brought in the chapel, he dashed up to the door followed by the remainder of his troop. Their loud and disorderly entrance filled the whole building with clamor, and their commander, with angry and inflamed visage, stalked through the room of Sir Hugh, and traversed the corridor with furious haste. He gained the chapel, and a gleam of ferocious joy lighted up his features as he saw the prisoner standing before him bound and helpless.

"Well, young cock o' the walk, your wings are clipped at last," he said, with a coarse laugh. "You've led me a pretty dance; you and that deceiving old father of yours. Where is he? I'll make him feel that it is not safe to trifle with one of his Majesty's officers as he has done with me to-day."

Vernor disdainfully regarded him.

"My father, thank Heaven! is beyond the reach of your malice. You nor any one else will annoy him more."

"Why, what does the galliard mean? Where is Sir Hugh, I say? Bring him before me that I may signify my pleasure to him in this conjuncture of affairs. I'll take the old sinner where he'll find cause to repent of his evil deeds."

"You're spared that trouble, sir," said Jones. "The old gen'leman's gone a longer journey than you can take him. When I jumped in on the hidin' place o' the young un, he jest fell back an' gave up the ghost."

"Dead!" said Kirke; "do you mean that his tough old heart actually broke when he learned that his young scape-grace was in the toils? Bless my soul! I had no idea he had so much sensibility."

"He's dead sure, sir. Mebbe you'll come up an' see where the youngster was stowed away, an' you can see for yourself that Sir Hugh'll never breathe again in this world."

Giving orders for the prisoner to be removed to the hall and securely guarded, Kirke strode after his satellite, and mounted to the garret. He carefully suveyed his route and said:

"Cleverly contrived, faith; and the panel is so well concealed behind the pillar that no one would have suspected its existence. I was certain the young man had taken refuge here, and I intended to stay in the neighborhood until he was nabbed."

When they gained the opening into the dressing-room he forced his burly form through it, and stepping out, stood before the two affrighted ladies, who were kneeling before the couch on which the body of Sir Hugh lay. Mrs. Methurn extricated herself from Ethel's clinging arms, and arose with dignity, while the poor girl turned her pallid face toward him, and pointed appealingly to the lifeless form of the baronet. Mrs. Methurn said:

"I trust that Colonel Kirke will treat these remains with the respect that is due to them."

The rude soldier lifted his hat in the presence of death, and replied:

"He's done his last wrong, ma'am, and gone where Jeffreys can't reach him, which I can't say I'm sorry for. Sir Hugh was a liberal man, and I'll see him put decently in the family vault before we go. But I'm sorry to say that you and this young lady must go with me to Taunton as soon as the job's completed."

"Can we not be permitted to remain here till our presence is necessary there?"

"I *had* agreed to that; but now it is impossible. You have helped to conceal that young fellow, thus making matters worse for yourselves than they would have been."

"Has he escaped?" asked Ethel. "If he has, I can bear imprisonment."

"If he *had* escaped through your connivance, it would have been the worse for you, young lady. But he is safe in the custody of my men. Jones tells me that you must have slipped the bandage with which his arms were bound, or he could never have freed them as he did. Since we've caught him, it don't matter: but if he had got off it would have gone hard with you."

"Oh! I could have borne anything if he had gained his freedom," she said, with a burst of tears. "Come, aunty, let us prepare to meet the evil fate that has encompassed us."

"Yes—get ready to be judged by the hardest man in England, or, for that matter, in the world. But don't be down-hearted, for Jeffreys has a taste for beauty, and you are rather a pretty little thing. Only don't spoil your eyes with crying; you'll find a better use for them in looking out for another husband after this one is put out of the way."

Ethel shrank from the brutal man with an expression of

horror, and looking as indignant as she felt at such language, Mrs. Methurn drew her away. She paused at the door and asked:

"How long may we remain beneath this roof, sir?"

"Till my men have had a good dinner provided for them, ma'am, and we have had time to knock up a box to put the old gentleman in. He was fond of his glass, and I hope there will be good wine to be drank at his funeral banquet. I rely on your respect for the deceased to order a repast suited to his quality, for my Lambs are used to the best the country affords."

"They shall have the best we have," replied the lady; "but you must be aware of the difficulty of obtaining sufficient food for a whole troop of horsemen at so short a notice. Our family is not large, and it will take time to send to the village."

"Zounds! madam, kill the fatted calf; kill his mother, if necessary; for I shall not budge from the Priory till I have partaken of its hospitality. The Methurns were not wont to be niggards, and if their fortunes have fallen, there is still enough left to feed his Majesty's soldiers."

Mrs. Methurn did not reply to this rude speech; she merely bent her head and left the room.

No sooner were they alone than Ethel threw herself upon her bosom and wept the tears she had with difficulty restrained in the presence of the troopers. But she soon aroused herself from this indulgence of feeling, and proceeded to pack up such articles of clothing as herself and Mrs. Methurn would need during their stay in Taunton.

What their fate might be she could not foresee, and such terrible stories were told of Jeffreys and his summary proceedings towards those implicated in the rebellion, that she feared the worst, but the latent vein of heroism in her nature was fully aroused, and she felt within herself a

power to sustain the heaviest blows of misfortune if Vernor could only escape the danger that menaced him.

The death of Sir Hugh had been a great shock, but he had never been fond of her, and she had always regarded him with more fear than affection. At such a crisis it was a great calamity, but she had faith to believe that God would bring good out of evil to those who trusted in His power, and with this consoling belief she wiped away her tears, and set herself earnestly to the task before her.

Mrs. Methurn had far more difficulty in the one she had undertaken. Messengers were dispatched to the village, and to Farmer Conway's to request that provisions might be sent up to the Priory; but the day was rapidly waning away before the banquet was ready for the impatient and often clamorous soldiers; for Kirke allowed his men the widest liberty when not engaged in actual service.

A rough coffin was procured for Sir Hugh, and with little ceremony he was placed in it, and conveyed to the family vault, which was situated in the rear of the chapel. Vernor and the two ladies were permitted to be present, and with fear and trembling the curate of the parish came to read the burial service over his body. When he asked leave to do so, Kirke replied:

"It isn't much good they'll do such an old reprobate now, Mr. Parson; but as it is customary, I won't refuse. I'm called a brute, and sometimes I act like one, but the d—l you know isn't so black as he's painted. The women would feel horrified if the old fellow was put away like a dog, and somehow that little girl interests me. The poor thing has been made a victim by Sir Hugh and that scamp of a son; they have ruined her, I know, and this affair will swallow up the last fragment of her fortune. Somehow I pity her, though I don't often care for those the fortunes of war throws in my hands."

"Miss Ethel is a sweet young lady," replied the curate. "I taught her Latin and the mysteries of calculation, and she was always a docile pupil. I do hope you will try and befriend her in the evil strait into which she has fallen."

"As to that, my power over her fate ceases when I deliver her over to the authorities at Taunton. Jeffreys will then be the arbiter of her destiny."

The dominie shuddered:

"Oh, sir! he is a merciless man, and this is such a young girl. I—I'm told, sir, that those he cannot hang he will condemn to be sold as slaves in the West Indies. Think of it, sir! such a delicate young lady as this to be sent away as a slave to that wild and unhealthy country."

Kirke laughed bitterly:

"It's good enough for the most of those who will be sent there; but Viscount Clifton will never let his niece, and the heiress to his estate, be sent into exile. It would be too great a stain upon his noble family."

The listener shook his head dubiously:

"If it depends on *him*, he won't raise his finger to help her; for if it had not been for Mrs. Methurn I do not know what would have become of the poor child when her mother died."

"It would have been a great deal better for her if she had never seen one of the family, for they have bound her to a worthless prodigal in her childhood, and he has made way with the earnings of her uncle. When this thing is through with, she won't have a shilling left. I hope Master Vernor will get his deserts for his treatment of her."

"Oh, sir! surely they will not destroy the heir to an ancient family like that of the Methurns, which dates back to the Norman conquest. They have held an honorable place in the land for many generations."

"It's a pity then that they have degenerated so much, for

the old baronet and his son are poor specimens. If Sir Hugh had lived a few months longer, he might have saved the estate from forfeiture; but now it will go to the crown, and the heir will hang very likely."

The poor dominie regarded him with silent horror. The family at the Priory had been his patrons, and from him the young people had received the greater portion of their education. For Vernor he had less affection than for Gerald, but he could not think of the fate that threatened him without the bitterest regret.

While performing the last services for the deceased baronet, his voice faltered and his eyes filled with tears many times; and in a parting interview with Mrs. Methurn, he promised her to look in frequently at the Priory, and see how things went on during her enforced absence. She made an effort to look hopeful, as she said:

"I trust that we shall be permitted to return before long. If we do not, I hope, Mr. Panton, that you will remember the poor people I have been in the habit of looking after."

He promised to do so, and asked:

"Will not Mr. Gerald come to your assistance, ma'am? He's a lawyer, and he will know the rights of the case. It seems hard that you and Miss Ethel should be taken away from your home for such a trifle."

"I have written to Gerald, and I shall send my letter from Taunton."

"Will they really put you in prison, ma'am? It's a dreadful place, for I've been there to visit a friend. That was several years ago; but the place is no better now—nay, it is worse, for a malignant fever is raging among the people confined there."

Mrs. Methurn shivered:

"My poor Ethel! it will be terrible to take her into the midst of infection. I must make every effort to escape

that danger. Kirke is rough and brutal, but he has the reputation of being also very venal. He has power to serve us, and a liberal bribe may induce him to permit Ethel and myself to remain at Mr. Digby's till we have to appear in court."

"If he does, ma'am, he will be more lenient to you than he was to Miss Digby; for I know that she was arrested and thrown in prison. She took the fever, and was taken back to her father's house when they found she could not live unless she was removed from the den into which they had thrown her. She lies there now at the point of death."

"Poor Alice! so young and so unfortunate. Yet my own darling may fare no better."

She lowered her voice, and went on:

"I have been told that Kirke and Jeffreys play into each other's hands, and are cruel, or kind, according to the ability of the party arrested to pay for lenient treatment. I have a hundred pounds by me, which I have saved since Gerald went into Mr. Clyde's office; perhaps that will purchase permission for us to remain under Mr. Digby's roof. It would be too cruel to throw us in the midst of infection."

"Kirke seems to feel for Miss Ethel, ma'am, and I think the half of the money will bribe him to let you both remain with your friends. But no sum will keep Mr. Vernor out of prison; they are too much afraid that he will escape. He has shown such spirit and determination, that they will not consent to lose sight of him for an hour."

Mrs. Methurn sighed heavily:

"I am aware of that, and I have no hope of keeping him with us. To save Ethel from contact with such misery and degradation, is the utmost I expect to accomplish. You advise me then to make the trial with Kirke?"

"I think you may venture to do so, ma'am. He can



only refuse, and you will be no worse off than you are now."

Thus counselled, Mrs. Methurn sought an opportunity of speaking with Kirke, who at first utterly refused to listen to such a proposal. He declared that the two ladies must go to prison, as many others of as high station had done before; that he had no power to change their destination, but when he found that the widow had money of her own with which to purchase indemnity, he softened his tone, and after many manœuvres to find out how much she was able to give, he finally consented to accept sixty pounds, and allow Ethel and her protectress to take refuge in the house of Mr. Digby till the day of their trial arrived.

When Mrs. Methurn ventured to mention Vernor, his face darkened, and he abruptly said:

"You can do nothing for the young man, madame. He must be made to feel all the rigors of imprisonment to bring him to the point that is so desired. He is sullen and uncompromising, but I have dealt with as hard cases before now, and I shall yet make him take the only course that can save his own life, and at the same time serve the government."

"If it is your purpose to tempt him to treachery toward those with whom he has been leagued, I trust that he will preserve his honor even at the sacrifice of life," she replied, with spirit.

"Ho! ho! that is fine talking, madam; but at his years life is very precious, and he will be very likely to value it above what you call his honor. Monmouth's cause is lost, and by giving up some documents he has concealed, your nephew does not injure those who are already condemned; he will only give a color of justice to their execution."

"If he gives them up, will he be released without the formality of a trial?"

"By no means; *that* Jeffreys will never forego. If life is spared in return for this service, it will be the utmost that will be granted. Heavy punishment will be meted out to him, the least of which will be the forfeiture of his title and estate. As to what further sentence Jeffreys may pronounce upon him, I cannot say. The young man has led a sadly profligate life, and the best you and the young lady can do, is to take care of yourselves, and let him sink or swim as fate may direct."

"But he is my nephew and Ethel's husband, and we cannot be indifferent to his fate."

"If your positions were reversed, I fancy he would be indifferent enough to yours. I am sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Vernor Methurn's past life to know that he is utterly selfish and hard-hearted; and if the law hangs him out of the way of this poor child who has been made the victim of his rapacity, it will be the better for her. Excuse me, madam; I am blunt and free-spoken, and I'm not used to dealing with ladies. But my advice to you is, to let the young man bear the burden of the calamity he has brought upon you all."

Mrs. Methurn turned away with a sad heart; she would gladly have averted from Vernor the penalty of his late acts had she possessed the power to do so, but she was helpless to aid him in any way. Vernor was strictly guarded in one of the lower rooms, and no opportunity of speaking with him had been allowed the two ladies, save when they stood beside the bier when the funeral services were being performed. He had then briefly said:

"Take care of yourself and Ethel, Aunt Agnes. It's all up with me, and I must bear my fate like a man. I have brought evil enough upon you without hanging as a millstone upon you now. Leave me to my own deserts."

The house for many hours was a scene of riot and confu-



sion, from which Mrs. Methurn was glad to take refuge in the seclusion of her own apartments. The late dinner was served, for Conway sent up a wagon load of provisions, and the people of the village anxious to prove their loyalty, furnished everything they thought the troopers would need.

The wine-cellar was searched, and a sufficient store of both wine and ale were found to intoxicate the whole party. Few would have believed that the shadow of death rested upon that house which rang with bacchanalian songs and roystering laughter. The feast was turned into a wild revel, and it was late in the night before the troopers staggered from the table.

Under these circumstances Kirke postponed his departure till the following morning, for among his troops but one sober man was to be found. That was Simpson, to whom the custody of Vernor was delegated with the assurance that if he permitted him to escape his own life should be the forfeit. He knew the threat would be fulfilled, and he had sufficient forbearance to refrain from indulging himself for the present, as he knew that at the next carouse his own turn would come; and the troopers had many houses to visit on similar errands before their work was completed.

He tried to while away the time in conversation with his prisoner, but Vernor sat wrapped in gloomy silence, thinking over his ruined fortune and blighted future. What the Gipsy had told him recurred to his memory, and in his heart he cursed her for her agency in bringing about his capture.

Minchen and her son were still in the house, and Melchoir watched for an opportunity to come into the presence of his brother, that he might gratify his deep hatred by seeing him bound and helpless before him.

The drunken troopers had sunk down upon the floor in a heavy sleep, and the house was at last quiet, when the

young Gipsy came stealthily toward the door beside which Simpson held his watch. He offered the trooper a tankard of ale and a piece of money, and whispered:

"Let me pass—let me see my foe in the toils, and I will be your friend for life."

"Gad! you're the fellow that set the men on the right scent, you helped to nab him, and I don't suppose you'd care to help him off."

"I'd throttle him first," was the fierce response. "I wish to witness his humiliation—to gloat on his sufferings. He degraded me once by cowardly blows, but now I think we are quits. Let me pass, good fellow, and it shall not be the worse for you. When I get my share of the reward for taking him, I'll remember you."

"This ale is good; this money is genuine, and I don't see any objection to grantin' what you ask. Go in and speak your mind to the sullen youngster, who wouldn't answer a civil remark I made to him a while ago."

Simpson sat down to enjoy his tankard, and Melchoir glided past him, and stood before his detested brother.

Vernor's feet were securely bound to a large table, near which he was placed, and a leather belt belonging to his guard, was strapped around his waist, and buckled to the chair on which he sat. Handcuffs were placed upon his wrists, and his head was bent down above them, his long hair flowing in matted locks over the table.

He did not heed the entrance of his visitor, and the sound of Melchoir's voice caused him to start and lift up his pale face. An expression of triumphant scorn was upon the one that confronted him, and the Gipsy tauntingly said:

"Do you remember the day we met in the woodlawn years ago? when you insulted and outraged me by using your horsewhip upon my shoulders? See—here is the scar

left by those blows. I shall bear it to my grave, but now it burns no longer, for it has been dearly avenged."

He laid bare his shoulder as he spoke, and a long red line was visible upon the dusky flesh.

Vernor said:

"You are mad; the blow I gave could have left no such mark as that through all these long years."

"Perhaps not; but I rendered it indelible by burning it out with caustic. I wished it to remain as a witness between you and me, for I swore to pursue you to the death for the indignity you then put upon me; on *me*, your father's son—your own elder brother."

"If we are really brothers, it is very strange that you have so bitterly resented an outbreak of temper on my part. Had I known the tie that exists between us, I should have foreborne to strike; but Sir Hugh never informed me that I had such a relative in existence."

A sudden hope, wild as unfounded, dawned on Vernor. This strange being had probably repented of the part he had taken in his capture. He had possibly gained access to him to aid him to escape, and he eagerly regarded him as he slowly went on:

"If I had known you were of my father's blood I should have held my hand. Why did you not tell me then, in place of brooding over the injury till it has made your heart bitter toward me. The tie of consanguinity is strong, and should not be lightly severed. Be a brother to me in this strait, and I pledge myself to recognize you as such, and to provide for you as my father's son when I have made terms with the government. I have the means of regaining all I have lost, if you will only help me to regain my freedom."

The face of Melchoir was a curious study while Vernor thus spoke; anger, incredulity and scorn were all blended in its expression; and he savagely said:

"If I thought you had such power, I would destroy you as you sit bound and helpless before me. Craven! do you dare to appeal to me—to *me*, to respect the tie that unites us, when, if you were free and prosperous, it would be scouted with contempt? It is well for you, a bound captive, with the sword suspended by a hair above your head, to talk of befriending me, the unfettered son of the forest. I am already provided for, thanks to the munificent government which offered a large reward for your capture. I pointed out your place of concealment—I surrendered you to the men who secured you, and for this service I am entitled to the sum offered. I scorn your offers of service, and refuse to be known as the kinsman of a traitor and villain—for such you know yourself to be, Vernor Methurn."

Hope died out of the listener's heart as he looked upon the speaker, and hearkened to his bitter words. His head again drooped upon the table, and he feebly said:

"Leave me—I wish to be alone. Since my father's son can give me over to destruction, I need hope for mercy from no other quarter."

"No, expect no mercy—and know that if it were extended to you, I would be upon your track again working for your ruin."

"What benefit could my death be to you? You could never become the heir of Methurn."

"Perhaps not; but *you* shall never fill the position that should have been mine. Since I, the eldest born, cannot reign in my father's place, you shall never do so."

"To what end have you sought me?" asked Vernor, in an irritated tone. "Is it only to taunt and annoy me?"

"I came hither to triumph over you; to bring home to you some of the humiliation you have made me suffer; to gloat upon the sight of your fettered form, and hug to my

heart the certainty that you cannot escape the doom that hangs over you."

"You have performed your mission. Go now, or I will call out and let Kirke know that his orders have been infringed by permitting you to enter here."

"Call, and welcome; the beastly troopers are too drunk to hearken to you; but I have said all I intended, and I bid you adieu for the present. I shall witness your condemnation; I shall be present at your ignominious execution, and then I shall go upon my way, satisfied that retribution has fallen where it is due."

He waved his hand, and passed from the room. Vernor's lip curled, and his eyes flashed as he muttered:

"I shall foil you all yet—and you, wretched cur, shall feel the weight of my vengeance for the insults of this hour. I hate and abhor you as deeply as you can loathe me."

His head sunk down, and overcome with weariness he slept, in spite of his uncomfortable position.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE PRISONERS.

ON the following morning the whole party was removed to Taunton. The two ladies were permitted to occupy the carriage with Jones as their guard, and after some discussion, Vernor was placed beside him, with strict injunctions to the trooper to suffer no conversation to take place between the prisoners. His aunt and Ethel could only testify their sympathy for him by their looks, but he seemed self-absorbed and indifferent, and Ethel silently wept as the bitter conviction came to her that even in this dire crisis of his fate, her compassion, her tenderness was of no consequence to him.

Had Vernor then shown any kindness, or consideration for her, her young heart might have been won to love him, even in his fallen, and ruined state; but Vernor was too selfish to conceal his real feelings, and the last fatal stab was given to her affection for him.

As the vehicle drew near the town, sights of horror caused them to veil their eyes. Men hanging in chains were seen at intervals, and at the entrance of Taunton were two heads blackening in the sun. The place was in a ferment, and the carriage was detained by a crowd who were conducting three more unfortunate men to the gallows. These men were condemned to death by military authority alone, for the court known as the bloody assizes had not yet commenced its sitting.

After many delays, the vehicle drew up in front of the gloomy prison, and Mrs. Methurn's heart beat with the painful fear that after all, Kirke might consign Ethel and herself to its gloomy walls. But Vernor only was removed, and the jailer who took charge of him assured Kirke that the place was so crowded with wretched humanity that it would be difficult to find a place for the new prisoner. He said:

"They are killed off mighty fast, Colonel, but two come in for one that's taken away. But when the Judges comes, they'll do the work thoroughly, and there won't be many rebels left in these parts when they are through with them."

"You must find a place for this man at all events," was the reply; "and see that he is kept safe."

"Oh! I'll answer for that; nobody gets away from me."

At the moment of parting, Vernor held out his manacled hand to Ethel, and with some show of emotion, said:

"Good bye, Ethel; forgive me if you can, for all I have done to make you unhappy. Forget me—for let my fate be what it will, the law will sever you from a condemned

traitor. I give you back your plighted troth; I shall now never claim you as my wife."

Even in that moment of bitter sorrow, there was some comfort in this assurance. She said:

"I trust that you will escape, dear Vernor, and in a foreign land find that happiness which our union could never have afforded you."

Mrs. Methurn whispered in earnest tones:

"Farewell, Vernor, do not be tempted to do anything that can tarnish the honor of your name. Remember that fidelity to those with whom you have been leagued is imperative upon you."

He boldly, and sternly regarded her, as he slowly said:

"I shall be guided by my own interest, Aunt Agnes. The phantom called honor must not be permitted to stand between me and life. Adieu! be a mother to Ethel, and tell Gerald that I give her up to him. He has loved her from her childhood, and I now feel that I should not have stepped between them. Make no effort to see me again; this is no place for you or Ethel to visit, even if it would be permitted."

He dropped her hand, turned away, and was conducted beneath the gloomy portal, over which Dante's inscription on the entrance of the Inferno might well have been written:

"All hope abandon ye who enter here."

The carriage was then driven toward Mr. Digby's residence, and after some trifling delay, they reached his door.

The knocker was muffled, and straw had been thrown in the street to deaden the sound of passing vehicles, for the sole daughter of the house lay almost in extremity with the fever she had contracted during her cruel imprisonment.

Mrs. Methurn shrank from the thought of taking Ethel into the infected mansion, but no other was open to her in

this hour of difficulty and danger. On Mr. Digby's protection and assistance she knew she could rely, and he was the only friend to whom she was willing to appeal in her distress. She consoled herself for the risk they must encounter, with the thought that she could be of service to the sick girl, for Alice had neither mother nor sister to watch beside her feverish couch.

Careless of consequences to the invalid, the trooper who guarded them tore aside the muffling from the knocker, and struck a resonant peal upon the door, which brought Mr. Digby himself to it, looking pale, and excited at the rude summons. He was worn down with watching and suffering, and he glanced apprehensively toward the soldier, as he said:

"What brings you hither again? My daughter is ill almost to death, and you surely would not drag her from the shelter of my roof to die?"

Without lifting his hat, the man roughly replied:

"I've no further concern with your daughter. There are two women in that carriage who are brought here by Kirke's command, I fancy you will not care to disobey his orders by refusing to receive them."

"Why should any one be sent to this house of death unless it is intended to destroy them by placing them in its tainted atmosphere?"

"That's no concern of mine. They are to stay here till Jeffreys is ready to judge them. Besides, they wished to come themselves."

By this time Mrs. Methurn and her young companion had alighted, and ascended the steps. The sad face of Mr. Digby brightened up a little as he recognized them, and he stepped forward to receive them.

"It is but a dreary welcome I can give you, Mrs. Methurn, and I am afraid it is an evil cause that brings you here

at such a time; but I am glad that I am permitted to offer you shelter. It is better than to be thrust in prison, as my poor girl was."

Mrs. Methurn pressed his hand in tearful silence, while the trooper rudely said:

"The prison would ha' been good enough for such as them, but Kirke didn't choose to put 'em in it. Look sharp old fellow, that they're ready to come when called for, or it'll be worse for you. My orders are to leave 'em here, and your head'll be responsible for 'em."

"I accept the responsibility. Walk in, ladies; I will endeavor to render you as comfortable as circumstances will permit."

As he was closing the door the soldier said:

"What's the street littered up in this way for? Is the life of a rebel so precious that the King's highway must be filled with trash to keep out the noise?"

The pale father paused, and spoke with pathetic dignity:

"The rebel of whom you speak is a young girl; she is my only child, and I would save her life at the hazard of my own. She is delirious, and noise would be fatal to her. The straw can inconvenience no one that passes, and—and——"

His voice broke down and the trooper said:

"I shall report it to my officer, and he will have it removed, I am sure. Such tender care for one who boldly welcomed Monmouth will not be permitted."

In an agony of fear, Mr. Digby drew from his pocket several guineas, and thrust them into the trooper's hand, as he whispered:

"Take this and be merciful."

The man nodded, laughed, and sprang down the steps. His threat had produced the result he anticipated, and he hurried at once to a drinking shop to bury himself in a carouse.

Mr. Digby paused to replace the muffling upon the knocker, and then joined his guests in the hall. He led the way to the usual sitting-room of the family, and said:

"I am almost alone in the house, Mrs. Methurn. My cook remains, but she is afraid to stir from her kitchen lest she may contract the disease from which my poor child is suffering. But her old nurse still clings to Alice and assists me to attend her. She is fearfully ill, and we are nearly worn out with watching."

"We have, then, come in time to relieve you a little. Ethel and I will take charge of the sick room till you are rested."

"Dear madam, it will be exposing yourself and Ethel to great danger. Alice has contracted the malady which was raging in the prison when she was thrown into it. Those cruel monsters could not spare even a young and tender girl, and it was with much effort I gained permission to remove her hither after the disease fastened on her. I fear she must die; but I shall have strength granted me to do all that is necessary for her while life lingers. When she is gone, I do not care how soon my head is laid low beside her. She is my all—my darling; and cruel men have torn her from me in the budding promise of her life."

Mrs. Methurn laid her hand on his and hopefully said:

"Do not give up thus. I am a good nurse—the sight of Ethel, will be soothing to Alice, for she loves her; and since we share the shelter of your roof, we will also share the duties of the sick room. Being here, we are as liable to take the fever in any part of the house as if we watched beside your daughter. Do not deny us this privilege."

Mr. Digby was about to reply when Ethel impetuously said:

"Let me go to my dear Alice, and be of what use I can to her. I am not afraid; and if the fever should attack me, I have youth and strength to resist it."

Mr. Digby shook his head; he would still have remonstrated, but his objections were overruled, and he finally led them to the room of the sick girl. As they drew near the door they heard her voice calling out wildly, and her father said:

"It is as I feared; the loud peal struck on the knocker has aroused her again. When I left her she was a little calmer, and I had a faint hope that the delirium was subsiding."

He cautiously opened the door, and motioning to them to remain without, he entered and spoke soothingly to his daughter. She wildly raved:

"They have come for me; they bear me back to that gloomy den to perish there. I heard the summons; it was my death peal. You will not let them tear me away from you again!"

"My daughter, calm yourself; it was no messenger for you. Some friends have come to see you—to help me nurse you. They are at the door now waiting permission to enter. Shall I bring them in?"

"What! bring in the wretches who would destroy me? Send them away—send them away—or I shall die before you;" and she broke into a wailing cry that was pitiful to hear.

Mrs. Methurn stepped in and approached the bed, with tears streaming over her face at the painful spectacle the lately young and blooming girl presented. She sat up in her bed, wasted to a skeleton, her long hair hanging in disordered masses around her thin face, from beneath which the large black eyes blazed with the fires that were consuming her life.

"Dear Alice, it is I—your friend, Mrs. Methurn; I have come with Ethel to assist your father to nurse you, and we shall soon have you well again. Do you not know me?"

A faint gleam of recognition flashed over the wan face, and she looked pleased when Ethel came in and stood beside her. She more gently said:

"I—I thought it was the soldiers come to take me to my doom. You look kind—you will not let them have me again if they do come—will you?"

There was a wistful, scared expression on her face which was painful to look on. Ethel took her burning hand in her own, and tried to smile on her as she said:

"They will not take you away again, Alice. They suffered me to be brought hither in place of going to prison, and I did as much as you to anger them. Let me be your nurse and bring you back to health. My aunt knows what to do for you, and we shall soon have you well again."

"Well!" repeated the poor girl—"oh, no—no." She sunk back with a faint moan of pain, and overcome by the recent excitement, the flush faded from her face and she became insensible.

The nurse, an elderly woman, who looked even more broken down than Mr. Digby by her recent trials, here came in from an adjoining apartment, raised the sinking head of the sick girl, and held some aromatic essence to her lips, while her father attempted to chafe her thin hands.

Mrs. Methurn put him aside and performed that office herself. In a few moments Alice again unclosed her eyes; but the faint gleam of partial reason was again overclouded, and she raved wildly of the days she had spent in the dreary precincts of the prison.

"If she could have slept on," said the nurse, "she might have awoke much better; but that noise at the door made her as wild as she has ever been. Oh me! it is sad to see my darling in such a strait."

"We will raise her yet, Mrs. Fulton," said Mrs. Methurn, hopefully. "I am an experienced nurse, and I will take



your place here while you get the rest you look as if you need so much. Providence sent me here to be of use to my dear Alice, and you may trust her to me with perfect safety."

"Thank you, ma'am, for your kindness; but you risk a great deal yourself in coming into this room."

"It is a risk I will cheerfully take if I can be of service to Miss Digby. I know something of illness, and if your patient has a strong anodyne administered to her now, she will get a good sleep, from which she may awake restored to reason. Who is her physician, and what orders has he left? Tell me, that I may know what to do while you are resting."

The woman's face clouded, and she resentfully said:

"We can't get a regular doctor. They are such cowards that they are afraid to come to a disloyal person, except under cover of the night. Two of 'em have sneaked in here after dark, and they told me to do exactly opposite things. I didn't follow the advice of either of 'em. I did what I thought best, and I am glad you have come, ma'am, to help me with your judgment."

After this information, Mrs. Methurn was no longer surprised at the condition of the patient. Like most country ladies in her day, she possessed considerable skill in ordinary diseases; the village near the Priory had more than once suffered from such fevers as Alice seemed now suffering under, and her simple pharmacopœia had been quite as successful in treating it as that of the village Esculapius.

She carefully examined the patient, and decided on the course of treatment it would be advisable to pursue. Mr. Digby gladly consigned her to her skill, for new hope seemed to arise as he listened to her consoling words, and he finally said:

"Do what your judgment dictates. If you had not come she must have died. Now, I have a faint hope that she may be saved."

Thus entrusted with the safety of the patient, Mrs. Methurn's first care was to send the two overtaken watchers to rest. She then persuaded Alice to swallow the potion she prepared for her, and Ethel sat beside her, gently stroking her feverish hands, until its sedative effects began to tell upon her.

At length the lips ceased their half inarticulate mutterings, the wild eyes closed in slumber, and the two sat in almost breathless silence to watch the crisis which Mrs. Methurn saw must occur in that sleep. Alice would awake to life, or never again unclothe those flashing orbs upon the scenes of earth.

It was a painful responsibility which Mrs. Methurn had taken upon herself; but with her knowledge of disease, she saw that it was the only chance for life that remained to the sick girl, and she unhesitatingly adopted it. It was a sorrowful watch, and to her dying day Ethel never forgot those hours so fraught with suffering to herself, and anguish to others. A dark cloud, from which she could see no loophole of escape, encompassed all that was dear to her, and her chosen friend lay before her almost in the embrace of death.

But for her trusting heart there was one refuge; she prayed fervently to the All Father, and the abiding faith which was the guide of her life brought comfort to her even amid the ruin and desolation that had fallen on all connected with her.

The hours passed slowly on, and more than once the restless and unhappy father came softly into the room to look upon the pallid face of the sleeper, and ask, in perturbed whispers, if life had not already passed from her worn



frame. They could scarcely see that Alice breathed, but on holding a mirror before her lips, the faint mist that gathered upon it showed that life was not yet extinct.

Mrs. Methurn prepared nourishment herself, and kept it in readiness to administer as soon as she awoke, if she ever did so. The muffled roll of carriages in the street below penetrated to the room, but the senses of Alice were steeped in too deep oblivion to be conscious of the noise.

Time seemed to linger in that darkened apartment, and the watchers began to fear that the spirit of Alice would pass away in that death-like slumber, when her heavy eyelids were with difficulty lifted, and a voice that sounded faint and far away, came from her parched lips:

"I am thirsty—give me drink, or I shall die."

Ethel sprang up, held the nourishing draught to her lips, while her aunt supported her head, and after swallowing a small portion her eyes wearily closed, and she again slumbered. But her sleep was now more natural, and a soft dew broke out over her parched skin.

"The crisis is past, and life is left. With extreme care, we may raise her again," whispered Mrs. Methurn, and Ethel resigned her place beside the bed, and softly glided from the room, to give this welcome assurance to the anxious father.

She found Mr. Digby seated near his daughter's door, for he could not attempt to rest himself while so terrible a dread hung over him. He eagerly scanned the face of the young messenger, read hope in its expression, and rapidly said:

"She will live! You could not wear that look if my child is dying."

"She is better; I believe she will now be restored to you. She has taken nourishment, and sleeps more calmly."

He drew Ethel toward him, bowed his gray head upon

her shoulder, and wept tears of thankfulness. When more composed, he said:

"To your aunt and yourself I owe the life of my child. I did not know what to do for her, but you have saved her, and henceforth you shall be to me as my nearest kindred. Oh, Ethel, if my Alice had died, I should have been desolate indeed!"

He drew her away, and entering the sitting-room with her, more calmly spoke:

"I have been so occupied with my own misery, that I have not inquired into the causes that brought you hither. Some calamity must have happened to Sir Hugh, or you would not be here alone. Where is he? Has he fled with Vernor, and left you and Mrs. Methurn to bear the burden of what they led you to do?"

"Sir Hugh has gone on the long journey we must all eventually take," she mournfully replied. "Vernor was brought to town with us. He was placed in prison, but a bribe induced Kirke to permit my aunt and myself to seek protection with you, till we are summoned before Jeffreys."

"What do you mean, my child? Sir Hugh dead, and Vernor at the Priory! I thought he was still at large, and would probably escape to the continent."

Ethel rapidly gave him an account of what had happened at the Priory within the last twenty-four hours. Mr. Digby listened with deep interest, and sighing heavily, said:

"Poor Sir Hugh! his end expiates much of the evil of his life. Excuse me, my dear, but your guardian was not among the best of men. I am afraid this unhappy affair will ruin Vernor, for now the baronet is gone, the estate will be sequestered, and nothing will be left for him. Thank heaven! it will be in my power to befriend your aunt and yourself, for aside from the fine that will be

exacted for my daughter's share in the ovation to Monmouth, I have reason to believe that I shall escape with the sacrifice of a few thousand pounds to the court sycophants who are greedily appropriating the spoils exacted from those who took part in the late rebellion who are rich enough to purchase immunity. You will find it hard to believe, Ethel, but the king has granted to the maids of honor to the queen the money which will be exacted from the parents of the children who walked in the procession that day. They will send an agent here to collect it, and they demand seven thousand pounds as the penalty. But they will never be able to wring such a sum as that from us."

Ethel grew pale.

"That would be over three hundred pounds for each one. I can never raise the half of that sum for myself, and if I cannot, what will be done with me?"

"Your property is more than sufficient to bear such a drain; or was it all given up to Vernor when they made you his wife? If so, I am afraid that it will all be merged in one common ruin."

"My uncle's will gave all I possessed to Vernor on the day of our marriage. I have had a liberal allowance, but no settlement was made on me."

"Is it even so, my poor child? Then you must be my daughter, and here yourself and your aunt shall find a home as long as you will consent to remain in it. I shall speak with Mrs. Methurn, and endeavor to induce her to listen to such arrangements as I wish to make."

"Dear Mr. Digby, you are too kind; but I can think of nothing for the future while Vernor's fate is so uncertain. What do you think will be his sentence?"

His countenance changed, and he abruptly asked:

"Is Vernor dear to your heart, Ethel? Has he made any effort to win the love of the child he lured into so unsuitable a marriage when she should have been at school?"

Ethel turned her face away, and after a pause said, in a faint voice:

"The words spoken on our bridal day form the only bond between Vernor and myself. He has seldom shown any preference for me, and I have had the mortifying conviction forced on me that my fortune was the sole inducement to him to marry me."

"Then you do not—you cannot love him, Ethel. Answer me truly, child, for I am your friend—and I will do all I can to save you from the sad fate he has given you."

"I have been reared with Vernor; I have from childhood regarded him as a brother; but the love that should unite those who pledge themselves to each other for life does not exist between him and myself. I have long regretted that I was silly and childish enough to be led away by the fine presents he made me, till I—I thought that I could love him."

"It was very natural, my dear. You were but a wee lassie when this wrong against you was consummated. But the calamities that have now overtaken you will lead to the severance of the tie that should never have been cemented."

"In what way, sir? Oh! not by the death of Vernor! Not by a death of violence! I would rather live a loveless life with him than have that befall him."

"My child, he has sown the wind, and he must reap the whirlwind. Death, or transportation, will be his fate. The last is even worse, in my opinion, than the first."

Ethel covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly. She at length sobbed:

"Poor Vernor, if he is sent to a foreign land I will go with him. If he desires it, I will be his companion—his slave."

"He will not wish it, Ethel; neither will it be permitted by the authorities. Immunity can be purchased for you,

but such means of escape are not open to Vernor. He was the private secretary of Monmouth, was with him in all his wanderings here, and he will be condemned to a very severe penalty. If life is spared, he will probably be sent to the West Indies, and sold as a slave himself."

She uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Oh, no—no—death before that! The judges will surely never be so cruel!"

The lips of the listener curled bitterly.

"Child, the man who is coming hither to sit in judgment on these misguided people is more like a fiend from the Inferno than a human being. Jeffreys luxuriates in crime; the cries of anguish are music to his ears; the scent of blood incense to his nostrils. He will never show leniency to one so deeply implicated in the rebellion as Vernor was. Yet his violence will give you back the freedom which will enable you to find a happier future than Vernor could have given you."

"At that price I do not wish it. I would rather hug my chains to my heart till they eat in, and canker there, than owe my release to such a crime against humanity. Oh! Mr. Digby, can nothing be done to save him? The judge is mercenary—will it indeed be impossible to purchase a pardon for him?"

"If Sir Hugh had lived, something might have been attempted; but now the estate will be seized, and Vernor can claim nothing from it. He has dissipated your fortune, and he has not the means to pay for a pardon, even if it were possible to buy one. These are hard things to say to you, Ethel, but you should understand your true position, and if I have not misjudged you, you will have firmness to bear it. You will be extricated from the power of Vernor who, in his course toward you, has been swayed by self-interest alone. He has impoverished you, and thus put it

out of your power to assist him. Let him embrace the fate he has prepared for himself, and take some thought for your own welfare. Be assured that *he* will never suffer you to stand in his way."

"It may be so, sir, but his father gave me a home beneath his roof; he was not unkind to me, and—and I at least owe allegiance to him to whom my hand was plighted. Mr. Digby, will a free-born Englishman dare to sentence one of his own race to be sold as a slave, and sent to that dreadful climate? Poor Vernor will surely die there."

"He deserves to, if he has not the courage to die as a brave man should," replied he, with some warmth. "Vernor may purchase his life by treachery to those he has been leagued with; but if he does, he is unworthy of a better fate. Many ship loads of prisoners have already been sent to Jamaica. Interest was made to have them sent to Virginia or New Jersey, but that was refused, because there they would have found sympathy and assistance. They are transported to a deadly climate that they may not escape the death doom which even Jeffreys dare not award to such numbers as have been tried before him. My dear Ethel, take my advice, and be grateful that your fate is severed from Vernor's by the sentence that exiles him. You have suffered enough through him; you are but a child yet, and life will be fairer to you when he is removed from your path."

Ethel could not bring herself to take this view of her position, though it was the true one, and she felt a little hurt with the frank, free-spoken man who gave her this sensible advice.

Mr. Digby was an honorable, high-toned gentleman, but he was impetuous of temper, and his indignation was easily aroused. He knew much of Vernor's career, and he felt the deepest sympathy for the inexperienced child who had been sacrificed to his cupidity. In Ethel's frequent visits to his

daughter, he had been charmed by her ingenuous truthfulness of nature, and he warmly encouraged the intimacy which grew up between her and Alice.

Sir Hugh and himself had never been on more than friendly terms with each other, and for the courtesy that was extended to him he was indebted to the interest his ward inspired and the respectful admiration Mr. Digby had long cherished for Mrs. Methurn.

His wife had been dead many years, and until he met with the gentle and refined widow, Mr. Digby had seen no woman to whom he would have been willing to entrust his darling Alice. Her tender care for her adopted daughter had first attracted him toward her, and had he hoped for success in his suit, he would long since have offered Mrs. Methurn his hand. But she met him only as a valued friend, and he feared to disturb the pleasant relations between them by aspiring to a more tender place in her regard.

Thus matters stood when Mrs. Methurn was forced by the dire calamities which had overtaken her to seek refuge and protection beneath his roof. This was no time to think of marriage, when the angel of Death still hovered over his household, and the land was filled with desolate homes and bleeding hearts; but if Alice was restored to him; if peace again blessed the country, he would speak; he would take the object of his preference from the dreary future that lay before her, and give a safe and happy home to herself and the child of her adoption.

With such thoughts filling his breast, Mr. Digby at length laid down to rest, after many sad nights and days of watching. He soon slept that heavy sleep which comes from exhaustion, while Ethel wept bitter tears over the fate of the unhappy Vernor.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## VERNOR RECEIVES A VISITOR.

TIME passed on, and Alice slowly struggled back to life with many fluctuations of hope and fear.

All access to Vernor was denied to his friends, and Mr. Digby could only ascertain that he had not been thrown in the common prison. It was known that he possessed information as to the extent of the conspiracy against the government which those in power were most anxious to secure, and it was not their policy to risk his death by exposing him to the infectious malady that raged among the prisoners, before gaining what they were so desirous of obtaining. Their object once attained, his fate would become a matter of as much indifference as that of the scores who were daily led to execution.

Vernor was fully aware of this, and he tenaciously preserved the secret that was of such vital importance to himself. He baffled all the efforts made to treat with him by preserving a sullen silence, for he knew the treachery of those in whose power he was thrown, and he reserved the communication he fully intended to make, as the price of his own life. If he was induced to make a premature disclosure he knew that pledges would be broken on the side of the court, for he understood the character of James too well not to be aware that one so deeply implicated with Monmouth as himself would never be allowed to escape if any means could be found to condemn him.

The room in which he was confined was in the jailer's house, and had sometimes been used for the incarceration of persons of more importance than the common class of criminals. It was so well secured that there was no possibility

of escape; the walls within were plated with iron, and the windows were heavily grated; and hour by hour Vernor paced to and fro within its narrow limits like an enraged wild animal, bitterly cursing the fate which had led him hither.

Misfortune did not improve this votary of self-indulgence, and the days he passed in that weary solitude, with the doom of death looming before him, hardened his reckless nature, and rendered him ready to embrace any chance of escape from the fate that menaced him.

Gerald set out for Taunton as soon as the letter of his mother detailing the calamities which had fallen on the family reached him, and her sad heart was cheered by his presence, though he could give her little hope as to the result of his cousin's trial.

Gerald had matured into a noble and true man, with that conscientious sense of responsibility to a higher power which is the best balance to character. His large, clear, gray eyes had the serene expression of conscious power, for he felt within himself the stirrings of a great intellect, and he knew that if life and health were granted to him he would make a name for himself, which posterity would not willingly let die.

Young as he was, Mr. Clyde, recognizing his great legal abilities, had already associated him with himself in the defence of several important criminal cases. He was gifted with brilliant eloquence, and the silvery periods that flowed from his persuasive tongue often moved the jury to tears.

After many difficulties had been overcome, Gerald succeeded in obtaining access to Vernor, as his counsel in the approaching trial; but he found his cousin cold and uncommunicative; he seemed unwilling to owe his acquittal to the efforts of Gerald in his defence, if such a result could be hoped for from the most strenuous exertions in his favor.

The young advocate returned from the interview disheartened and oppressed, and when Ethel eagerly inquired into the state of Vernor's mind, he could give her little comfort or encouragement for the future.

In her deep sorrow Ethel seemed to Gerald even more attractive than in her sweet childhood, and he resolutely held himself aloof from the fascination of her presence as much as he consistently could. He often found her with his mother, and the deep interest with which she inspired him was unconsciously betrayed in his manner, until Ethel's own heart took the alarm; for she felt that this renewal of daily intercourse was reviving her early feeling of preference for him, and she knew that she was no longer free to love him. She soon found a pretext of retiring to the room of Alice when he called, and Gerald understood and appreciated her delicate sense of propriety.

He felt that it was painful to see her daily, and know that she was beyond his reach, yet he had come there with the hope of being able to save the life which stood between her and himself; he would use his utmost efforts to do so, and he did not despair of ultimate success.

Vernor had been in prison a week when, late at night, he heard the grating of the lock of his cell door and the jailer came in. He spoke in guarded tones:

"I am glad that you are still up, Mr. Methurn, for there is a lady here who has something of importance to say to you. I brought her here at this hour, because it must never be known that she has visited you. You understand?"

"Yes, I fully comprehend that you have been heavily bribed to admit her," he sardonically replied; "but I am not going to betray you. Any interruption to the solitude of this dreary place is welcome. Let her come in."

The man nodded, stepped to the door, and ushered in a

tall figure in the deepest mourning, with a heavy crape veil falling nearly to her feet. Vernor had expected to see either his aunt or Ethel, but his visitor was much taller than either of them, and he said:

"There must be some mistake; this lady cannot wish to see me."

A sweet sad voice came from beneath the shrouding folds of crape, which said:

"You are certainly Mr. Vernor Methurn, and I must see you alone a few moments."

She made a slight gesture of command toward the jailer, who bowed respectfully and left the room, carefully closing the door behind him. Vernor drew forward the only chair the apartment contained, and she sank upon it with a weary sigh. The curiosity of the young man was aroused, and he impatiently waited for her to lift her veil and reveal her features. There was something familiar in the outline of the figure before him, but he could not recall when or where he had before seen it. She presently said:

"You do not recognize me, Mr. Methurn? Yet how should you know the phantom of what I lately was? Behold the work of the few past weeks of suffering and despair."

With a quick motion she threw aside the crape that concealed her features, and he beheld a face so white—so fixed in its expression of despair, that one might have deemed it that of the dead, but for the large wild eyes that gleamed from it with a restless fire that seemed bordering upon insanity.

Vernor beheld the ruin of a beautiful woman on whom he had last gazed in the pride of ambition and passion. He exclaimed:

"Lady Wentworth! How came you here? What brings you to see me?"

"I am permitted to come hither through the compassion

of the jailer, who was once in my father's service. He listened to my prayer to see you, and you know why I have come, Mr. Methurn. They wait at Whitehall for that which you alone can furnish to give a color of justice to the inhuman sacrifice they meditate. The king will not condemn his nephew to death unless that last aggravation is given. You have in your possession a paper prepared by Monmouth's own hand, in which he accuses James of the murder of the late king. I came hither to entreat you by all his past kindness not to destroy your friend and benefactor."

Vernor's face did not change; it wore the impassive coldness which always characterized its expression when his course was determined on. He calmly said:

"I am sorry, madam, that you should have taken the trouble to apply to me for what is no longer in my possession."

"What has then become of it?" she gaspingly asked. "Oh, man—cruel, heartless man, if you have given this up for your own behoof; if you have sacrificed that noble—noble head to serve your own purposes, the curse of blood will yet fall upon you. I denounce it against you: I will cry to Heaven for retribution upon you, even as David cried to the Lord for vengeance upon his enemies; and mark you, *his prayers were always answered*, because they invoked a righteous punishment."

Vernor saw that the speaker was half maddened, but his respect for her sufferings did not prevent him from replying with a sneer:

"Truly, madam, your prayers are uncalled for, for I am in as evil a case as any man need care to get in. The devil himself could not do me a worse turn than I did for myself when I joined the cause of Monmouth. As to the paper you refer to, I did not consider it of much importance, and

I kept it about my person. The manifesto put forth under the Duke's authority, distinctly accuses his uncle of many crimes as dark as the one you speak of—"

"But," she interrupted, "Monmouth can reasonably deny all knowledge of what was in it, for it was drawn up by Ferguson; but if he is known to have reiterated the charge himself, it would be fatal to him."

There was a faint accent of regret in the tones of Vernor, as he replied:

"I am sorry that I did not make the distinction myself, but I neglected to do so. When I concealed other papers of importance relative to those who were implicated in the late rebellion, I overlooked this one. It was stitched in the lining of my coat; and only yesterday Kirke ordered a stricter examination of my garments to be made in the hope of finding a clue to those from whom money can be extorted as the price of their safety. He found the paper you wish, and by this time it is doubtless on its way to Whitehall."

There was a faint cry, and Lady Wentworth sunk back insensible. The jailer came in, and after throwing water upon her rigid face, she slowly recovered. She breathed a long, shuddering sigh, and after a few moments arose, drew her sable cloud around her, and spoke in strangely broken tones:

"The friend that has trusted you, you have betrayed to death. Had you been faithful to the man you professed to love, that paper would have been destroyed at the risk of your own life. I tell you, Vernor Methurn, that I would have made you rich; I would have given you all—*all* save a bare pittance, from my great wealth, to have made it mine. You are mercenary; you are extravagant; I would have gratified your avarice to the utmost limits of my fortune if you had put it in my power to save him whom I love beyond expression. Now, the scaffold is reared; his head

will fall, and *you* will be his executioner. You will also be mine, for I shall not long survive him."

Vernor's irritable temper was aroused by these reproaches, and he haughtily said:

"If you were to accuse *yourself* as his destroyer it would be nearer the truth. Madam, who tempted Monmouth to leave a safe asylum but *you*? Whose ambition soared to kingly state for him but *yours*? As to your offers of wealth, a man who expects to be allowed but a few more weeks of life can well afford to despise them."

"True—true," she vaguely muttered; "I tempted him—I urged him on, and now, I can but die with him."

She made a slight gesture of farewell, and leaning heavily upon the arm of the jailer, left the room.

A few more days and Monmouth perished on the scaffold, from which his vindictive uncle was resolute he should not escape. The broken heart which had clung to him with such passionate fondness lingered on yet a few months. In the spring of the following year, the parish church near which was situated the ancient and stately seat of the Wentworths was unclosed to receive the coffin of the young Baroness of Wentworth Nettlestide, over which a magnificent monument was erected; but in the neighboring woodland was for years one of far deeper interest to those who visited the spot—her name carved upon a tree by the hand she loved too well.

Vernor had spoken but a portion of the truth to Lady Wentworth. In an interview which took place between himself and Kirke before they left the Priory, he had surrendered the important paper as the price of better treatment than was accorded to those implicated in the late rising. To wring from him the names of the men of wealth who were secretly pledged to join Monmouth's cause was now the object of the two relentless harpies who had been



sent to Somersetshire to spread terror and desolation in their path. But Vernor was resolute to yield them up only in the last extremity, as he firmly believed that his life would be granted in return for the information he could give.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE TRIAL.

THE dreaded assizes came on. Jeffreys entered Taunton in the usual state, accompanied by the other judges, all robed in scarlet, and escorted by a troop of horse. The pageant filled all hearts with dread, in place of being, as heretofore, an occasion of festivity. He issued orders to have the court room hung with red, as a hint that no mercy was to be shown to those who had dared to revolt against the rule of James Stuart.

It is not our purpose to describe the atrocious and disgraceful scenes that were enacted within its walls, nor to dwell upon the judicial murders perpetrated by this merciless man. History relates them in all their horrors, and in its pages the name of the chief actor in them is bequeathed to eternal infamy.

Vernor was brought up for trial on the third day of the assizes; Gerald appeared to defend him, but the judge, after listening to the charges against the prisoner, scarcely allowed his counsel to speak a few sentences before he roared out:

"Stop that, sir. How dare you attempt to defend such a double-dyed villain as that? Take care, Mr. Advocate, or I shall order you under arrest yourself. It is treason to speak in defence of a man who is known to have been the

personal friend of Monmouth—who landed on these shores with him in armed rebellion against the king, and who is no doubt now plotting new mischief. But I'll take care of that; I'll send him where he may raise an insurrection among the fiends of the Inferno. I'll deal with him, I'll warrant."

Jeffreys' inflamed visage, coarse features and air of swaggering authority, coupled with such insulting language, were a strange sight in an English court of justice. Gerald respectfully remonstrated:

"But, my lord, the law of the land guarantees a man a fair trial for his life, and you refuse to hear any extenuating circumstances. I wish to——"

"Go to the d—l with your wishes! What do I care for them? I am here to punish traitors, not to hear them defended, and that man at the bar is one of the vilest among them. Speak another word, at your peril! A pretty pass I should come to if every young jackanapes of a lawyer is to take up my time listening to his balderdash. The evidence is dead against the prisoner. Jurymen, you know your duty, and, mark me, you shall perform it."

Frightened by his menacing tones, the jury hurried out to go through the farce of consulting together, when it was evident that the fate of the prisoner was already decided. Gerald again attempted to speak a few words, but, aroused to a pitch of insane fury, Jeffreys ordered him to be removed from the court.

This mockery of a trial was but a specimen of hundreds of others, from which men were hurried to their fatal doom. The jury remained out longer than the judge deemed necessary, and he again stormed out:

"The case does not admit of five minutes' deliberation. Go to them, Mr. Sheriff, and tell them my time is not to be trifled with in such a manner."

Thus pressed on, the jury returned, looking scared and

bewildered. The foreman did not immediately speak, and Jeffreys thundered out:

"Come, sir—what have you to say? Are you dumb, or have you lost the little sense nature bestowed on you?"

"My lord," stammered the man thus addressed—"we find the prisoner guilty, but recommend him to the mercy of the tribunal."

"Mercy," repeated the judge, with an ominous grin. "That's an attribute I don't patronize where rebels are concerned. You attend to your duty, and I'll attend to mine."

He drew on the cap of condemnation, arose and said:

"I sentence you, Vernor Methurn, to be taken to the place of execution to-morrow at eleven o'clock, and there hanged by the neck until you are dead—dead—dead, and may all traitors meet with a like fate—Amen."

Vernor heard the sentence with more equanimity than might have been expected. He became slightly pale, but he did not remove his eyes from the face of the speaker, and he merely bowed his head in submission to the sentence.

He looked around the court as he arose to leave, and his eyes encountered those of Melchoir, who had purposely placed himself where he must see him. There was a flash of exultation in those of the Gipsy, which was replied to by one of scorn and loathing from the condemned man.

Gerald was waiting for him at the door, and he was permitted by the jailer to accompany him to his prison. When they were alone Gerald said with emotion:

"I would gladly have served you to the best of my ability, Vernor, but this brutal creature who has been sent hither to sit in judgment on better men than himself, would not permit it. My heart is wrung with sorrow and indignation at witnessing such a prostitution of the forms of justice."

"I knew that you would not be permitted to help me, Gerald. They have their own ends to gain by condemning me,

but I have the means of purchasing my life from them. If I cannot pay money to the mercenary wretches, I can point out to them those who can, on whom they have hitherto been unable to pounce."

"And will you—*you*, a Methurn—do this, even to save your life?" asked Gerald, in an excited tone. "Oh, Vernor, even death were preferable to such dishonor."

"If *your* life were the penalty, perhaps you would think differently," he sullenly replied. "I do not give over any one to the executioner. I merely surrender into the hands of these cormorants the power to extort money from those who merit punishment as much as I do. If I comply with their demands I shall be permitted to go into temporary exile. Ethel I give up to you. I have never loved the poor child, and now that her ruin can be laid at my door, I like her less than ever. Her presence would be an everlasting reproach to me; you can now easily get her released from her bonds, and I hope you will be happy together. She knows that I am not in love with her; that I have scarcely the means to live myself without taking on myself the burden of her support."

"She has property in Holland, and she relies on that as a means of subsistence for you both."

Vernor uttered a loud whistle.

"That is moonshine. The fact is, I led Sir Hugh to believe that the real estate she inherited had not been tampered with. I had my own reasons for doing so; but I have really mortgaged the whole of it, and my creditors will seize on it as soon as they hear of what has happened here."

"Then of all the property bequeathed to her by her uncle, there is absolutely nothing left?" asked Gerald, in alarm. "Oh, Vernor, how could you act thus, by a minor thrown so completely in your power?"

"If you had been in my place, with the temptations that

were thrown in my way, you would have done no better. I lost at the gaming table; but now I understand the tricks of the gentry that fleeced me, and when I have a chance I will return the compliment. But living by one's wits is rather a precarious method of getting along, and I cannot think of burdening myself with a wife to whom I am more than indifferent. If Lord Clifton were to die, I might consent to keep my troth, if I could make my peace with the government. Do you know if he is likely to step out of the world before long?"

Gerald looked at the fair, handsome face before him, with its light blue eyes, and sunny hair; its expression of reckless defiance; and he felt that words would be thrown away on one so callous to all the tender feelings that ordinarily sway mankind. Vernor thought of himself alone, and he was careless as to who might know it.

His cousin gravely replied:

"Lord Clifton's health has improved of late. He was married last month to a lady to whom he has long been deeply attached. His father refused his sanction to the marriage, and it was deferred till after his death. Thus Ethel has little prospect of now succeeding to her grandfather's estates."

"So much the worse for me," said Vernor, indifferently. "The thing is settled then. You may take Ethel yourself and live like Darby and Joan together; she'll suit you as a wife much better than such a wild good-for-naught as I am; and I know very well that you have always had a jealous corner in your heart because I appropriated your Lady Bird. But there is no harm done. Ethel never cared for me half as much as for you, though the poor thing has such straight-laced ideas of duty, that she tried to do so with all her heart."

Gerald made no reply to this, but after a pause said:

"Vernor, do you know that to raise the fine which will

be exacted of Ethel, she will be compelled to mortgage the annuity left her by her grandfather, and thus leave herself no means of support for several years to come? Is there absolutely nothing left of her fortune?"

"Nothing—have I not told you that 'tis all gone? Let her apply to her uncle—in such a strait he will surely help her."

"I afraid he will not. My earnings as yet scarcely enable me to live, and my mother will have to pay a fine herself which will cripple her resources."

Vernor fretfully said:

"What is the use of troubling a man in my position with all these annoying details? I am ruined—a prisoner with the doom of death hanging over me; is not that enough for me to bear, without having other people's troubles thrust on me? Ethel is better off than I am. She'll find friends to help her. I am as sorry as you can be that the money is all gone; but it is a stubborn fact that it is all spent, and talking won't alter it."

At that moment the jailer entered and warned Gerald that the time allowed for the interview had expired. He arose, and as he wrung the hand of the prisoner, whispered:

"Dear Vernor, be true to yourself, and do not disgrace the name you bear, by treachery."

Vernor clasped his hands around his throat, and recklessly said:

"I couldn't stand that, Gerald. Don't ask me to let my neck be squeezed to save the purses of a few rich men from a similar process."

He laughed aloud at the expression of his cousin's face, and went on:

"Tell Ethel that I have not played my last card yet, and it is sure to win. Since she no longer represents the queen of diamonds, I leave her to you as the queen of hearts.

Good bye, Gerald; don't look so shocked. Nature made me a gay galliard, and she did not encumber me with a superfluity of sentiment, as she did you and my quondam lady love."

The door closed upon him, and Gerald took his way to the residence of Mr. Digby in a strange whirl of feeling. The hardness shown by Vernor amazed and shocked him, in spite of his previous knowledge of his character; his own high-toned and sensitive nature was so different, that he was at a loss to comprehend the windings of the subtle and unscrupulous spirit that swayed his cousin. The little feeling Vernor had betrayed for Ethel, alienated the sympathy of Gerald from him more than all the acts of his life of which he had been cognizant. He began to feel with Mr. Digby, that if she could sever herself from him altogether, it would be far better for her future happiness.

The news of Vernor's condemnation had already reached those who were so deeply interested in his fate, and Gerald found his mother and Ethel in the greatest distress. What he communicated to them with reference to Vernor's hopes, did not tend much to lighten their affliction.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### DAWN OF A NEW DAY.

THE night was passed in fluctuations of hope and fear; but at an early hour in the morning a letter from Vernor was brought to Ethel, which contained these words:

"I have made my terms, Lady Bird, and I shall be free to leave this wretched country. The hangman will not get

me yet, nor must you blame me too severely for the course I have taken to save myself from his tender ministrations. I have perilled no man's life; I have only used the means in my hands to save my own, and it is a false idea of honor that will condemn me.

"In place of being executed this morning, some meaner man, already condemned, will take my place, and I shall be removed to the sea coast, where I am to be allowed to escape to a foreign shore. Forget me, Ethel; let me no longer be the shadow on your path. I absolve you from all allegiance to myself, and Gerald can easily have you freed by such legal forms as may be necessary to render our ill-starred marriage null and void.

"Do not attempt to see me; you will only subject yourself to insult and failure, for a meeting will not be permitted. I shall be removed from Taunton to-day, and in twenty-four hours I hope to be safe upon the sea, free!—free! Oh, how my heart bounds at the thought of escape from this weary bondage.

"Do not distress yourself about my condition. I shall have funds furnished me for my immediate expenses, as that was a part of my bargain with those I have dealt with in this affair. Once on the continent, I can support myself easily enough. I shall become a citizen of the world, and trouble you no more.

"Remember me to my aunt and Gerald, and tell the latter it will be useless to attempt to see me again; neither do I wish it. Forgive me, Ethel, for all the wrong I have done you, and let the restoration of your freedom atone for it.

"VERNOR METHURN."

In spite of her misgivings as to the questionable means by which Vernor had escaped his impending doom, the heart of Ethel was lightened of a heavy load, and for a few mo-

ments she only thought of the two great facts his letter revealed—Vernor would evade a shameful death, and she would be forever released from him.

The letter had been brought in by Gerald, and he stood beside a window while she read it, unwilling to watch the variations of her face while thus occupied. She offered it to him in silence, for at that moment her emotion was too great for words. When he had glanced rapidly over it, Gerald drew near, and sat down beside her.

"What do you think now, Ethel? Do you still consider it your duty to follow a man who thus throws you off! Does your heart cling to him, Lady Bird?"

"Oh no!—no!" she impulsively exclaimed. "When Vernor was first arrested he told me he would release me, and I will own to you that this assurance was the solitary gleam of brightness left me then. But on reflection, I did not think it right to abandon him in his wretchedness and desolation. I would have sacrificed myself, if I could have been of any benefit to him. I thought that if he escaped, the property I still possess in Holland would be a support to us, and it was my duty to share it with him. I believed he would not consent to accept the last remnant of my estate unless I had done so—and—and——"

She paused at a loss for words to explain her real feelings, and Gerald spoke with some bitterness:

"What will you think, Ethel, when I tell you that even that pittance is gone? sacrificed like the rest to Vernor's improvidence."

He had expected her to show regret at this announcement, but a bright expression of joy flashed over her face.

"Thank Heaven! then I can accept his decision without a pang. I have nothing to give him; he cares not for me, and my conscience will not accuse me of wrong toward him if I accept the freedom he restores to me. Dear Gerald, what do you think?"

"That you are an angel of forgiveness, Ethel. Vernor has ruined you; he has betrayed the sacred trust reposed in him, and you, poor child, were thinking only of him; were ready to sacrifice your life to a man who has shown the most shameful disregard of your feelings and interests. Let him go on the way he has prepared for himself. I am afraid his course will not be a reputable one, and I thank God with my whole heart that you will be severed from him, even at the sacrifice of your fortune."

Ethel bowed her head upon his hands as she had done in their old childish days, and wept a few tears of sweet emotion. She presently looked up and said:

"Let the money go, Gerald; I care little for it, for it has brought me only unhappiness."

"But, Ethel, how are you now to meet the demand that will be made on you in a few days? It is known that William Penn, the celebrated Quaker and philanthropist, is on his way here as the agent of the maids of honor to whom the fines were given that are to be levied on the unfortunate children who appeared in the procession that welcomed Monmouth. It is a singular errand for him to come on, and I do not understand his motives for accepting such a commission."

"Be sure they are good ones, Gerald, or such a man would never have undertaken it. As you are a lawyer, tell me how am I to raise money from my annuity."

"You can mortgage it for a few years; but what are you to live on in the meantime? If I had a home, however humble, my mother and yourself should share it with me; but you know how poor a young lawyer struggling into practice must be."

"Yes—I understand all that; but if the fine is not excessive, I could retain a moiety of my income to supply my actual wants, and I could learn to be very economical. Do

you think the government will really exact seven thousand pounds from us? If so much is demanded, I do not know how I shall escape outlawry."

"It is a shameful fraud!" burst forth Gerald; "and it will cover the King with infamy, that with his sanction such a sum is required from irresponsible children acting under the orders of their teacher. And the queen, a woman! permits her own personal attendants to make a prey of her unfortunate subjects. It will be a dark page in our history that tells of this transaction."

He arose and walked the room in irrepressible excitement. At this moment Mrs. Methurn entered and asked:

"Have you been able to see Vernor yet, my son?"

"I have been to the prison, mother, but he refused to receive me. A letter for Ethel was given me which she will show you."

Mrs. Methurn hastily ran her eyes over the page, and, sighing wearily, said:

"It was a terrible alternative, and I dare not judge him harshly in such extremity as he was reduced to. Ethel, darling, you will now remain with me."

"Always—always; I have been wretched at the thought that I might be compelled to leave you. But, aunty, I think we should make an effort to see poor Vernor again, even if he has forbidden it."

"You forget, my love, that we are prisoners in the house, and the sentinel stationed at the door will not permit us to leave it without an order from his superior officer. If Gerald can obtain one for us to visit the prison, I will gladly accompany you there."

"I have already applied for one, and been rudely refused. Vernor will be hurried away at an early hour, and no opportunity will be granted his friends to see him. I am going back now, and I shall remain on the watch near the

jail, and endeavor to gain a few words with him as he passes out."

Mr. Digby was summoned to the council that was then held, but as he was also a prisoner in his own house, he could do nothing to aid them in the accomplishment of the wish that lay nearest their hearts at that moment: to look upon the fugitive once more, and express their interest in his future welfare.

Much had already been conceded to Mr. Digby in permitting him to remain beneath his own roof, and he knew it would be useless to attempt to gain leave for any member of his family to go abroad under any pretext whatever.

Disappointed in this hope, Ethel wrote a few lines to Vernor, expressing her interest in all that concerned him with the freedom of a sister for a dearly beloved brother. This she confided to Gerald, and he departed on his errand. He was absent several hours, and on his return stated that he had not been able to see his cousin at all. Vernor had been removed by a private entrance to the jail yard, and only as the carriage was driving away did he discover the ruse that had been practised.

"He did not get my letter, then?" said Ethel.

"I gave that to the jailor myself, who promised to deliver it; but he refused to admit me, as he said it was not the wish of the prisoner to see any of his friends."

"He is gone," said Mr. Digby, "and I, for one, am glad of it. Vernor has shown at the last that he is utterly indifferent to those he leaves behind him, and you will all do well to let him go on the path he has chosen without wasting a regret upon him. He can take care of himself, and he will be sure to do so."

Each one present felt that he spoke the truth, yet a yearning tenderness toward the poor wanderer filled at least two hearts near him, and many a thought was cast after the

absent one, many a prayer breathed for his safety and well-being.

By this time Alice was sufficiently recovered to leave her room, and she now came in looking delicate and languid, but quite able to take a little daily exercise. This could only be obtained by walking in the garden attached to the rear of the house, for, ill as she had been, permission could not be obtained for her to take an airing in the carriage.

Her father hastened to sustain her steps, and Gerald placed a chair for her near the fire which a cool September day rendered necessary. After a few moments, Mr. Digby asked Gerald to accompany him to his library as he had something of importance to say to him, and the ladies were left together.

Mrs. Methurn had drawn near Miss Digby, and she fondly leaned her head upon her shoulder and softly said:

"But for you I must have died. Let me call you mother, for I love you as one. Oh! if you would be one to me—if you would give the dear hand that holds mine to one who will value it even more highly than I do, you would make me the happiest girl in the whole world."

Mrs. Methurn flushed slightly and said, with a smile:

"Your gratitude exaggerates the services I have been enabled to render you, Alice. Love me as much as you will, for I place you in my heart next to my own children."

"Then you will be my mother? You will not refuse the station my father is anxious to offer you. Ethel shall be my sister, and we will never more be parted. Oh! dear Mrs. Methurn, shall it not be so?"

"Alice, do not let your affection for me lead you to speak of what you do not understand. Your father has been a good friend to me; but he has said nothing to induce me to believe that he regards me in any other light."

"Because until now he could not see his way clearly out

of all the difficulties that have lately surrounded us. But he has received the assurance that the sacrifice of some money will smooth the way before him, and the sum demanded he can easily pay. He is speaking with your son now on this very subject, and I thought I would prepare you for what is coming. Oh! Mrs. Methurn, if you only knew how good and noble my dear father is, you could not find it in your heart to refuse him."

Mrs. Methurn was not as much surprised at this revelation as Alice might have imagined. The exuberant gratitude of Mr. Digby for her kindness to his motherless child had been expressed in such terms as sometimes induced her to think that he regarded her as more than a friend; but the thought was repelled as soon as it intruded. She had never thought of making a second marriage, and, had her home at the Priory still been open to her, she would probably have declined his offer, advantageous as it certainly was. But, now, she scarcely felt as if she had the right to refuse an honorable alliance with a man of independent fortune and high character, who was certainly not disagreeable to her. She felt for him the highest esteem; he could give a home to Ethel, and probably advance the interests of Gerald, so she only pressed the hand that lay in her own, and, kissing the brow of Alice, gently said:

"When your father speaks on this subject himself it will be time enough for me to think of it."

A flash of joy brightened the black eyes of Alice, and she said:

"Only think rightly, Mrs. Methurn, and all will be well. Oh! he is the kindest father that ever a lonely girl had, and I am sure he will make the best of husbands if—if—"

"Hush, my dear. This subject is forbidden between us; I am sure your father does not wish you to do his wooing for him."



"Oh, no indeed. He can do it much better for himself, so I shall be quiet. I will not say another word. Ethel, dear, you do not know what an important affair we have been canvassing while you have been dreaming beside that window. The sun shines brightly; come with me into the garden for our daily walk."

The two girls left the room to get their hats and shawls, and Mrs. Methurn remained buried in a reverie, from which she was at length aroused by the entrance of her son, who sat down beside her and poured into her ear the same story Alice had lately told. Mr. Digby had requested him to ascertain if she would receive his proposals.

She looked up at him and asked:

"What are your feelings with reference to it, Gerald? Are you willing that I shall marry a second time?"

"Dear mother, so noble and true a man as this one should not be lightly refused. Mr. Digby has won my heart by the way he spoke of our dear Ethel. If you will give him the right to do so, he will adopt her as his child; he will settle the fine that must have impoverished her, and I am sure he will be everything to you that a husband should be to the woman he chooses as his wife."

"But I shall not permit him to do so much for Ethel. I have some money of my own, and with what she can raise on a portion of her annuity, it will suffice without taxing Mr. Digby. That he will regard her as his daughter is enough, though I would accept no man unless he were willing to do that."

"Then you will not refuse him?"

"No—I esteem him; I believe I can make his home happier, and I am grateful for the release from future care that he offers me. There is not much romance in this, you think: but remember we are both past the age of sentiment; yet we have feeling enough left to appreciate each other most kindly and tenderly."

"That is enough, mother mine, and I thank you for your decision. You will make a good man happy, and take from my mind the weight that has pressed heavily upon it since my uncle's death. I am as yet too poor to help you, though I hope the day is not far distant in which I shall win both fame and fortune. In the meantime, my struggle will be much lightened if I know that the two beings most dear to me on earth are comfortable and happy. Shall I go to Mr. Digby now?"

"Yes—do not keep him in suspense. Tell him that I will be a mother to his daughter."

In a few moments Mr. Digby joined her, and the two held a long and sensible conversation, in which they settled their future plans. At its close he said:

"I have strong hopes that I can retain Gerald near us. There is a flourishing law firm here, the head of which is an old friend of mine. Mr. Markham is infirm and anxious to retire from business. His junior partner will succeed him as head man, and I think I can place your son in the position Morton now holds. Gerald will thus step into a handsome practice at once."

She warmly thanked him, and was retiring when the two girls came in from their promenade. Alice glanced rapidly from one to the other and exclaimed:

"It is settled, then, and as I wished?"

"Yes, my daughter—salute your future mother; and you, Ethel, congratulate the father who adopts you as his child from this hour."

Ethel looked bewildered, for she had never expected such a donouement as this; but she approached Mr. Digby and gave him her hand. He drew her into his arms, and, pressing a paternal kiss upon her brow, said:

"You belong to me now, Ethel, for your adopted mother is to be my wife."

Her face flushed with a glow of happiness, and she ingenuously replied:

"Oh, sir, I am so grateful for this. You are like the good fairy, who comes in exactly at the right time to lift worthy people out of the slough of Despond. I have sometimes thought that you and aunty are so good, so noble, that you would be worthy of each other."

"I appreciate your judgment, my dear, and I am only too happy that your aunt thinks as I do, that we shall make a very pleasant family party."

In the meantime, Alice was kissing and caressing Mrs. Methurn, in her affectionate way, and promising that she would be the best and most dutiful of daughters to her.

It was arranged that the marriage was not to take place till the present difficulties were settled, and the curse of blood lifted from the land.

On the following morning there was an important arrival at Mr. Digby's. A man of noble physiognomy and stately presence, dressed in the drab garments and wide-brimmed hat of the Quakers, alighted from a handsome carriage and demanded admittance on business of importance with the master of the house. Mr. Digby received him in his library, and the stranger addressed him in a pleasant voice:

"Friend Digby, thee sees before thee William Penn, whose name is probably not unknown to thee. I have come on an errand thee will probably think strange for one of my persuasion to accept; but when I have explained my motives for doing so, thee will see that I have been actuated by benevolent feelings toward the poor children who are threatened with such hard terms on the part of the government."

"I am glad to welcome you beneath my roof, Mr. Penn. I was pleased when I learned that you were to be sent hither as the agent of the court, as I know that you will be

more lenient in your course than many others would have proved. Pray be seated, and let us discuss this affair amicably."

Penn sat down with his hat still on; Mr. Digby half smiled, but he did not invite him to remove it, as he was aware that the Quaker had refused to do so even in the presence of the King. Penn glanced around the comfortable room, with the rows of books lining the walls, and said:

"Friend Digby, thy lines seem to have fallen in pleasant places, and I regret that thee should have had any share in the recent outbreak."

"I had none beyond being one of those who were present at the ovation offered to Monmouth in this town. I was carried away by the enthusiasm of the hour, but I have since deeply lamented the terrible evils that have fallen on the poor people who took part in the rebellion."

"Yes, yes—they suffer dreadfully, and the government strikes at the least criminals, and spares the greater. But it is not my business to criticise the conduct of those in power. The King is a good master to me, and I came hither to serve him. Thy daughter is more deeply implicated in the affair of the procession than any other; but I have been told that she has already suffered severely for the part she took."

"She was thrown in prison, and very nearly died of the fever she contracted there. Money induced those in whose power she was, to give her back to me when life was at its lowest ebb. I thank Heaven! she is now recovering, and will soon be quite well again."

"Thee has much cause to be grateful, indeed. I have already seen many of the parents of these poor children, and I am happy to say to thee that the fine imposed on them will not be so heavy as was at first threatened. The maids of honor, to whom the Queen gave the proceeds, have

listened to my representations, and they have consented to take one-seventh of what was at first demanded. A thousand pounds will be levied upon the young girls, of which your daughter, and the young lady who presented the Bible to Monmouth, must pay fifty pounds each. The others will pay only twenty."

This was welcome news to Mr. Digby, more on Ethel's account than on that of Alice, for both she and Mrs. Methurn had firmly refused to allow him to advance the money himself for her. He warmly said:

"We have to thank you for this abatement, sir, I am well aware; and I now understand your motives for accepting a commission so apparently at variance with your creed and life. Accept my thanks for your efforts to serve these unfortunate children. They were innocent of wrong, and only acted under the orders of the principal of the school. I hope Mrs. Malton will not suffer herself; the money exacted from her pupils should suffice these grasping *dames d'honneur*—a title they hardly deserve, I am afraid."

A faint smile, slightly sarcastic, curled the Quaker's lip; he replied:

"They are of the world's people, and they have much use for money. I believe the schoolmistress escapes. The girls are the daughters of wealthy men, and the ladies I represent do not scruple to make the parents pay for the imprudence they were allowed to commit."

"We can easily pay the fine, Mr. Penn; but the fact does not lessen the disgrace to those who demand it. I regret that countrywomen of mine should be willing to accept money extracted in so disgraceful a manner."

"That is thy opinion, friend Digby, but theirs happens to be contrary to it. I do not sit in judgment on either party. I merely perform the task I undertook in settling this affair on the easiest terms to those concerned in it

which would be listened to by my employers. My motives may be misunderstood and misrepresented, but my course has always been to do what good came to my hand without reference to the opinion of others."

"And nobly and well have you performed your Divine Master's business," said Mr. Digby, with warmth. "I cannot regret the payment of fifty pounds on behalf of my daughter, since it purchases her safety, and has given me an opportunity to speak face to face with the greatest philanthropist of his day. I have long revered your name, sir, and my roof is honored by your presence beneath it."

"I thank thee, friend Digby, for thy good opinion, but I must not spend my time in listening to compliments. I have much to do before I leave Taunton, and the court ladies are pressing for a settlement in this affair."

"I am quite ready to pay my daughter's fine now," said Mr. Digby, rising and opening a secretary, from which he drew forth a pocket-book. He took from it a hundred pounds and offered them to Penn. He took fifty pounds, and said:

"This is thy liability. The rest I have no concern with."

"Excuse me—I should have explained that Miss Clifton is under my protection, and the remaining sum is paid on her account."

"Does thee do this for the young lady, or is Lord Clifton unable to pay for his niece?"

"No application has been made to him to do so. This money has been placed in my hands by her adopted mother for this purpose. Ethel expected to have to raise more from her own means, but fortunately it will not now be necessary."

"And her means, if I am rightly informed, have been fraudulently made away with by her guardian and his son.

I have heard something of this young lady, and the way in which her fortune was obtained by those who should have protected her. I am sorry that she has anything to pay, for she has been shamefully treated."

"She has been deeply wronged, it is true; but we will not speak of that. Sir Hugh Methurn has gone to his account, and his son has been hardly dealt with of late. I shall take steps to annul the bonds that bind Ethel to the young man so soon as my own marriage with her protectress, Mrs. Methurn, takes place, which will now be in a few weeks."

"Then I am to congratulate thee," said Penn, with a benevolent smile. "I am glad the lady and her protégée have found a friend in thee, for the estate of the late Sir Hugh is already forfeited to the crown."

"I am aware of that; and his son will become a wanderer upon the face of the earth. His wrong to Ethel is almost expiated by such a downfall."

"Perhaps so—such wrongs generally meet retribution even in this world. Let us finish this business, friend Digby; I have the receipts ready written, and I will sign two of them in behalf of your daughter and this young lady."

The transfer was soon made, and the visitor arose. Mr. Digby attended him to the door, and saw him depart; he then went into the family room, where, as he anticipated, he found the three ladies. Mrs. Methurn was sewing—Alice engaged in drawing, while Ethel read aloud to them.

Alice glanced at her father's face, threw down her pencil and exclaimed:

"What pleases you so much, father? Something good must have happened."

"Yes—something that will make you happy, my darling. You and Ethel are free girls once more. Mr. Penn has just been with me, and I have settled your fines."

She clapped her hands joyfully.

"That is good news indeed! Oh, how I wish I had known that William Penn was with you. I should have been so glad only to look at such a man."

"Well, he is a goodly looking man, but as he would not like to be made a show of, I refrained from letting you know that he was in the house."

Mrs. Methurn looked anxiously at him.

"And the fine? How much has Ethel to raise?"

"Nothing; what you gave me was amply sufficient, and I have settled the affair for both my daughters."

Alice threw her arms around his neck, and tenderly kissed him, and Ethel raised his hand to her lips in mute gratitude. Mrs. Methurn breathed a silent thanksgiving, and then gave her attention to Mr. Digby's account of the interview which had just taken place.

In the afternoon Mr. Digby gained permission to call on Penn, and through his intervention the sentinel was removed from his door, and his family were again permitted to go forth at their own pleasure.

On the following morning the carriage was ordered, and the whole party drove out to the Priory to look after the servants left there. They found the king's commissioners already in possession of the place, and of the domestics none remained except the housekeeper and Maud, the personal attendant of Mrs. Methurn. The former wished to retire from service, and take up her residence with a married niece who lived in the village near, but Maud gladly prepared to return to Taunton with her mistress.

After some negotiation, the two ladies were permitted to have the furniture belonging to them removed, and a pleasant apartment which joined that of Alice was given up to Ethel as her own.

Time passed on, and the bloody assizes with all their

horrors came to an end, and the people once more breathed freely. Mr. Digby exerted himself with success to obtain for Gerald the position of which he had spoken to his mother. With the consent of Mr. Clyde the young advocate removed to Taunton, and assumed his place as junior partner in the firm, which now stood as Morton & Methurn.

A month later the marriage of his mother with Mr. Digby took place, and for a season all was serene and bright before them. This tranquillity was interrupted by a letter from Vernor to Mrs. Digby, which filled her with consternation.

It had been written many weeks before, and confided to a countryman, who promised to deliver it in person. Afraid to venture into Taunton while the assizes were sitting, lest he might be seized on as a suspected character, the man retained the letter till all danger was past, and then brought it to the person to whom it was addressed.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### GERALD'S PROSPECTS BRIGHTEN.

THE letter from Vernor was written in a state of excitement bordering on despair, and ran thus:

"AUNT AGNES:—I do not write to you in the hope that you can help me, for that at this juncture is impossible; but Mr. Digby may interest himself in the fate of the son of an old friend so far as to make some efforts to get my wretched sentence reversed when the excitement against Monmouth's followers has subsided.

"Will you believe that I have been outwitted—completely

baffled by the wretches with whom I dealt in good faith? I put untold thousands in the power of those harpies, and yet I am to be sent to the colonies in place of being permitted to get away to Holland, as was my expectation.

"Jeffreys refused to give me a written guarantee, under the pretext that it was irregular, and in my case would be useless. My escape was to be connived at, but when we gained the sea port from which I expected to embark, I was confined with the other prisoners destined for Jamaica, and coolly told that I had bargained only for my life.

"Yes—I, a gentleman—a man of good family, have been thrust among the common herd, with the assurance that my fate is to be no better than theirs. In short, that I am actually to be *sold* as a slave to some brutal West India planter.

"For a few hours I thought I should have gone mad with the sense of degradation that fell upon me, but I have in some measure recovered the power to think and act. I have found the means to write this information to you, for I know measures will be taken to conceal my wrongs from the few friends I have.

"The bearer of this is a man on whom I once conferred an obligation which he has not forgotten. He pledges himself to deliver it in person, and on his fidelity I must rely, as it is my only chance to communicate with you. Oh! Aunt Agnes, think of my wretched position; use your best efforts to alleviate it, and interest your friend Mr. Digby in my cause. I shall die in that unhealthy climate, exposed to hardships and toils to which I am unused. If I cannot escape through your means, I will commit suicide, and my blood may rest on those who will not use every effort to rescue me.

"Only get permission for me to go free, and I pledge myself never to touch English soil again. Accursed land! that dooms its sons to such a fate as has been awarded me.

"I should have been more wary in my dealings with such unprincipled men, but what could I do? I was utterly in their power, with a shameful death looming before me, and I depended on their honor to keep the pledges made to me. I should have known that Jeffreys does not even understand the meaning of the word.

"Tell Ethel of the strait I am in. Mr. Digby has shown much interest in her, and she must have some influence with him. Let her use it to the utmost to induce him to move in my behalf. If Gerald can help me, I humble myself to ask his aid; anything—anything to get a reversal of this iniquitous sentence.

"I have been pursued even here by a woman and her son, who are my deadly enemies, and I cannot rid myself of the idea that but for their machinations I might have been permitted to escape to the continent. Do you remember the Gipsy fortune-teller who came to the Priory on that May-day, years ago? It is she, and I have learned that my father wronged her in her youth, and she visits his sin on me. She has vowed that since her son cannot succeed Sir Hugh as the eldest born, the child of her rival never shall do so. There is nothing now to succeed to, and her enmity might be allayed by the recent disasters that have fallen upon me, but it is not; for she has found means to gain access to me—to taunt me with my evil fortunes, and to assure me that she would have made known even at Whitehall the venal compromise of Jeffreys if I had been permitted to evade the doom awarded to others far less guilty than I am.

"I can write no more; I have, with great difficulty, succeeded in scribbling this almost illegible scrawl, and I must watch my opportunity to deliver it to Panton. I trust that he will be faithful to his promises; and remember that if I do not within three months hear from you something on which to ground a hope of escape, I will take my fate in my

own hands, for as a slave to the caprices of another man I will not live.

"VERNOR METHURN."

Mrs. Digby read this effusion with blanching cheeks and quivering lips. She rang and ordered the bearer to be admitted into her presence. In a few moments a rough-looking countryman entered, and she hurriedly asked:

"Did you receive this letter from the hands of Mr. Methurn himself?"

"Yes, mum. When they was a takin' him on the vessel that the pris'ners was to sail in, he managed to drop it as he passed me. I had promised to help him, for Mr. Methurn had once helped me out of a scrape in Amsterdam. I was working in the docks there, and got mixed up in a bad affair. Two English gents took a interest in me because I was a countryman of theirs, and they got a pardon for me from the Princess of Orange. Mr. Methurn was one on 'em, and I never forgot it. When I found *him* among the poor devils goin' to Jamaky, I *was* astonished you may be sure. I contrived to get a few words with him, and he asked me if I would bring that letter and give it in your own hands. I would have done it sooner but I was afeard to come to this place while sich doin's was a goin' on as has been done here lately."

"And my nephew has really been sent to Jamaica? It seems incredible, though I have read his letter."

"He's gone, sure enough, mum; for I saw the vessel sail, and a mis'able unchancy thing she was as ever I laid my eyes on. Ef *she* gets to the eend of her v'yage safe I'm no judge of water craft. It's my belief they meant to drown the poor cree'ters they didn't dare to hang."

The listener shuddered—she thought it but too probable that such was the ruthless intention of those who had taken the unhappy prisoners in charge. She faintly asked:



"And the name of the vessel? Vernor has omitted that, and we must learn it that we may have some clue to his actual fate."

"The Sally Ann was the name o' the ship, mum. She was a old vessel that haint been considered sea-worthy for more'n a year; but the government chartered it to cross the sea at this stormy season 'o the year. It'll be a miracle if she gets to port safe."

Mrs. Digby heard him with a sick feeling of apprehension. Vernor had never shown much affection for her, but she had cherished for him a tender maternal regard, and in spite of his wrong-doings—his lack of consideration for others, she could not hear of this last calamity without the keenest suffering.

At this moment Mr. Digby came in; he bowed to the stranger with an expression of surprise, and asked:

"What has overcome you so much, Agnes? Have you heard any ill news?"

She silently offered him the letter, which he read in evident perturbation. He then questioned Panton and drew from him the substance of what he had already related to his wife. In his heart Mr. Digby believed it would be better for them all if Vernor should be swallowed up in the deep, but he was a humane man, and he checked the thought as it arose. He said:

"I will talk this matter over with you presently, Agnes, and we will see what can be done to help Vernor. Come with me into my library if you please, Mr. Panton."

The two went out together, and when they were alone Mr. Digby questioned the stranger on every point that could afford him a clearer insight into Vernor's actual position. But little more could be elicited, and liberally rewarding him for the service he had performed, he dismissed Panton and returned to consult with his wife.

He possessed little power himself, but he had friends in London who had access to the court, and he did not despair of gaining a commutation of the punishment of the hapless exile. So far as he knew, no other man of good family had been sent to the colonies, and he believed it to be a refinement of cruelty on the part of Jeffreys to have secured the bribe and violated the pledges he had given. He felt that Vernor should have perished sooner than give up men comparatively innocent to be preyed on by the creatures in power, but he could not abandon him to the miserable doom of captivity in an unhealthy climate without using every means in his power to rescue him from it.

He spoke more hopefully to his wife of the results of his efforts than he really felt, and Mrs. Digby wiped away her fast falling tears as his words fell soothingly upon her ear. She said:

"It is now many weeks since that letter was written, poor Vernor is languishing in bondage, and looking for news to cheer him. I must write without delay, and tell him that you will use your utmost efforts to serve him. If he does not hear from us he may do something desperate."

"Write by all means, and I can certainly get your letter sent under cover to the Colonial Secretary, to whom I will write myself. Luckily he is an acquaintance of mine, and he will make some effort to find Vernor out, and see that he gets your letter. You need have no apprehensions on the score of his attempting self-destruction; a man who, like Vernor, has sacrificed honor to retain life will scarcely put that precious possession in jeopardy by his own act."

"Do not speak in that bitter tone," she entreated. "Vernor has done many things to alienate my heart from him; but I have still a tender regard for him, and his evil deeds have been bitterly brought home to him."

"True, my love; and if his present sufferings bring forth



the fruits of repentance they will not have been inflicted in vain. For your sake, if not for his own, I will serve Vernor to the utmost extent of my ability. I have no faith in him, for he has more than once been weighed in the balance and found wanting. But we will let that pass. I will endeavor to gain his pardon on the condition that he remains forever an exile, for I never wish to see his face again. It will be best to keep his present situation from Ethel; the poor child would grieve herself ill over the misfortunes of the wretched scapegrace who has already done her such irreparable injury."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Digby. "Ethel need know nothing of it till Vernor is released. It will be best to keep it to ourselves."

"I must consult with Gerald. Mr. Clyde may be able to aid us; he has an extensive business connection among the nobility, and he would help any one bearing the name of Methurn."

"Of course Gerald must be taken into our councils. He will write to Mr. Clyde with alacrity. Vernor speaks of humbling himself to ask his aid; but I do not know why he should regard it in that light. My son will gladly serve him."

"Can you not comprehend that the integrity and self-respect that Gerald has shown in his career have been a tacit reproach to his kinsman? It is not likely that Vernor has any other feeling toward him than a sore sense of inferiority, which does not usually beget affection. If Gerald had been the heir of the house, the name of Methurn would not now be tainted with outlawry; its honor stained by the conduct of its present head. Forgive me, Agnes, for speaking thus of one you still regard with affection; but Vernor's conduct has entirely forfeited my respect. Gerald will yet restore the old family to its ancient prestige,

and, if Vernor were out of the way, I should not despair of seeing him at some future day the lord of the Priory, with the title and estates of his uncle restored to him."

"I have no wish for my son to displace his cousin, nor can I see how he can ever recover the estate that has been forfeited."

"There are more ways than one to accomplish that, and I have a plan in my mind to bring about that result."

She looked at him with surprise, and he went on:

"For many years I have lived quietly in this place, because Alice had the advantages of a good school without being separated from me. My income is good, and I have laid up a considerable sum of money from it. After settling the fine levied on me, I find that I still have enough left to prevent the Priory from falling into the hands of strangers. It was bestowed on a needy courtier, who is in want of ready money, and I am already in treaty for its purchase. I shall get a good bargain, from which Gerald may in the future be the gainer."

Mrs. Digby clasped his hand and carried it to her lips.

"Ever good—ever thoughtful for others, how shall I thank you for this most unexpected kindness?"

"Pooh! it is not much to thank me for, my dear. I do not propose to *give* the property to Gerald. He must work and save, and when he is rich enough he shall pay me back what I gave for it. In the meantime the income I shall derive from the estate will pay me a handsome interest."

"The service will be none the less for that. If Gerald can regain his family inheritance by his own efforts, I shall feel prouder of it than if it had become his by descent."

"He will do it, Agnes. Gerald works industriously—he has will and intelligence, and we shall yet see him mount higher than any of his name have done before."

"How happy I am that you appreciate my boy so highly.

The approbation of such a man as you are is worth gaining."

"I am glad you think so, Mrs. Digby; but if you flatter me much more I shall be in danger of becoming conceited. Here come the girls; brighten up your tell-tale face, my love, and do not let them suspect the new cause of uneasiness Vernor has given us."

Ethel and Alice came from a morning walk, the latter as blooming as before her illness, and after pausing a few moments to listen to their lively chatter, Mr. Digby departed to seek Gerald and consult with him as to the steps to be taken to rescue Vernor from his unpleasant state of duance.

He carried the letter with him, and after perusing it, the two gentlemen earnestly discussed the chances of success in such an undertaking. Gerald saw all the difficulties in the way, but they did not deter him from using his utmost efforts to serve his cousin. He wrote to Mr. Clyde without delay, and appealed to him to aid the nephew of his old friend in this sad crisis of his fate.

Mr. Clyde knew little of Vernor's past career; he was filled with sympathy for a young man of good family on whom such a calamity had fallen, and he replied to Gerald immediately, assuring him that he would use such influence as he possessed in Vernor's behalf. Through some of his noble clients he hoped soon to be able to reach the ear of the King.

The letter of Mrs. Digby was dispatched to Jamaica by her husband under cover to the Colonial Secretary, and then there was a dreary interval of suspense as to the result of their efforts. Mr. Digby had also applied to the friends of whom he had spoken, and in reply they promised to make an effort in the exile's behalf when the resentment against Monmouth's followers had sufficiently subsided to afford a chance of success to such an application.

The season was unusually stormy, and many nights Mrs. Digby lay awake listening to the wind that wailed around the house, fancying that in every gust she heard the dying shrieks of the unhappy Vernor. Newspapers were then scarcely known; an insignificant sheet called the *News Letter* was issued weekly in London, which came regularly to Mr. Digby. On its arrival, the shipping intelligence was eagerly scanned for some notice of the arrival of the Sally Ann at her place of destination.

One morning the family were assembled around the breakfast table when the mail was brought in. Both Mr. Digby and his wife had letters to read which occupied their attention, and Ethel took up the small dingy square of paper and glanced over it. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"Oh this is too dreadful!"

Mrs. Digby laid down her letter, and became slightly pale.

"What have you there, my dear, that moves you so much?" she asked.

"Oh, aunty, those poor creatures that were sent to the colonies have been shipwrecked, and the whole of them lost."

"What was the name of the vessel?" asked Mr. Digby, seeing that his wife was incapable of speaking.

"The Sally Ann."

Mrs. Digby uttered a cry, and covered her face with her hands. Ethel could not account for her emotion, and she looked up bewildered.

"What is it, aunty, why should you be so much distressed?"

"Oh, child—child—don't ask me now. Read—read—I must hear what is told of this sad disaster."

With faltering voice, for, by some electric chain of sympathy, Mrs. Digby's agitation had communicated itself to her, Ethel read the following paragraph:

"The ship Sally Ann, on which so many of the political prisoners sent into exile were embarked, has gone down almost in sight of port, carrying with her every soul on board, except her officers, who managed to escape in the long boat. We do not intend to say that these men were undeserving of the hard fate to which they were condemned, but we do say that a most shameful and culpable act has been committed by those in authority.

"The vessel chartered for this purpose was notoriously unseaworthy, and the shipwreck so near the coast of Jamaica, the escape of the officers alone, give rise to the most unpleasant suspicions that foul play was intended from the first. In God's name, if the offenders against the tranquillity of the country deserved death, let them bear the penalty as human beings, but not to be battened down in a foul hold, where disease and death held their revels during a long and stormy voyage, to be sent into the depths of the ocean nearly at its close.

"It is heart-sickening to think of this great wrong as the finale to the dismal tragedy that has been enacted in our country during the last four months."

"The writer of that is a bold man, and may esteem himself happy if he escapes the vengeance of the government for speaking so plainly," said Mr. Digby, in the hope that Ethel's attention would be drawn from the uncontrollable emotion of his wife. She was weeping convulsively, and the young girl fixed her eyes upon her with a frightened and perplexed expression. Suddenly she arose, approached her aunt, and with pale lips faltered:

"I see it all now. Vernor was among those men. He was not permitted to escape to Holland. Oh, aunty, this is a terrible blow! poor—poor Vernor! would that I could have saved him."

Mrs. Digby clasped her in her arms, and together they wept over the fate of the hapless young man.

Mr. Digby re-read the paragraph, and said in a tone he vainly endeavored to render hopeful:

"Don't give up at once. Vernor may have escaped, for I scarcely think they would confine him with the humblest class of prisoners. I know he is a strong swimmer, and as the vessel was near the coast, there may have been a chance for him to save his life. But even if he failed to do so, that fate is infinitely better than to be sold as a slave to some man who might have treated him badly. My dear Ethel, do not weep so violently; you must control your feelings, or you will make yourself ill."

Ethel struggled to recover calmness, but the many shocks she had lately endured at last told upon her delicate frame, and in a few hours she was prostrated by severe illness, which confined her for many weeks to her couch.

In her turn, Alice watched beside her, and when she had sufficiently recovered to listen with interest, Gerald spent every hour he could spare from his business in reading aloud to her as had been his habit in earlier days.

Every effort was made to discover if Vernor had actually perished in the shipwreck of the Sally Ann, and before the winter passed away confirmation came that he was among those left on board the ship; she had struck upon a ledge of rocks, in a few moments went to pieces, and so far as was known, not a soul among the prisoners had escaped.

Insensibly the sad memories connected with Vernor faded from the mind of the young sufferer as time passed on, and once more Ethel walked the earth with a sense of freedom that was delightful to her. She reproached herself with this feeling, but the glad consciousness that no bar remained between herself and Gerald would make itself felt, and a new spring of happiness awoke in her severely tried heart.

The shade of sadness which had often been seen on Gerald's brow passed away, and he gave himself up to the delightful thought that by the time Ethel was old enough to become his wife he would be in a position to claim her as his own.

No word of love passed between them, for she was yet too young to be bound by any pledges, but as the years went on those two kindred souls were knit together by bonds strong as death, lasting as eternity.

No communication came from Vernor, and finally the family settled in the belief that he had shared the fate of his companions in exile. The legal proceedings which had been contemplated were laid aside, as it was considered useless to pursue them when Ethel was already released from her bonds by Vernor's death.

The Priory had passed into the possession of Mr. Digby, and he assured Gerald that he only held it in trust for him. So soon as he was able to repay the purchase money, he would restore it to him; in the meantime he set aside a certain portion of the annual income derived from the estate as a portion for Ethel; as he satisfactorily ascertained that a large sum from her inheritance had passed into the possession of Sir Hugh which had been expended in the improvement of the property.

With this bright prospect before him Gerald labored with untiring assiduity in his profession, and won golden opinions from all who knew him. His old friend, Mr. Clyde, threw much business in his hands, for which he was well paid, and his day-dream began to assume tangible shape.

Ethel was maturing into a lovely and accomplished woman, for she sought to render herself a companion for him in the days to come, not to be a mere toy for the amusement of an idle hour.

The people of England were still in a restless and dis-

contented state, and the tyrannical rule of James II. was slowly maturing the revolution which compelled him to abdicate the throne, and the Prince of Orange was made king under the title of William III.

Both Mr. Digby and his stepson took a warm interest in public affairs; they clearly foresaw what the end must be, and when the final arrangements were made for the landing of William at Torbay, many of the negotiations that secretly passed were sent through the agency of Morton & Methurn, and the junior partner of the firm twice visited the Hague, and was privately received by the Prince of Orange.

William graciously promised that on his accession to the throne, as the reward for Gerald's services, the attainder should be removed from the name of Methurn, and the family honors and estate be restored to its present representative.

It was a joyful day for Gerald when the loud-toned bells of Taunton rang out their jubilant peal for the accession of William, and men congratulated each other that the tyranny under which the country had so long groaned was at an end. The blood so ruthlessly shed in the rebellion of Monmouth, was avenged in the downfall of the Stuarts, and James, in his turn, was an exile and a wanderer.

Gerald's claims were not forgotten; and as soon as his government was established on a firm footing, William redeemed the pledges he had made to him. The Priory was purchased of Mr. Digby and presented to him, with permission to assume the title which had been borne by his uncle.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## UNEXPECTED NEWS.

ETHEL was now twenty years of age. She was *pétite* in person, but exquisitely formed, and her sweet face was radiant with health and intelligence. Every obstacle to the union of the lovers was seemingly removed, and Gerald might now express the feelings that had been long understood. He lost no time in doing so, and Ethel became his plighted bride.

"At last you are my own," said Gerald, with love-beaming eyes. "Dearest Ethel, I have toiled for you—waited for you as long as Jacob of old for his beloved Rachel. Once I thought you were gone from me forever, and I cannot tell you how deeply my life was saddened by the thought that I had lost you; that one who must have made you wretched had snatched you from me."

"Poor Vernor!" she sighed. "His fate was so sad that I forgive him for all the unhappiness he caused us both. I was a little simpleton to be flattered into giving him such power over my fate; but I declare to you, Gerald, that through all that time there was a sore little corner in my heart where all your kindness was shut up, for I was afraid to open it, and look fairly into it, lest my childish love for you should spring out and overshadow that I was in duty bound to cherish for Vernor. Yet he did not take much pains to make me love him, and I now know that he never cared for me."

"No, my darling, charming as you are—precious as you are to my heart—there could be no affinity between you and my unhappy cousin. He has gone to his account, poor fellow! and I will say nothing against him; but if the day

had come on which he would have claimed you as his wife—if he had treated you unkindly—I believe I should have attempted to tear you from him by force. I have always felt that I had the best *right* to you; now I am convinced that a higher power designed us for each other, and after severe trial and tribulation it has brought about our union."

"I trust so, Gerald. And may that power watch over us, and enable us to walk in the path He has appointed to us, honorably, truly, and religiously."

"Amen!" reverently responded her lover; and they went hand in hand from the shaded garden, in which this interview had taken place, to announce their betrothal to Mr. Digby and his wife.

They found them in the library; and Mr. Digby was opening a letter, sealed with black, which had just been received. He looked up, saw the young pair who came in radiant with happiness, and demanded his blessing on their union. Mrs. Digby was already prepared for the announcement, and she offered her congratulations with tender smiles, and fervently embraced Ethel as her daughter.

"Bless my soul, young people, you have lost no time in settling this affair!" said Mr. Digby, laughing. "Only yesterday came Gerald's promotion to the dignity of the baronetcy and estate, and to-day he has found a mistress for his house."

"The mistress was chosen many years ago, sir; but till now I have had nothing to offer her but my empty hand, which I thought scarcely worthy of acceptance. Ethel consents to share my good fortune, and if you approve, there will be no delay in making her my wife."

"I not only approve, but I give you my warmest wishes for the happiness you both deserve. Let the joy bells ring, and have the wedding over as soon as the settlements can

be made, and the bride's outfit prepared. You are a noble fellow, Gerald, and my little Ethel is a pearl of price, I assure you."

Alice came in—a brilliant dark damsel, of stately mien, and noble presence. She warmly offered her congratulations, and Mr. Digby at last remembered the letter he had so long held unopened in his hand. He uttered an exclamation of surprise, and after reading the communication twice, looked seriously at Ethel.

"My dear, this letter concerns you, and the news it contains makes so material a change in your prospects, that I scarcely know if Sir Gerald Methurn, with all his newly acquired dignities, will be a suitable match for you."

Ethel grew pale, flushed deeply, and her clasp tightened upon the hand Gerald still held in his own.

"I am Gerald's plighted wife, and no change in my prospects shall make me recede from the pledges I have given him. What is it, dear sir? Has another fortune fallen unexpectedly to me?"

"It is even so, Ethel; and more than fortune. You are now the representative of your family honors. Your uncle is dead; he has left no child to inherit his estates, and you are now Baroness Clifton, of Clifden. This letter is from the family lawyer, and he requests that I will bring you up to London as soon as possible, that steps may be taken to put you in possession of your inheritance."

A bright expression of joy lighted up her face, and turning to her lover, she exclaimed:

"And Gerald, who sought me portionless, and almost dependent, shall have it all. He shall enter parliament, where his talents and eloquence will give him fame and position. Here is my hand, Gerald, and with it I joyfully endow you with all my honors, such as they are. You will make a name beside which that of the proudest Clifton shall sink into insignificance."

"Thank you, my generous love," he tenderly replied, as he pressed her hand to his lips. "But I am glad this did not happen a few weeks earlier, for then I should have hesitated to ask a lady so richly dowered to become my bride. Now we have looked into each other's hearts, and mere worldly distinctions cannot stand between us."

"As if they could ever have done so! Fie, Gerald! why should you speak thus? Have we not loved each other for years? Have you not always been my best friend? And if this fortune had come as a bar to our union, I would have renounced it."

"Bravo, my child! there speaks the true heart," said Mr. Digby. "But the marriage must be deferred until you are mistress of Clifden. Then we will have a grand old English wedding, and all your tenants shall drink to the happiness of the bride and groom."

With some annoyance Gerald felt that it must be so. He had hoped to make Ethel his own in a few weeks at farthest, but now he knew that months must elapse before the tedious delays of the law would enable her to establish herself in her new position, and her guardian to have such settlements prepared as her new dignities demanded. But he was too happy to grumble much, especially as it was arranged that the whole party should accompany Ethel to London, and go from there to Clifden, where the marriage was to be celebrated.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE SHIPWRECK.

WE must now go back to the time of Vernor's embarkation on the Sally Ann.

After the first fury of his disappointment subsided, he found means to ingratiate himself with the commander of the vessel, for although the common class of prisoners were treated with the utmost rigor, Captain Sutton felt some compassion for the well-born and gently nurtured man on whom so degrading a punishment had been inflicted. Vernor also loudly proclaimed the fraud which had been practiced upon him, and a latent sense of justice in the breast of the captain caused him to feel that the treatment he had received was unworthy of an English judge, however brutal or degraded in character he might be.

For a few hours Vernor was placed in the dark and noisome hold, which was so crowded with human beings that there was not even room for all to lie down at one time. Many of the prisoners were already suffering from sickness, and before the voyage was half-finished a third of their number had perished of privation and confinement.

When the ship was fairly at sea, the captain sent down an order for Vernor Methurn to be brought before him, and he gladly followed the messenger, for already he found it difficult to breathe in the fetid atmosphere below.

Captain Sutton, a bluff, red-faced man, with a stern expression, but some kindness of heart, was pacing the deck when he came up; he nodded to his captive and said:

"My orders are very strict, Mr. Methurn, and until we were out of sight of land I was forced to put you below. But now I am master of my own craft, I take on myself

the responsibility of removing you from the companionship of those poor devils down there. You're a gentleman, I once knew your father, and I was sorry to see his son brought to such a pass as to herd with common felons."

"As to that, captain, those men have only been guilty of the same crime which I have committed," replied Vernor. "But I do not thank you the less for taking compassion on me. I could not have lived twenty-four hours in that horrible den, and it is my belief that the whole lot will perish before we reach our destination."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps even that is better than the fate that awaits them at the end of the voyage. I cannot help them; if they were allowed the freedom of the vessel they would rise against my crew and overpower us. You see I only confine them in self-defence; but I risk nothing in freeing one man from his bondage. When we reach Jamaica I will make efforts to place you with a friend of mine, who will treat you with consideration. Do you understand accounts sufficiently to make yourself useful to a commercial man?"

"Yes—I have a good knowledge of them; for, as you already know, I acted as secretary to Monmouth."

"That is enough; Pedrazza will be glad to secure your services, and if you understand French and Spanish, in addition to your own language, you will be of inestimable service to him."

"I thoroughly understand French, and have some knowledge of Spanish. In a few months I can make myself master of it, if it is necessary to do so."

At that moment Vernor would have promised anything to secure the good will of the captain, for he had a vision of plantation life, of exposure to the pestilential climate which must soon undermine a European constitution; but this was a very different thing. If he could take the place



of a clerk in a commercial house, he might possibly gain the regard of his master, and in time regain his freedom; though he had many doubts as to his ability to apply himself to the labor that would be required of him.

The captain nodded and smiled, well pleased at the prospect of getting a competent clerk for his partner in a snug smuggling business, at a trifling cost to them, for the prisoners were not expected to bring more than ten or fifteen pounds each to the rapacious man who had doomed them to such a fate.

After exacting from Vernor a promise that he would not attempt to communicate with his companions in misfortune, he ordered the irons with which his ankles were secured to be knocked off, and assigned him a bunk near that of his first mate. He dared not invite him to his own table, lest his under-officers should grumble at this distinction, which was only extended to his first lieutenant, but he furnished him with much better food than that which was doled out to the other prisoners.

The voyage proved very tempestuous, and but for skillful seamanship the crazy old vessel must have gone to the bottom long before she did. Vernor suffered little from seasickness, and when the weather permitted, he daily took exercise upon the deck. Thus his strength was preserved, and when the Sally Ann drew near Jamaica he felt as well as he had ever done in his life.

Late in the evening of a day that had been comparatively calm, light clouds were observed gathering over the horizon, and the captain examined them through his weather-glass, afraid of one of those sudden squalls to which those tropical waters are subject. He ordered every effort to be made to gain the port of Kingston before the gale came on, but all the exertions of the sailors were unavailing.

In half an hour the wind had risen to a storm, the

wretched craft refused to obey the helm, and she soon drifted at the mercy of the waves. She was driven on a reef of rocks, and the experienced eye of her commander saw that her hour had come, that those who would save themselves must lose not a moment in getting away from the ill-fated vessel.

The long boat, the only one save a small cockle-shell which was hoisted on the stern of the ship, was hurriedly got out, and such articles of value as the captain was most anxious to save were thrown into it. The crew, amounting to twenty men next crowded in, and Vernor was left standing alone upon the deck. The boat was already loaded to the water's edge, and the sailors fiercely refused to permit one of the prisoners to endanger their safety by attempting to overcrowd it.

The captain would have made an effort to save him, but in that moment of peril he was overruled by his insubordinate men, and he could only shout back through his speaking-trumpet:

"Cut loose the small boat; it may keep you from drowning, and some vessel may pick you up."

His words were lost in the howling of the wind, above which arose the wild cries of the imprisoned wretches who had been thus abandoned to their fate. Vernor shuddered at the howls of despair which made even the raging elements seem trifling in comparison with the tornado of human passion that surged below.

"I will at least unclosetheir prison," he muttered. "Even if it is done at the risk of my own life."

In the dimness of gathering twilight Vernor groped his way to the hold, unclosed the entrance, and a crowd of ghastly, worn men rushed out, in spite of the manacles that confined their lower limbs. But the most of them sunk down in despair when they reached the deck and saw the

leaden sky, and the roaring waves dashing in foam upon the rocky ledge which had wrecked them.

One powerfully-made man, emaciated almost to a skeleton, managed to keep his footing, and with gleaming eyes he drew near Vernor, and asked:

"Must we die like dogs? Is there no chance to escape?"

"For you and me, perhaps, there may be; for you have nerve to attempt it, but the rest must perish."

"Then point out the way. I have strength enough left to help myself, in spite of my long imprisonment in that horrible den."

"Come with me, then, and say nothing to the others."

With difficulty he made his way to the stern of the vessel, closely followed by the man. The boat was still in its place unimpaired, and a wild laugh burst from the prisoner.

"Oh, ho! we'll balk them yet. The devils that would have made slaves of us, and the sea that would swallow us up, shall neither of them get their prey. The gale is subsiding, and the boat, slight as it is, will serve our turn till some vessel sees us and picks us up."

While he was thus speaking he released the boat from its fastenings with a practised hand, and then said to Vernor:

"Take your place in it, for you are no seaman; I was one once; and at the last moment, when the timbers of the old craft part, I will spring into it and push off from the wreck. It will be easy for me to do it, for I have managed to rid myself of my irons long ago. Hold fast to the oars, for if we lose them we are lost."

Vernor obeyed his directions with alacrity, for he saw that a few more moments must decide the fate of the ship; and on their nerve and courage their safety must depend.

The wind lulled almost as rapidly as it had arisen; but

the last blast that passed over the Sally Ann proved her death wail. She was lifted by it, and thrown with such force against the rocks that the rotten timbers broke apart with a crash, and the cry that went up to heaven from the drowning creatures within her must have appalled the stoutest heart.

At the critical moment, the companion of Vernor sprang into the boat, seized an oar and pushed her clear of the wreck. The sea was still fearfully agitated, but there was no immediate danger, for the boat, though small, seemed strongly built; but it was a forlorn chance of safety that remained to them, thrown thus upon the wide ocean without chart or compass; destitute of food, and in the neighborhood of those who would seize and convey them back to captivity if they fell in their power.

"We must stop and see if any one rises to the surface," said Vernor's companion, hoarsely. "We can save some of them perhaps, and I cannot let a man perish when I can help him."

"We had better get out of danger ourselves," said Vernor. "A sudden clutch upon this shell made by a drowning man may overturn it and destroy us all."

"True—we will get beyond that danger; but if one rises I shall go to him at any risk to myself."

While he spoke he used his oar on a comparatively smooth surface of water, and then pausing, looked anxiously over the rapidly darkening waters. Not a head appeared—heavily ironed as they were, how could they rise? In that brief moment near one hundred souls had gone to their account, and the dashing waves and sullen winds wailed their sad requiem above them.

With a heavy sigh the man drew his hand across his eyes and said:

"They are all gone, and maybe they are happier than

you and I; for we may perish of hunger and thirst. Yet hard as our fate is, it is better than the other one they would have given us. Your name, I know is Methurn, for I heard it called the day you were taken from among us, so much for being born a gentleman. What was considered good enough for us was not considered good enough for you. But I shan't quarrel with you on that score, for you have proved yourself a friend to me in my extremity. My name is Lithgow."

"You speak like an educated man and a gentleman yourself," said Vernor. "Many such have no mercy shown them in this rebellion."

"No—I am not what you would call a gentleman. My father was a respectable mechanic, and such education as I have I have gained by my own efforts, I have been a sailor; afterwards a trader, and I was in a flourishing business when Monmouth landed and proclaimed religious freedom. My family are dissenters; my brother was a preacher among them, and he died in a dungeon for no other crime than preaching the gospel as he understood it. A cousin shared a similar fate for a less offense, but he was stern and uncompromising in his faith. Do you wonder now that I took up arms in the cause of the Protestant Duke?"

"I do not. We can both only regret it, since our efforts have resulted so disastrously to ourselves."

"No—I don't regret it," was the fierce response. "If it was to do over again I would do it, and there are in England thousands like me who will yet make a successful stand against the tyrant that rules them, not as subjects, but as slaves. The very cruelties that have been inflicted on the followers of Monmouth, will bring forth bitter fruits of repentance to James. I only wish we had waited till the right man came."

"I do not know who he can be."

"God knows. He will uphold his cause when the hour comes, and, mark my words—*it will come*. It will surely come, for the Lord will not permit the righteous to be trampled down forever."

While these words were exchanged, the boat had floated almost at the mercy of the waves, for the only effort the two men made was to keep clear of the wreck, and prevent her from drifting upon the rocks which had proved fatal to the ship. With the fall of the wind the sea became gradually calmer, and the parting clouds showed glimpses of the clear sky with the everlasting stars circling in serene majesty above them.

Vernor looked over the darkening waters with a troubled gaze, but his companion raised his eyes to the vast concave above, and in lifting his heart to the contemplation of its majesty, sought to forget the gnawing pangs of hunger from which he had scarcely been free for many days past, for the rations doled out to the prisoners were barely sufficient to sustain life.

The full tropical moon showed its broad disc above the world of waters around them, for by this time they had drifted far out to sea; the only remains of the late storm was the heavy ground swell that usually follows a violent commotion of the elements, but this gradually subsided, and toward midnight Lithgow laid aside the oar with which he had steered the boat, and said:

"My strength is exhausted, for it is many hours since I have eaten anything. I must sleep, and try to forget the cravings of hunger. If we are not soon rescued, I shall die from inanition."

Vernor drew forth a ship biscuit which he had hitherto forgotten, and divided it with him. He said:

"This was a portion of my dinner, and luckily I thrust it in my pocket. I think some vessel must overhaul us before we are reduced to extremity,"

"We are in the hands of God, and if He has further work for us to do on this earth, He will save us. If not, we shall go to Him."

Vernor said nothing in reply, and after eagerly devouring the small morsel, Lithgow sang one of the hymns familiar to the Dissenters, and in spite of his weakness, his fine toned voice rang out clear and thrilling over the watery waste on which they were drifting. He then prayed aloud for deliverance from the perils that surrounded them, and ended by saying in devout tones:

"Even in this extremity I bow to the majesty of thy power, oh Lord, and say, in sincerity of heart, 'not my will, but thine be done.'"

Vernor listened to this outpouring with more surprise than reverence. He could not comprehend the source of this man's submission, and if he had prayed at all he would have assaulted Heaven with demands to be rescued from the dangers that encompassed him.

When Lithgow lay down, Vernor took charge of the boat, and he vainly cast his weary eyes in every direction, in the hope that some approaching sail might be seen glittering in the moonlight. But morning dawned without so welcome a vision arising on his solitary vigil, and as the first beams of the sun fell upon the wasted face of his companion, he unclosed his eyes, and started up.

"Where am I?" he wildly asked. "Who are you? and what has happened? Oh! I remember now. I dreamed that I was at *home*! a place I shall never, never see again. My child was weeping and rejoicing over me, when I awoke to find myself a shipwrecked, starving outcast. Oh! this is hard to bear, in spite of my faith in God!"

He covered his face with his hands, and hot tears rained through his trembling fingers. Vernor made no attempt to soothe him; he was in a wretched state of mind himself, and

had no sympathy to spare for the woes of another. He said:

"I must sleep in my turn now. You were more exhausted than I, for you are weaker, and you labored more than I did to get the boat out of danger, therefore it was your right to take rest first."

"Sleep in God's name, and may it refresh and strengthen you, since food is denied us."

Vernor lay down in the bottom of the boat, and sheltered his face as well as he could from the fierce beams of the sun, while Lithgow steered, and watched for the appearance of a sail. The long hours of the day passed on; the scorching sun poured its ardent rays upon their unsheltered heads, and both were glad when it at last sunk into the bosom of the sea.

Another long and dreary night passed they scarcely knew how, for the pangs of hunger and thirst had now become almost unendurable. Toward dawn Lithgow spoke to his companion, in a hollow tone:

"You are younger and stronger than I am, and you may live till some vessel passes and finds you, but I feel that I cannot endure much more. Should you be rescued, send to my daughter, who lives in Lyme, the news of my death. Her name is Jessie; and if you ever return to England, I pray you to see her and tell her that my last thought was of her."

"I promise to do so; but a strong man like you should not so soon despair. Do not talk of dying yet."

"Yes—I was strong once, but my late sufferings have broken me down. This thirst that consumes me must be sated at any cost. I must drink the sea-water, for I can no longer refrain, though I know it will produce delirium that must end in death."

"But that will be a suicidal act. Since you know the

consequences, you should abstain from gratifying your thirst."

"I will still make the effort to do so: like Tantalus, I must see the tempting element spread everywhere around me, yet not bring it to my parched lips. Oh, Father! give endurance to thy sorely tried disciple."

He bowed his head in mute prayer, which was interrupted by an exclamation from Vernor:

"There is a dark object in line with the rising sun which must be a vessel."

Lithgow started up, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked keenly in the direction indicated.

"It is,—it is a sail! We shall yet be saved! Oh God! I thank thee," and he fell upon his knees with tears streaming from his eyes.

When he became calmer he drew off his coat, fastened it to the oar, and raised it aloft as a signal. The tiny speck on the horizon increased gradually in size till the hull of a large ship became visible. For half an hour she bore down toward them; but, just as their hopes were assuming the phase of certainty, she changed her course, and passed so far from them that so small an object as the boat was unnoticed from her deck. Lithgow sank down, huskily muttering:

"It was my last hope; we are forsaken of God and man. Let us resign ourselves to our fate."

He drew in his oar, folded his arms, and remained in a state of quiet apathy, from which Vernor could not arouse him, though he made many feeble efforts to do so, for he felt weak and hopeless himself, and began to think it would have been better to risk captivity in Jamaica than to perish in this miserable manner.

Another day of inexpressible suffering beneath that torrid sun, and at its close Vernor lay in a state of semi-consciousness, while a fierce delirium had seized on his companion.

In one of its paroxysms, he dipped his cap in the sea and drank a long draught of the briny water. This only increased the raging thirst that was consuming him, and he raved more wildly than before of his home—his daughter, and the cruel severities to which he had been subjected. Suddenly he cried out:

"A shark is following in our wake. He has come for his prey; he knows we are doomed. Get up, I say, and help me fight the monster."

Vernor made a few feeble efforts to stir, but sunk back powerless, and with his last remaining strength Lithgow seized the oar and struck at the huge sea-monster. In the effort he lost his balance, fell overboard, and sank to rise no more.

The boat drifted through the night, but Vernor was past caring what befel himself. He lay unconscious of the flight of time, of the drenching dews of night, of the scorching rays of the sun. This was the third day he had been without food, and unless relief speedily came nature could not much longer sustain the vital power within his exhausted frame.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### TIMELY SUCCOR.

LYING beside the pier at Kingston was a gaily decorated pleasure yacht, from the mast of which a white flag floated. The Sylvie belonged to a wealthy planter of Barbadoes, who often made excursions in it, accompanied by his daughter, a young girl who had been educated in France, and a year before this time had returned to the paternal roof in her native island.

The Sylvie was named for its young mistress, who cherished a passionate fondness for the sea, and enjoyed these excursions with a zest peculiar to her vivid temperament. M. Menard, her father, was a cold man to others, but he was as wax in the hands of the resolute and fearless Sylvie.

She wished to visit Jamaica, and he came hither, accompanied her to every accessible spot of interest in the island, and then remained in Kingston as long as her capricious fancy led her to stay. Suddenly she grew weary of the place, and orders were issued to have the yacht in readiness at an early hour on the following morning. Before the sun arose the young creole was on board in the luxurious cabin which had been fitted up for her use. But she did not long remain below; fresh and bright as the morning, she ascended to the deck to look back upon the island they were leaving, crowned with the verdant beauty of the tropics, and her doting father gazed upon the brilliant loveliness of his daughter with wonder and pride.

Sylvie was tall and stately, with that exquisite symmetry of person for which the women of mixed blood are noted; for she was the daughter of a quadroon mother and a European father, and she inherited the strong passions of the two races from which she sprang.

Her complexion was soft as the leaf of the magnolia blossom, without its creamy fairness; and a faint tinge of olive harmonized with her flashing black eyes and rippling raven hair. Her arms and hands were models of beauty, and as she moved across the deck her stately presence seemed to command the homage of all that looked upon her.

At the stern of the little vessel was a sheltered seat prepared for her use, and sinking upon it with the indolent grace of the creole, she commanded a negro girl, who followed her steps, to serve her breakfast there, as it was not her pleasure to take it in the cabin.

Her father, a thin cadaverous Frenchman, with a dark skin which the climate seemed to have tanned almost into leather, drew near her and spoke:

"Will you let me eat alone then?"

"Not unless you choose, *mon pere*. This heavenly morning must not be wasted below. The sea is as smooth as a mirror, and the yacht flies upon her course with scarcely a perceptible motion. It will be pleasant to take our morning meal in this soft air; the awning will protect us from the intrusive rays of the sun. Come, father, order it to be spread here—it is my fancy."

"And therefore must be indulged," he replied, with a fond smile. "Well, let it be so; it will be more agreeable here than in the cabin."

Sylvie smiled triumphantly, and the order was given in accordance with her wishes. A small table was brought up, over which a snowy napkin was spread, and upon it was placed the usual déjeuner of a Frenchman in the tropics—fruits of several varieties, bread and butter, and a bottle of claret.

On this simple but delicious fare the father and daughter breakfasted, and the service was removed to give place to Mademoiselle's portfolio, in which she attempted to sketch some of the most striking points of the scenery.

Her efforts did not meet with much success, for she started up every few moments to survey the ocean and watch the sparkling waves as they broke into foam in their wake. Dinner was served below, and to that she descended, as the sun had become unpleasantly warm. Then came her siesta, from which she arose as the sun was setting, as a goddess from her bath of beauty. She arranged her coquettish toilette as carefully as if the critical eyes of strangers were to fall upon her, for Sylvie appreciated her marvellous beauty, and took the utmost pains to set it off to advantage.



Her silky hair fell in long glittering curls beneath a scarlet bandeau woven through the glossy braids at the back of her head with consummate skill; her dress was of some brilliantly colored material that harmonized with her style, for Sylvie was an artiste in dress, and she spared no expense to procure the richest fabrics that could be worn in the climate of which she was a native.

When she again joined her father on deck, the long line of golden glory which follows a tropical sunset was flushing the waves with their red and amber hues. Sylvie looked with delight upon the wide expanse of water, for her untamable soul revelled in the sense of freedom felt upon the chainless deep.

Her vision was remarkably keen, and she presently detected a dark object floating upon the illuminated waters. She pointed it out to her father, who said:

"It is only a log, my child, such as Columbus saw when he drew near the coast of San Salvador. They are often found floating in these waters."

Sylvie gave another long look at the object which had excited her interest. She presently said:

"That is certainly a small boat. I can see the outline of it with my naked eye. Borrow Captain Pierre's glass and examine it, I intreat."

Her entreaty sounded as a command, and Menard obtained the glass at once. He too made out a boat lying at the mercy of the waves, but it was out of their course, and he was unwilling to make a detour, as he believed to no purpose. He slowly said:

"I see it, but there can be no one in it. It will delay our voyage too much to steer toward it."

She fixed her eyes almost fiercely upon him:

"Fie, father! how do you know that no one is in it? We had a gale lately, in which we know that at least one vessel

went down, and that boat probably has in it some poor wretch rescued from drowning, only to perish of hunger. We must go to his assistance."

"But there is no signal flying. If the boat is tenanted there would be some token by which we should know it."

"The helpless creature in it may be too weak to put one up. He may be watching us now with eager eyes, and half-despairing heart. I *must* see what is in that boat, so order the captain to steer toward it."

With a gesture of resignation, her father obeyed the imperious mandate, and the course of the yacht was changed at once. The young girl, with eager curiosity, leaned over the side of the vessel, and watched their approach to the object which so vividly interested her.

When they approached sufficiently near, their speed was slackened, a boat was lowered, and two men rowed toward the frail craft in which lay the insensible Vernor. They grappled the boats together, and in a few moments were alongside of the larger vessel.

The stranger lay quite helpless, and after some delay he was lifted to the deck, and carried into the cabin. When Sylvie drew near and looked upon his pale face, she uttered an expression of dismay and astonishment. She breathlessly said:

"It is he! it is the strange cavalier of the cathedral who once saved my life! Oh! if we had left him to die, I should have had some terrible misfortune happen to me. What can be done to restore him? Oh, father! use all your skill to bring back life to him."

Menard, who had some knowledge of medicine, as most planters have, put her aside, and examined the condition of the stranger. He presently said:

"His heart beats strongly yet; he is only exhausted by exposure and want of food. A little wine will restore him

to consciousness, and he will soon be able to take nourishment."

Vernor's locked and rigid lips were forced open, and the stimulating liquid soon acted on the vital powers that were only dormant. He unclosed his eyes, looked dreamily around him, and after a few moments made an effort to assume a sitting posture.

"Water — water!" he faintly murmured; "I die of thirst!"

A goblet of iced water was held to his parched lips by the hands of Sylvie, who snatched it from the attendant that brought it, and, weak as he was, a faint flush mounted to Vernor's cheeks as his dimmed eyes fell upon her. There was recognition in that glance; and with a joyful bound of her heart, the young Creole whispered to herself:

"He remembers me too; he knows me. Oh! if I had listened to my father, and left him to die of hunger, I should have lost the happiness of my life."

Poor girl! she little dreamed of all that was to flow from that meeting. How sad was the fate that threw Vernor Methurn again upon her life-path.

Through the efforts of those around him, he was soon sufficiently restored to partake of food, which, at first, was sparingly furnished to him; and by the following day Vernor was well enough to recline on deck, under the awning, in company with the planter and his daughter, to whom he explained as much of his late adventure as he deemed necessary.

He concealed the fact that he had been upon the prison ship, and merely stated that in consequence of being implicated in the late political disturbances in England, he had thought it best to leave that country. The vessel on which he sailed had been wrecked, and the only companion who escaped with him had subsequently fallen overboard in a paroxysm of frenzy, and been drowned.

Sylvie listened to his narrative with alternate tears and smiles. At its close she said:

"All is well that ends well. My debt to you, Monsieur, is but half cancelled. We will take you with us to our verdant isle, and perhaps the exile may there find inducements to cast his lot among us."

Vernor's eyes most eloquently said that a very powerful inducement was already found, and he replied:

"I am now a wanderer upon the face of the earth, and it does not matter much where my tent is pitched. You exaggerate the service I was once enabled to render you, Mademoiselle, but your gratitude is so grateful to me that I cannot refuse to accept it."

He referred to a casualty which had happened to Sylvie during her stay in France. She had accompanied her governess to evening mass in the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame, to which Vernor was attracted by the beauty of the music. He accidentally caught a glimpse of the radiantly beautiful face of the young Creole, and followed her from the church. Just as she issued from the door, a carriage dashed toward it borne by two powerful and frightened horses. They must have trampled her beneath their hoofs in their wild career, had not Vernor rushed forward and snatched her almost from under their feet and borne her half fainting into the cathedral.

When she recovered from her fright sufficiently to speak, she thanked him with a freedom and eloquence which a young French girl would have been afraid to express, and, as he gazed on her vivid beauty, Vernor felt that the ideal of his fancy was embodied in this passionate and enchanting girl. But he remembered the ties that already bound him: and when she asked his name that she might embalm it in her orisons to Heaven, he merely said:

"I am called Vernor. I am only a traveller, and I came

hither to listen to the music, which I was assured is finer than that which is heard in Rome."

They parted after a few more words had been exchanged, for the elder lady soon ended a colloquy in which she thought her young companion had demonstrated her exuberant gratitude rather too freely. As they parted, Sylvie whispered a request for his address, which was promptly given; and a few days afterwards a small package was delivered at his lodgings, which, on opening, he found to contain an exquisitely painted miniature of the young girl he had saved, richly set in brilliants. A tiny note, written in a delicate, lady-like hand, accompanied it, in which he read these words:

"MONSIEUR:—I send you the likeness of her you have saved from death, or mutilation—the last, in my estimation, infinitely worse than the first—that you may not forget my features. The precise code of manners which regulates young girls in this country I do not subscribe to, for, thank Heaven! I come from a land where more freedom is tolerated.

"I am of tropical birth, and I am the spoiled darling of a wealthy man. Should fate ever lead you to Barbadoes inquire for Sylvie Menard, and every return which gratitude such as mine can render will be freely yours."

Vernor mused over this letter, gazed upon the brilliant face which accompanied it, recalled the stately grace of her form, the thrilling tones of her voice, and in his heart he execrated the bonds that bound him to Ethel. But for them he might have won this enchanting creature, who, in that brief interview, had more nearly touched his egotistical heart than any other woman he had ever seen.

Had he known where to seek her he would have made an effort to see her again, and during the few days of his stay

in Paris he regularly attended mass at Nôtre Dame in the hope of meeting her again. But her governess had probably foreseen this ruse, and Sylvie's religious devotions were performed at another shrine.

Vernor carried with him the tiny case which held her miniature, and in all his subsequent wanderings it had never left him. When his garments had been examined in prison he had managed to conceal it in the meshes of his long hair, and the first time he was left alone with Sylvie he drew it from his breast and said:

"See how faithfully I have preserved this precious possession. It has been constantly worn next my heart as a talisman against evil."

"I regret that it had not more potent power," she replied, with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes; "for you seem to have been the sport of fortune since we last met."

"True—yet this blessed reunion could not have taken place but for those misfortunes. I recognize in them the power of fate in bringing together those who are destined to make earth a paradise to each other."

These words were breathed in low, earnest tones, and he looked eagerly upon her face to mark what impression they produced. Sylvie's eyes were not lowered beneath the passionate power of his. She looked searchingly into his with her dazzling orbs, and slowly said:

"It is too early to come to that conclusion yet. Fate is strong, but will is sometimes stronger, and I have one that has never yet been curbed. Should you prove all I have fancied you to be, then—perhaps— But here comes my father to put an end to a conversation which, at present, can lead to nothing."

Menard paused as he was approaching them, to speak with one of the sailors, and Vernor spoke in low bitter tones:

"I am aware that it is a great presumption in a ruined, shipwrecked stranger, who is thrown upon your bounty, to address you thus. Pardon me, Mademoiselle, my feelings hurried me away; but I will transgress no more."

She quickly replied:

"You willfully misunderstand me. My father is particular in some things, and at this early stage of our acquaintance he would not approve of—of—such conversation. You will become our honored guest; he will do all that lies in his power to place you in a position to restore your fortunes. Let us only be friends till you have won his confidence. Then——"

She paused, and flashed her brilliant smile upon him as Menard joined them, and Vernor silently accepted the duty she assigned him.

He used his best efforts to gain the good opinion of the old Frenchman, and with his usual tact he soon succeeded. He spoke French fluently, and the heart of the planter was soon won by his praises of *la grande nation*, for Menard's national vanity was as great as if he had never forsaken his native land to seek his fortunes in the colonies.

The yacht came safely to anchor in a small cove situated near Menard's plantation, and a group of negroes were already in waiting with a palanquin to convey their young mistress to the house, which was about half a mile distant, on an elevation that overlooked the sea.

To Vernor, after his long absence from land, the tropical verdure and luxuriance of the vegetation were charming, and with the joyful elasticity of his temperament he bounded on shore, and walked lightly forward with Menard.

They approached the house through a winding avenue of orange trees loaded with blossoms and fruit, and the air was filled with the perfume of the delicate white flowers which peeped from the shining green foliage. Bellevue was

named from the fine prospect it commanded of the sea; it was a long, low plantation house, irregularly built, with a latticed piazza extending the whole length of the front, over which wild jasmine and roses were trained in arches of verdant beauty.

A wide hall opened from the piazza, from which the different apartments were entered. The furniture was light and tasteful, and had been carefully selected with reference to the warm climate in which it was to be used. A hammock of sea-grass was suspended midway between the two doors of the hall, near which was an inlaid table, on which a lady's basket and some loose music were placed. The last was evidently appropriated by Sylvie, but the first was for the siesta of her father, for only in the hammock can one find repose during the heat of a tropical day.

As they entered the house, Menard warmly grasped the hand of Vernor, and welcomed him to its hospitality. He said:

"I am not a man of many words, Mr. Vernor, but I am glad of an opportunity to prove to you that I am not ungrateful for the service you once rendered my child. We will talk of business after you have been with us long enough to feel at home; perhaps I can then suggest to you something that you will like."

Vernor thanked him, and followed a sable page to the room already prepared for his use. Sylvie, in a fresh toilette, appeared at the supper table, which was spread on a wide sheltered gallery in the rear of the house, and the attendant nymphs had exercised their utmost skill to adorn the board in honor of her arrival. Every dish was wreathed with flowers, and an immense bouquet adorned the centre of the table.

Sylvie did the honors with bewitching grace, and when supper was over, she took occasion to welcome their guest to his future home. Vernor replied with a smile:

"It is a fair home, but I have no claims upon it beyond a few days of tolerance beneath its roof. I must seek some means of gaining a living, unused as I am to do anything useful."

"Oh, my father has settled all that," she replied with animation. "He will open his plans to you as soon as you are ready to listen to him."

"The sooner he does so the better for me—for I shall be glad of any employment that will retain me near this enchanting paradise over which reigns an Eve who might rival our first mother in attractiveness."

"That is a very gallant speech, and I reward it by telling you that you will have the option to remain with us, or to seek employment elsewhere."

"You cannot doubt my choice," he significantly said, and he followed M. Menard to the piazza, on which he was established with his pipe. In the conversation that ensued, the planter unfolded a scheme he had to retain Vernor near him, which he was only too happy to accept.

For many years a nephew of the old man had resided at Bellevue, as agent for the plantations owned by his uncle. But Basil Menard had fallen desperately in love with his cousin, and at last, frightened by his violence at her refusal to marry him, Sylvie had insisted that her father should dismiss him from his service. It had been the business of Basil to purchase supplies for the places, keep the accounts, and look after the overseer who had the blacks in charge.

This vacant berth Vernor's new friend proposed to bestow on him, with a salary proportioned rather to his friendship for him, than to the actual services demanded. Basil had gone they knew not whither, and the burden of business which Menard had borne several weeks was becoming excessively tiresome to him. When Vernor had expressed his grateful acceptance of a post he thought he might fill with respectable ability, the planter said:

"It's all settled, then. Don't talk about feeling, and all that nonsense. The work can be easily done, and the pay is good. You can go to Bridgetown to-morrow, and get a new outfit. Here is a quarter's salary in advance, and I will give you an order on my merchant for the plantation supplies."

He returned to the indulgence of his pipe, and Vernor strolled to the farther end of the piazza and joined Sylvie. Hour by hour his passion for her gained strength, and before it every restraint of principle vanished. The ties that fettered him would, he doubted not, be dissolved by the efforts of Ethel's friends to render her free, and love and fortune moved him to the acceptance of a brighter fate than he had lately hoped would ever be his.

Expatriated, impoverished as he was, he saw that this beautiful and nobly dowered girl would be his if he asked her hand, and he had no prejudices to overcome concerning the current of dark blood that mingled in her veins with the sanguine tide of her paternal race. She was lovely, intelligent and loving, and Vernor's heart went forth to meet hers with a passionate ardor he had not believed himself capable of feeling.

For the first time in his life he felt a genuine affection for some human being beside himself, and the coquettish wiles which nature taught the young creole, only added to the flame her bewildering attractions had inspired.

Menard was not quick of apprehension, and the destiny of his daughter was settled in those dreamy weeks which followed her return to Bellevue, while her unsuspecting father smoked his pipe, or lounged the hours away in his hammock, for the vivacious Frenchman had completely adopted the indolent habits of the people among whom he had so long lived.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## THE WEDDING.

WHEN Menard began to comprehend what had so long been going on before his eyes, he passed through many phases of feeling. He was amazed, bewildered, and lastly furious that this penniless stranger should aspire to the hand of his daughter. It was a pet scheme of his to return to France at the close of the following year, taking Sylvie with him; and there, with her beauty and fortune, she might make a brilliant alliance. He thought her pride had led her to refuse his nephew, and he had not dreamed that a man without either home or fortune could ever render himself acceptable to her.

Menard was a man of quick temper and but little perseverance; yet on this provocation his wrath was so great that his daughter began to fear it would assume the form of obstinacy. She used all her wiles—tried every art of persuasion without effect; but when he threatened to kick her presumptuous lover out of doors, the fire that lay smouldering within her blazed forth. With flashing eyes and curling lip, she said:

"Do so, Monsieur, if you will; but know that I shall go with him as his wife. Since you will not listen to reason, I shall take my fate in my own hands."

"Go, then, ungrateful that you are! Leave your old and doting father for the specious stranger, who has abused my hospitality by secretly winning the affections of my child. Live with him in poverty and obscurity, for I will give you nothing."

"You will surrender to me the estate of my mother which the law gives to me," she haughtily replied. "I am well

aware, Monsieur, that the greater portion of the wealth you claim was derived from my maternal grandfather, and you cannot alienate it from me."

This was a fact of which Menard had lost sight in his bitter wrath. When he came a poor adventurer to Barbadoes, the wealth of Antoine Ledru had tempted him to take his quadroon daughter as his wife, and at least half of his present estate belonged legitimately to her child.

"So—you would also strip me of my fortune," he screamed, "and give it to this vagabond, who will dissipate it, no doubt, and probably break your heart."

"I will take that risk," she resolutely replied. "I have faith in my betrothed. He is a gentleman by birth, and a man of noble and refined feeling."

"Refined foolery! He has turned your head with his sentimental nonsense, and you are ready to throw yourself away in this absurd manner. You! for whom I had planned so different a destiny. Listen to me, Sylvie; I have hoarded money to enable me to live in princely splendor in my native land. I will return to France, purchase an estate, and give you a palace in Paris. You shall have everything that heart can desire if you will only give up this degrading marriage."

Her lip curled contemptuously.

"My heart desires but one thing, and that is the love you bid me repudiate. I have no wish to live in Paris;—I prefer the wild freedom of my native island to the trammels of fashionable life. Make up your mind to this marriage, father, for I have set my heart upon it, and you know that I am not used to bend my will to that of another."

"Yes," he feebly groaned, "I have permitted you to do as you please, till I have no longer any control over you. If you will stoop so low as to marry my agent, why did you not take Basil? He was my nephew, and your fortune could at least have benefitted my own family."



"Because I did not love him, and I do love M. Vernor."

Menard walked up and down the long hall in which this conversation took place during the absence of Vernor. He tore his hair, performed a frantic dance, and finally resorted to his pipe and his hammock for consolation.

When he grew calmer, Sylvie approached him and spoke with the defiant pride that characterized her :

"When my betrothed returns, treat him with the respect that is due to him and to me. If you insult him by expressing your opposition to our union as freely as you have done to me, I will seek another home. I will go to the Ledru place, which belongs to me, and take up my abode with old Cecile till my marriage can take place."

Menard looked helplessly at her; his rage had exhausted itself, and he felt himself at the mercy of his determined adversary. He gloomily muttered :

"Since you will have it so, I must give my consent, I suppose. But you really know nothing of this young man. He may not be what he represents himself; he may have been exiled for a worse offence than a political one. Oh! Sylvie, do not break my heart by making an unhappy marriage."

"I believe implicitly what he has told me, and I will marry him or no other," was the firm response. "Such is my confidence in him that I will endow him, without reservation, with all I possess."

The old man clasped his hands despairingly, and the rebellious daughter swept away to her own apartment with the triumphant consciousness of victory.

Menard knew it to be useless to struggle against her determination, and he resigned himself to what he felt to be inevitable with the best grace he could assume. He adored his daughter, and he trembled at her threat to leave him if he persisted in his opposition.

With outward respect, but internal distrust Vernor was received as his future son-in-law, and the homeless exile found himself the prospective possessor of a lovely wife dowered with at least a hundred thousand pounds, the half of which would become his on the day of their union.

He did not pause to ask himself if time had been given to sever his former bonds. His lot was cast in this far away place, in an island subject to a foreign power, and it was not likely that any one should stray from his former home who could betray the treachery of which he had been guilty. At the worst, if this should happen, he could legalize his union with Sylvie by a second ceremony when the divorce between himself and Ethel was pronounced. With this sophistry he silenced the few scruples that arose, and gave himself up to the joy of loving and being loved with an ardor seldom equalled. He was passionately enamored of his beautiful fiancée, and she demonstrated her attachment to him with a freedom unknown to women of a colder clime.

This frankness charmed Vernor, and riveted the chains in which she held him, even more firmly than before. A few delicious weeks of happiness passed away on wings of light, and the bridal day drew near. The wedding was to be private; a priest was to come from the neighboring town to perform the ceremony, and the lovers were to make a bridal excursion in the yacht to the Island of Cuba.

On the evening before their marriage, Vernor and his betrothed stood together on the piazza looking out upon the moonlit sea, and discussing their future plans. Suddenly Sylvie asked :

"Have you never loved before, *mon bien aimé*?"

"Never; you are the only woman I have ever cared to make my wife. My first and only love is yours."

"It is well that it is so, for I am terribly jealous. I warn you that you must be devoted and faithful to me alone, or I

know not what may happen. I have trusted you implicitly; if you betray that trust, woe be unto you."

He laughed a little uneasily.

"Why, my angel, how tragic you are! Pray don't try to make me afraid of the yoke I am about to assume. I adore you—I shall never care for another. Does not that assurance satisfy your exacting heart?"

She regarded him with eyes brimming with tears, for a sudden dread had fallen on her, and a faint premonition of the fate she was preparing for herself, came as a cloud over the brightness of her happiness. She mournfully said:

"It should—it must. But to-morrow you assume a fearful responsibility. I am wayward, passionate, and capable of the direst revenge, if I find I have been deceived or outraged in any manner. You came to us a stranger, and I have trusted you with the life of my life. Oh! Vernor, if you prove unworthy of my confidence, our fate will be a fearful one!"

A cold thrill penetrated his heart as he listened to her words, and he felt his cheek paling beneath her glance. With great effort he repeated:

"Our fate; since you unite us in one common doom, my Sylvie, I can brave it, let it be what it may. Even to die with you, my best-beloved, is better than to live for any other woman; and to gain the happiness of making you mine, I will risk even that."

The shadow passed from her brow, and she whispered:

"Only love me thus forever, forever, and I ask no more."

With his consummate tact Vernor said everything that could allay the passing cloud, and the deceived and hapless girl went to her room with a heart almost oppressed with its ineffable sense of happiness.

A brilliant morning dawned on the island home of M. Menard. At an early hour the house was astir, and the

yacht, gaily decorated with streamers in honor of the occasion, lay in the cove below the house. The priest had passed the night at Bellevue, and a few intimate friends were invited to witness the marriage.

With but few misgivings, which were quickly silenced, Vernor prepared for the ceremony which was to give him a second wife before the first was legally separated from him. He believed that Sylvie would never learn the treachery of which she was about to be made the victim, and he knew himself so little as to imagine that he could always remain contented in the sylvan paradise into which he had come as the serpent of old came into the garden of Eden. He fancied that his passion for Sylvie would be as lasting as life itself; that it could reconcile him to the seclusion which was so foreign to his habits for many years past.

Two months had elapsed since he came to Barbadoes, and time had flown by on rapid wings, but he forgot that he had been occupied with an engrossing passion, and when the zest of that should pass away as the sparkle from the wine, his restless nature would seek some new avenue of enjoyment probably inconsistent with the serene happiness of domestic life.

Let the future betide what it might, Vernor was ready to risk all where he was to gain so much, and when Sylvie came forth radiant with love and happiness, he exultingly clasped her willing hand and drew her before the man of God.

The ceremony was soon performed, and Vernor led his bride to the head of the table on which a magnificent déjeuner was spread. The poor old father endeavored to look happy and pleased, but it was a dismal effort at cheerfulness, for he vaguely mistrusted this stranger who had won his child from him, and he dreaded what the future might bring forth.

The planter was not to accompany the newly wedded pair upon their tour. He declared himself unable to leave home at this crisis, and to the great satisfaction of the young couple they were to enjoy their happiness uninterrupted by his gloomy presence.

Breakfast over, the whole party prepared to accompany the bridal pair to the yacht. As they issued from the house a fierce-looking man of fine proportions, and much masculine beauty of person, was crossing the lawn with rapid steps. His brow was stern and his lips compressed as he advanced directly toward Sylvie. She met his eyes with a haughty expression of surprise and exclaimed:

"Basil! What brings you hither now, and where have you been so long?"

"You have not found it long it seems," he said, speaking through his closed teeth, "for in the interval you have given me a rival. Is it true, Sylvie Menard, that you have bestowed your hand on the man who stands beside you?"

"I have—and what concern is it of yours?"

"It should be much, for you are of my blood, and dear to me. You have preferred the stranger known to you but a few brief weeks, when the love of years was scorned. Look to it that he does not repay you with a broken heart. You know not who he is, or whence he came; his race is not ours, and perfidy is the birthright of his nation. Oh, Sylvie! you have doomed me to despair in thus throwing yourself away!"

Her eyes flashed, and she was about to make a bitter retort, when Vernor spoke:

"Monsieur, this lady is now my wife, and such language with reference either to myself or my country I will not tolerate. Stand aside, and let us pass upon our way."

Basil glared on him a moment, and then slowly said:

"I will make it the business of my life to find out who

and what you are, who have imposed yourself on an old man and an inexperienced girl. You have won their confidence, and torn from me the hopes of my life. Pass on, M. Anglais, but I am on your track, and if you prove unworthy of the good fortune you have won—beware!"

In spite of his efforts to control himself, Vernor became deadly pale at the utterance of this threat. He raised his hand menacingly, to which Basil replied by a gesture of contempt, and the priest stepped between them. He spoke soothingly to the excited intruder:

"Come with me, Basil. Your disappointment has made you unreasonable. With the consent of her father, Sylvie is the wife of M. Vernor, and any attempt to injure her husband can only render her unhappy. You will think better of this idle menace."

"Perhaps so, Father Pierre; but it moves him strangely. See how he changes color."

"If I do," replied Vernor, defiantly, "it is with indignation at this outrage. But I can forgive you, M. Basil, since I have succeeded where you have failed. Good day; seek out my antecedents, if you choose, and make the most of them. You will find little food for your malice in so doing."

He drew the hand of Sylvie beneath his arm, and proudly strode away, followed by all the party save the priest and Basil. Menard whispered a few words in the ear of the latter, and then joined the procession to the yacht.

In another hour the little vessel glided from the cove, with every sail set, bearing two happy and exulting hearts within her. If poor Sylvie's dream was brief, it was entrancing, and she gave herself up to her new-found happiness with a child-like abandon that rendered her more enchanting than ever to Vernor. He cast aside the momentary uneasiness produced by Basil's threat, for he believed that under his change of name he could safely

defy a stranger and a foreigner to trace his family in his native land, or to identify him as the husband of another woman.

The weather was charming, and the fairy bark sailed over smooth seas lighted at night by a tropical moon, and the days passed all too swiftly away to the two who were all the world to each other. Sylvie wished they could thus sail on forever; they reached Cuba after a delightful voyage, and after spending a week in Havana, went into the interior of the island and explored some of its most romantic recesses. Their trip back was without accident, and after an absence of two months Vernor and his bride again landed in safety at Bellevue.

Vernor had been apprehensive that he should find Basil there installed as superintendent in his place, but the young creole had refused the place which his uncle had again offered him; he could not live in the same house with Sylvie, and see her daily as the wife of another. He stated to Menard that, with a little assistance, he could establish himself in a lucrative business in the island of St. Croix, and the old man, as a panacea to his wounded heart, advanced the sum he required, but with a positive understanding with his nephew that no portion of it was to be devoted to the threatened visit to England.

Since his daughter had married this stranger, Menard wished no efforts to be made to bring discord between herself and her husband. If Vernor had been guilty of wrongdoing, it was best that Sylvie should never be made aware of it, and Basil pledged himself not to act on the threat he had made; but in his heart was a deep-seated feeling of rancor toward his rival, and he held himself in readiness to strike a blow at him whenever the opportunity should arrive.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE FLIGHT.

WITH a rapid pen we must now sketch the life of Vernor and Sylvie for the next four years. For a few months he was passionately devoted to her, but her exacting temper, her unreasonable jealousy if he showed even ordinary attention to the young girls who occasionally visited at Bellevue, gradually alienated him. He soon felt that he was becoming a slave to the caprices of an imperious woman, and he openly rebelled against the thralldom to which he had willingly submitted in the early days of their union.

Stormy days ensued, usually ending in a reconciliation, and for a brief season, the renewal of their former tenderness; but each one cooled the ardor of Vernor's attachment, till, with the natural inconstancy of his temperament, he almost regretted the fate which had thrown him on the path of his divine Sylvie.

He forgot all he owed to her, and at moments even secretly exulted in the thought that, in all probability, the tie that bound him to her was not legal. Sylvie's attachment, on the contrary, seemed to gain strength with every passing day. His coldness provoked her jealousy and her fears, but it had no power to change the devoted love which she had bestowed upon him.

She tormented him, she tyrannized over him, but she adored him; and he began dimly to comprehend that the words she uttered on the night previous to their union would be acted on if the provocation were given.

New causes of discord soon arose. Vernor wearied of the monotony of plantation life. He no longer had any business to occupy him, as he considered it beneath his dignity

to act as agent since he had married the heiress, and a substitute was found. He strayed away to Bridgtown, and sometimes prolonged his absence several days in the congenial company of the dissipated young men of wealth in the vicinity who found time hang heavily upon their hands. They established a race-course, patronized a gambling saloon, at which Vernor lost heavily, and, worse than all, he frequently returned to his wife in a state of oblivion as to what had happened to him.

Sylvie wept over him, nursed him tenderly through his fits of intoxication, and then stormed at him for so degrading himself. At first he replied with equal fire, but gradually he listened with apathy to her reproaches, and sat unmoved by her tears.

That portion of her fortune which Menard had surrendered to him was rapidly melting away in his hands, and the old planter saw with dismay the hoards he had accumulated by years of industry, scattered by the careless hand of a prodigal.

He beheld his worst fears confirmed: his daughter was not happy in her ill-omened union, and if Vernor was permitted to go on in this reckless way she would be ruined. Yet when he ventured to speak with Sylvie on this subject she declared with vehemence that what was hers also belonged to the man she loved, and he was free to do with it as he pleased—even to squander it in vices and follies, which must in time disgust him, and he would yet return to her with the loving heart he had once plighted to her.

Her father cherished no such hope, but he refrained from urging her to a course of action which would certainly produce an open rupture, for the old man began bitterly to feel that the wealth of his daughter had been as great a temptation to Vernor to marry her as her own attractions.

Had Sylvie's children lived, she might have been more

anxious for the preservation of her property, but of the two that were born in the first three years of their union, both died a few hours after their birth, and these successive afflictions only added strength to her attachment to their father. She clung to him with that blind, passionate ardor which was the gift of her temperament and her race; Vernor was her world—her all, and life without him would be worthless, wretched as he had often made it.

The revolution in England which placed William III. on the throne, had taken place many months before it was known in Barbadoes, for at that day intercourse between the continent of Europe and the colonies was much less frequent than now.

One morning after a scene of passionate recrimination between Vernor and Sylvie, he bitterly said:

"You will force me to leave you at last, for I will not stand the life you lead me."

He rushed out, mounted his horse, and rode rapidly in the direction of Bridgtown, leaving her filled with remorse and terror lest he should execute his threat.

When he reached the town, he found that a French ship had entered the port, and there seemed to be great commotion at the news she brought. Vernor heard with joy that the Prince of Orange was now King of England, and he thought with triumph that he might now return to his native land, and possibly regain his inheritance. Under a new ruler the adherents of Monmouth would not be severely dealt with, and with that hardness of nature that springs from a long course of self-indulgence, he scarcely gave a thought to the hapless woman who had given him her all, yet whom he was ready to offer up as a sacrifice to his own aggrandizement.

Sylvie had ceased to be attractive to him. She annoyed and tormented him, and if he could reclaim his title and es-

tates, he would find means to evade her in such a manner as to leave no clue by which she could trace him. Deeply revolving these possibilities in his busy brain, Vernor wandered from the crowd, and slowly walked toward the place of usual rendezvous for himself and his friends. Suddenly he was startled by a voice exclaiming close beside him:

"Hillo, Methurn! can this possibly be you, alive and well? I thought you had gone down among the mermaids long ago!"

Vernor raised his startled eyes, and recognized a young Frenchman with whom he had been on intimate terms while travelling in Europe. He grasped the hand of his former friend, and said:

"I am glad to meet you again, Bertrand, but do not call me by that name, if you please. I am known here by my baptismal one alone, for reasons you can well understand. Come with me to a place where we can speak in private, and I will tell you of my strange adventures since we last met."

"I am at your service, old fellow, for I am travelling for amusement, and have nothing particular to attend to. It is a perfect godsend to meet with an old friend in this out of the way place. The news came to me that you had been lost in the prison ship in which you were transported. A most infamous sentence too it was against a gentleman; but the old tyrant that ruled England has been well paid for all that."

"I am glad both on his account and my own, that James Stuart has met with his deserts. I can now go back with safety, and claim my own."

"There's not much chance of the last, I am afraid. You have not, then, heard from your family in all these years? Yet how should you, for they are all firmly persuaded of your death."

"I have taken no pains to let them know that I am still living. Those I left behind me cared as little to hear from me as I from them."

"So you really have given up that pretty baroness, with her fine fortune, to your lucky cousin? I am just from England, where I sought the acquaintance of Sir Gerald Methurn, that I might inquire if anything had ever been heard from you. He and his betrothed bride were in London, preparing for the wedding, which is to come off at Cliffden at Christmas."

Vernor flushed and then grew pale. He faltered:

"What do you mean? Has my cousin assumed the title which belongs to me? And Ethel—has she really become the heiress of her family estates?"

"She is now Lady Clifton, and your cousin served the new King so well in many ways that your father's property has been restored to him with permission to assume the title. Of course he believed you had perished, as every one else did."

This was a stunning blow to Vernor, and after a pause of confused thought, he hoarsely asked:

"Do you know if any legal steps were taken to dissolve the marriage between Ethel and myself?"

"Ah, I had forgotten that you were really married to her. No divorce was demanded, for the news of your death rendered it superfluous. If I were in your place I would return to France on the ship that brought me out, travel from there to England as fast as possible, put an end to the wedding preparations, and claim the bonniest bride in all Britain."

"But I have ties here that it will be difficult to break!"

"What! you have found a *chère amie*? That is bad, for these tropical women are the d—l for jealousy, and sometimes they are capable of doing terrible things."

Vernor felt this himself, and after conducting Bertrand



to a cabaret he frequented, and entering a private room, he there, under the strictest seal of secrecy, unfolded to him the exact position in which he stood. The Frenchman listened with deep interest, and at the close of the narration, said :

"It is lucky that your true name is unknown here ; but I reverse my former advice. Since you love this beautiful creole, stay where fate has cast you, and give up the uncertain chances of success if you should return to England. Lady Clifton may refuse to return to her allegiance to you ; and besides, your present wife might follow you, and have you prosecuted for bigamy."

"She could not do that. She knows nothing of my former life, and as Mr. Vernor she could never trace me."

"But I understand you to say that you are attached to her. She is rich, you said, and beautiful ; and from my own observation, I can assure you that the fair Baroness is so much in love with your cousin, that she will not readily consent to be claimed by you."

Vernor ground his teeth in silent rage at this suggestion. That Gerald, who in his heart he had always considered socially his inferior ; for whom he had for years cherished a deep-seated dislike, because his industry and honorable course had been a reproach to himself ; that he could have achieved such good fortune, was a bitter humiliation.

Bertrand was a giddy Frenchman, with little sympathy and less principle ; but he had a keen eye to interest, and in his subsequent conversations with Vernor he dwelt on the advantages of not sacrificing a certain good for an uncertain chance, and Vernor was almost persuaded to remain satisfied with his present position.

When the stranger visited Bellevue and saw Sylvie, he gave it as his decided opinion that his friend would be mad to forsake such a woman, for in her anger and despair she would be capable of taking any vengeance upon him.

Bertrand departed for a neighboring island, leaving Vernor to brood over the revelations he had made, and his dissatisfaction hourly increased. Sylvie's fortune was almost exhausted, and he knew that Menard would never permit him to encroach on his. The planter's health had failed him greatly within the last few months, and Vernor speculated on the chance of his speedy death.

If the old man were removed, the wealth Sylvie must inherit would be a fair equivalent for that he relinquished with the hand of Ethel : if he lived much longer his position would become unendurable to one of his temper and habits.

A few mornings after the departure of Bertrand, Menard was found dead in his bed, and Vernor made up his mind to remain on the island. But when the will was opened, its contents reduced his son-in-law to such a state of dependence upon Sylvie, that he was resolute to risk everything sooner than remain with her on such terms.

The whole estate was irrevocably settled on Sylvie ; trustees were appointed to manage it, and to pay over to her a quarterly allowance, which was amply sufficient to enable her to live in the style to which she had been accustomed, but not to furnish Vernor with the large sums he was in the habit of squandering. If she violated the conditions of the will, the estate was to go to Basil Menard, as the next of kin, and a small annuity was to be paid to Sylvie.

The papers of the deceased planter showed that he had already paid over to his son-in-law every penny to which Sylvie was legally entitled as the heiress of her mother ; and the property he had accumulated by his own thrift was his to dispose of as he pleased.

There was no possibility of evading the settlement thus made, and after an interview with Sylvie, in which he pas-

sionately accused her of having instigated her father to the course he had pursued, that he might be entirely dependent upon herself, Vernor left the house in a paroxysm of rage, which soon terminated in the firm resolve to leave Barbadoes at all hazards, and return to Europe in the French ship which was still in port, receiving a cargo of sugar for Bordeaux.

His arrangements were secretly made, and under cover of night, he went on board of the ship, a few hours before she set sail. A letter for Sylvie was left behind him. It was received on the following day, and read with emotions of despair and anger it would be vain to attempt to portray. This heartless and cruel effusion ran thus:

"BARBADOES, Nov. 30, 1689.

"SYLVIE:—We can no longer be happy together; we are not suited to each other, and the caprices of your violent temper have alienated the love I have felt for you. I do not deny that I once adored you with passionate fervor—you know that I did—and you can measure the extent of my infatuation when I tell you that it tempted me to commit a great wrong against you.

"Sylvie, forgive me, for when I made you mine I was already the husband of another. My bride was but a child, and I had never claimed her, but family reasons gave her my hand years before we met. In extenuation of my crime against you, I must state that I believed legal measures had been taken after my exile to release my first wife from her bonds; but I have lately learned that it was not so. The tie that binds us together is as a rope of sand, for it is not now even strengthened by love on my part. I will not say whose fault this is, for I have often been to blame myself, but if you will recall your violence, your jealousy, and the many bitter words that have passed between us,

you will comprehend that I am but too willing to avail myself of the chance that offers itself to escape from your imperious thralldom.

"A new king reigns in England, and it will be safe for me to return there. It will be useless for you to follow me, for you can never trace me. You have never known my true name, nor the position I once held. Be reasonable, if you can; give up a man to whom no legal tie binds you, and seek that happiness with another which you have failed to find with me.

"If it had been possible for us to live together in peace, this should never have been made known to you, for I do not love the bride to whom I am now returning. No—you, and you alone, have I ever loved, and if that knowledge can console you, let it do so. I shall never love another, but I can find in ambition a substitute for that evanescent passion.

"Adieu, Sylvie, for on this side of the grave we shall meet no more.  
"VERNOR."

When the first paroxysm of Sylvie's despair subsided, an intense and burning desire for revenge upon him who had so cruelly wronged her took possession of her wild heart. Just at this crisis, when she was revolving her plans, and seeking in her own mind for some one to assist her in carrying them out, Basil arrived. He had heard of his uncle's declining health, and came to visit him. The news of his death, and Sylvie's abandonment by her supposed husband, reached him as soon as he landed, and he hurried to Bellevue to offer such assistance as she might stand in need of.

When he was admitted into her presence, he was shocked at the change in her appearance. He recalled the radiant being he had last seen in the flush of her exulting happiness, and compared her with the wan woman before him,

with the fires of despair and incipient insanity blazing in her large, black eyes.

She pointed to a seat, and spoke in a hollow tone:

"You have been sent hither to aid me, Basil, when you were most wanted. Keep the vow you made that fatal day—seek the treacherous deceiver through the world, help me to bring him to justice for his inexpiable wrong toward me, and ask your own reward."

He slowly said:

"Would you give me yourself, Sylvie?"

"If you still value the wreck I have become I will do even that, if you will help me to vengeance on *him*. Oh! Basil, my heart is broken, my brain is going wild. Let us follow him at once; we shall find a clue—I know we shall."

"Yes—I am sure of that; for such wickedness as this will never be suffered to go unpunished. You must take something to compose you, Sylvie. You are in danger of an attack of fever, and that would not advance our plans. I swear fidelity to you; I will go with you on this quest, and never leave you till I find and punish him we both have such cause to loathe."

She took his hand between her burning ones, and feverishly asked:

"When shall we set out? We must lose no time, for I cannot bear an hour's delay. Is there any ship in port for France?"

"No—but there is the yacht. We can sail to Jamaica on her, and there we shall be sure to find an English bark. We may yet outstrip Vernor in reaching his native land."

"Lose no time, then, in making the necessary arrangements for our voyage. Get money from my merchant, and have all ready by to-morrow if it is possible to do so."

Basil promised to do his best, and he returned to Bridgetown, having first ordered the captain of the yacht to sail

there for the stores necessary to be taken in. The little vessel had been kept in order, and many excursions had been made in her by Sylvie since her marriage, so there was no delay in getting her ready for sea.

On the second morning after Vernor's departure, she set sail for Jamaica, with the two cousins on board; and if anything could have aggravated the wretchedness of Sylvie, it was being confined to the same vessel which had been as a fairy paradise to her in that blissful bridal trip with him she was now ready to sacrifice to the brooding spirit of revenge which had taken possession of her heart.

They reached Jamaica in safety; found there an English ship bound for Liverpool, on which a passage was immediately secured. The voyage proved tempestuous; the ship was driven from her course, and was finally wrecked upon the coast near Lyme. The passengers and crew were rescued; Menard also succeeded in saving the money he had brought with him, and the two strangers, bound on such a quest, did not find themselves destitute upon a foreign shore.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MELCHOIR MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AFTER a prosperous voyage, Vernor reached Bordeaux, and immediately sought the means of reaching England. He found a smuggling craft bound for Lyme, the captain of which proved to be an old acquaintance. The man recognized him at once, and knowing that he had nothing to fear from one who had often purchased contraband goods of him in other days, he readily consented to receive him as a passenger.

Captain Edson confirmed the information which Bertrand had given him, and informed him that the Priory had been put in thorough repair, and refurnished for the reception of the new proprietor and his bride.

Vernor ground his teeth with rage at the thought that *his* estate and *his* bride were in the possession of his cousin, and he exulted in the thought of the dismay he was about to spread among the happy hearts assembled at Cliffden.

After a stormy passage the lugger came in sight of the broken and precipitous coast on which Lyme is situated; Vernor recalled the charge given him by Lithgow on the night before his death, and he inquired of the captain if he knew of such a person in the town as his daughter. Edson readily replied:

"Oh, yes—I know Jessie Lithgow well, and a nice, industrious girl she is. She has a house on the main street, in which she keeps a haberdasher's shop, and the upper rooms she rents to lodgers."

"So much the better; that will exactly suit me, for I do not care to go to the public house lest my arrival should be prematurely made known to him who has appropriated my inheritance, and who may attempt to have me thrown in prison for returning to England without a formal pardon."

"Then you cannot do better than to take lodgings with Jessie Lithgow. She is discreet and quiet, and does not talk of her lodgers."

Vernor had brought with him a considerable sum of money, and he had already formed his plan of action. A small boat landed him on the pier which had witnessed the descent of Monmouth, and he made his way into the town, for the place had been familiar to him from boyhood.

Night had fallen, but a bright moon was shining, and following the directions the captain of the lugger had given him, he had no difficulty in finding the place he sought. A

light was burning in the shop, and after tapping twice upon the door, a slender, fair-haired woman of pleasing appearance unclosed it, holding a candle in her hand.

"Does Miss Lithgow live here?" asked Vernor. "I was directed to seek lodgings with her."

"I am Jessie Lithgow, and I let lodgings; but my rooms are all occupied at present. You had better go to the public house, which is only a little further down the street."

"Permit me to enter a few moments, if you please. I am the bearer of a message from one you have loved, and after hearing it I think you will not refuse to shelter me."

His manner was courteous, and his address that of a gentleman. Jessie scanned his face, and in some perturbation replied:

"Come in, sir. If you bring me the news I have long yearned to hear, I shall bless you indeed."

He entered, and closing the door behind him, Jessie led the way into the back room. This was comfortably fitted up, and a bright fire was burning in the grate, over which the tea-kettle was singing. When Vernor was seated she stood before him with an expression of eager solicitude upon her face, and asked:

"Is it of my wronged and ruined father that you would speak? He is all I have ever had to love. Oh, sir, can you tell me anything of him? I have lived for years in the hope that he might have escaped—that he might return to me yet, though others assured me that he must have perished in that dreadful shipwreck."

"He did not then perish. He escaped with me, but subsequently lost his life."

She uttered a cry, and covered her face with her hands. Vernor went on:

"I was a prisoner in the same ship, doomed to the same fate, but when the vessel went down, the seamanship of

your father enabled him to clear a small boat from the wreck, in which he and I made our escape. He told me of you, and in his last moments entreated me to see and inform you of his fate if I ever touched English soil again. I landed here to-night, and sought you out at once."

"And after all his sufferings, he died when he might have escaped the cruel fate awarded him," she cried, in heart-rending tones. "Oh, my father! my poor lost father!"

Vernor waited till her emotion had in a measure subsided. When she grew calmer she questioned him till every minutiae connected with those dreadful days upon the sea was in her possession. She wept bitterly during the recital, but the duties of hospitality reminded her that the stranger had probably had no supper, and she set herself about preparing it. She said:

"I comprehend, sir, that it might be dangerous for you to go to the inn. If you were among Monmouth's men you might be recognized here by some of the people, and evil might come of it. You were my father's friend when he most needed one, and I will put myself to some inconvenience to shelter you. There is a small room adjoining this that I use as a lumber closet, and if you will put up with such accommodations, I can make you a comfortable bed in there, and you can sit in this room in the day-time."

Vernor thanked her, and added:

"I only require a night's lodging, for I shall leave this place with the dawn."

The simple supper, to which she added a mutton-chop for her guest, was soon placed upon the table, and Vernor did ample justice to it. Jessie could not eat, for tears still at intervals streamed silently over her face.

After putting aside the tea things, she prepared a couch for him in the closet of which she had spoken, to which he was glad to retire, but she sat over the fire till a late hour, thinking over the news she had heard.

It was ten o'clock, when a tap came upon her window, and wiping away the traces of her tears, she unclosed it and spoke with a man standing without.

"You are up late," said a deep-toned voice. "May I come in a few moments?"

"It is too late, Melchoir; your mother will be sitting up for you, and you had better go to her room."

"Let her wait awhile. I must speak with you. What has become of the man I saw come into your shop two hours ago? I have been on the watch for him to come out, for he was a suspicious-looking stranger that landed from the smuggling craft the revenue officers have been lately watching for. Your rooms are all occupied I know, then what have you done with him?"

In much perturbation, she replied:

"I found a place for him; pray go away now and leave me alone."

"You've been crying. I never knew you to cry before, and I must find out what is the cause of your tears. Let me in, I insist, for I must fathom this mystery. Remember, I have the *right* to know why you harbor this stranger."

The man who thus spoke was the betrothed husband of Jessie Lithgow, and she dared not refuse his demand. She knew him to be impetuous and jealous of temper, and she feared even more than she loved him.

In trembling silence she unclosed the door, and the stalwart form of Melchoir stood within the room. He glanced around with knit brows and said:

"So-o—you gave this stranger supper too. He must have had some claim upon you; he is from foreign parts, and perhaps he brought you some news of the old man. You have always said you would hear from him, though I did not believe you would. If it is so, you had better tell me at once. I too have had a vague belief that one I have no

cause to love survived that wreck, and will yet come back to meet his fate. But he was young and strong, and there was something in that stranger's air to-night that strangely reminded me of him."

Jessie scarcely listened to the last words. She whispered:

"Speak lower, Melchoir. Since I *must* tell you, I have heard from my poor father—It was a sad story and that is why I wept. He escaped from the wreck of the Sally Ann, and he who is in that room was his companion. Father could not survive the hardships he had endured; but the younger man was picked up, and his life saved by those who found him."

The listener uttered a quick exclamation. He breathlessly asked:

"What is the age of this man? His hight—his complexion?"

"He is tall and well formed, with light blue eyes and golden hair, which he wears long like the Cavaliers. He seemed about thirty."

"*'Tis he,*" he breathed through his closed teeth. "His air—his walk were familiar to me, and I have not watched all these years in vain."

He asked, in an excited tone:

"And his name? What does he call himself?"

"I did not ask it, nor did he offer to reveal it."

"It does not matter. *I know it,* and that is enough for my purpose. Good night, Jessie; I will keep you up no longer. I have learned all it concerns me to know."

He strode from the room, and she sat down wondering why Melchoir should take such an interest in the stranger; but she soon recurred to the train of thought his entrance had interrupted.

When Jessie Lithgow was left homeless by the raid made

upon the property of even the humblest of Monmouth's followers, she had been assisted by Melchoir to purchase the house owned by her father, when it was sold for a tithe of its value.

The Gipsy and his mother came to Lyme and took up their abode; they concealed their origin, and, with the money they received for the betrayal of Vernor, Melchoir engaged in a smuggling trade which proved very lucrative. He met with the fair-haired daughter of Lithgow, and fell desperately in love with her; but she did not encourage his passion till a series of obligations awoke a grateful regard in her bosom.

In addition to the purchase of her house, he advanced a sufficient sum to enable her to commence her present business, which soon prospered in her hands sufficiently to repay the loans he had made. Melchoir unwillingly received the money, for he wished the debt to be cancelled in a different way. For years Jessie refused to listen to his pleadings; but finally the lonely girl wearied of the solitary life she led; the constant love that was offered her became attractive to her desolate heart, and she consented to become his wife.

But an inexplicable feeling of dread induced her to postpone their marriage from time to time till her lover's patience was almost exhausted. He became jealous of every man that approached her, and being on the pier that evening watching for the arrival of the smuggling craft, he overheard the directions given to Vernor to the house of his betrothed.

The lugger put out a private signal, and went on to a cove above the place where her contraband articles could be safely landed, and without stopping to speak with the boatman, the Gipsy followed the stranger into the town. He imperfectly heard the conversation at the door of Jessie's shop, and watched and waited for Vernor to come forth.



When two hours passed away and he did not do so, his suspicious jealousy was aroused, and he went to the rear of the building and demanded admittance, as we have seen.

When he left Jessie, he sprang up a dark stairway, threw open a door from which a bright light issued, and burst into the apartment of his mother. Minchen sat in a large arm-chair in front of the fire, dressed in the plain dark garb of a woman of respectable station; but her strongly marked face had lost none of its early fire; her wiry form little of its elasticity.

Her present inactive life wore upon her spirits; but, with the ambition of her life disappointed in failing to make her son the heir of his father, she bore with apathy whatever might happen to her. She turned her eyes on her son and sharply said:

"You promised to return at eight; it is now past ten, and I have been alone all the evening."

"When you hear what I have been doing you will easily forgive me. Have I not always said that he would come back? That the sea had not swallowed him up? You asserted yourself that such was not to be his fate."

Her large eyes dilated, and she breathlessly asked:

"What do you mean? Has Vernor really returned?"

"He has—he is asleep in this house now, and I will have him seized as a returned convict before he can get away. I came up to tell you first, but I must away to the authorities and have him arrested."

"Stop and tell me how it happened before you go. You have the night before you, for he will hardly attempt to leave before day."

Thus urged, Melchoir paused long enough to give her an account of what had become known to him through his betrothed. Minchen listened eagerly, and then slowly said:

"It was an evil chance that brought him here at this time.

He has, doubtless, heard that his cousin has succeeded to the estate and is about to marry Lady Clifton. He will brave everything to prevent the marriage; but we have him in our power. Will it not be better, Melchoir, to take him secretly and convey him to that chamber we both know of? We could keep him there till he would listen to any terms to purchase his freedom."

Melchoir mused a moment and then said:

"That is a good idea, and I wonder I had not thought of it myself. My men would aid me to seize him as he sleeps, and once safe out of the town with him, I could manage him myself. A ride of a few hours would bring us to the Priory, and I could keep him there an age without any of the family becoming aware of it."

"We owe something to the new baronet, for he has given me back my annuity since he learned the claim we had upon his uncle; and if we can serve him, and at the same time punish Vernor for his insolence to you, it will be the best thing we can do."

"But, mother, the marriage will not be valid while Vernor lives, for no divorce has been granted. We can shut him up, but that will not answer Sir Gerald's purpose."

"No—but it gives us time to warn him, and he can take immediate steps to release the poor girl Vernor comes to make miserable again."

"Yes—I will seek him as soon as my captive is safe. Ho! ho! this revenge will be better than taking his life. I'll keep him in darkness and solitude till he'll be glad to humble himself before me, and crouch like a dog for freedom to look upon the light of day again."

After some further conversation, Melchoir left the house to seek those he wished to aid him in his proposed enterprise. He had several hardy and desperate men in his employment, whose habitual disregard of the laws fitted them for

the service he was about to require of them. He offered them a high price to assist him, and they did not pause to inquire who was to be made prisoner, nor why Melchoir wished to get him in his power.

A closely-covered cart, a pair of hand-cuffs, and a gag were provided; the former was stationed in the outskirts of the town, ready to receive the captive, and Melchoir with his companions stealthily approached the house of Jessie Lithgow.

He was familiar with every portion of it, and he knew that a window loosely fastened with boards opened on the yard from the room in which Vernor slept. With the dexterity of a professional house-breaker, he removed these almost without noise, and stepped into the room.

A ray of moonlight fell upon the bed, and he saw that it was empty! He felt the clothing to see if his enemy had overheard his attempts to enter and fled from it; but it was cold, and had evidently been deserted some time before.

Unwilling to alarm Jessie unnecessarily, he again stepped out and gave whispered directions to his followers to guard every avenue of escape from the house, and he took up his watch at the front door.

At length daylight glimmered in the east, and there were no signs of Vernor. Grinding his teeth with rage, Melchoir knocked at the door, which in a few moments was opened by Jessie. She regarded him with astonishment, while he fiercely asked:

"Where is the stranger who came hither last night?"

"He has not left his room yet. Why do you wish to see him?"

"That is my business. I will come in and seek him."

"I will call him myself," replied Jessie, moving toward the room in which she believed her lodger to be still sleeping. No response was made to her knock; and Melchoir,

who had closely followed her, threw the door open, revealing the empty bed. He regarded her sternly:

"Where have you concealed him?"

She trembled as she replied:

"Upon my honor, I thought he was still here. I do not know what can have become of him."

Though frightened at the strange disappearance of her guest, Melchoir knew Jessie well enough to see that she spoke the truth. He dashed into the shop; every nook was explored in vain; there was no trace of him they sought.

Determined not to be thus baffled, Melchoir proclaimed aloud in the streets that an escaped convict was in the town, and called on the people to assist in arresting him. A crowd was soon collected, but without any result. Vernor was nowhere to be found; and Melchoir returned home in a rage to inform his mother of what had happened, and warn her that he should immediately set out for Cliffden, to inform Gerald of the arrival of his kinsman in England.

Cliffden was but twenty miles distant, and the Gipsy knew that the family had arrived there several weeks before to celebrate the nuptials of the heiress with Sir Gerald Methurn.

Ignorant of the part the mother and son had played in the arrest of his cousin, when Minchen appealed to him to continue the annuity Sir Hugh had allowed her, Gerald granted it as a measure of simple justice, and he thus gained from these lawless beings a grateful sense of obligation, which was as keenly felt as the baleful spirit of hatred that actuated them toward Vernor.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE AVENGER ON THE TRACK.

WHILE all this was going on in Lyme, Vernor made good his escape from the town. He was not a heavy sleeper, and the sound of a man's voice aroused him from his first slumber. He listened eagerly, and Melchoir spoke in so ungarded a manner that he heard much of the conversation through the thin partition. He arose softly, peered through a crevice in the door, and saw the form of a man heavily muffled, with his hat still drawn far over his brow. He did not recognize his old enemy, but he heard enough to assure him that he was in danger of detention by the jealous lover of Jessie Lithgow. This would interfere so materially with his plans, that he instantly made up his mind to depart without the knowledge of his hostess.

With painful suspense he watched for the termination of the interview; when Melchoir departed, Jessie retired to her couch, which stood in a recess in the room, concealed by heavy curtains that fell to the floor. Vernor listened till everything was quiet; the faint glimmer of the dying fire still lighted the apartment, and he stepped cautiously across the floor, unclosed the door that opened into the shop, and shutting it carefully after himself, made his way to the front entrance.

This was easy to do, as the upper half of the partition door was of glass, and the light that reflected through it was sufficient to guide him in the neat little shop where nothing was left out of place. Leaving a piece of money on the counter, he turned the lock of the outer door, and bounded into the street.

In a few moments he had gained the outskirts of the

town, and he made his way on foot to a small hamlet which lay a few miles distant. Late as it was, he found lodgings in the house of a small farmer, and on the following morning purchased from him a horse, on which he set out for Cliffden, to reclaim his long-deserted bride, and force her to return to her allegiance to him.

With a heart filled with many evil passions, he spurred his steed over hill and valley, but he was mounted on a miserable hack that stumbled at nearly every step; the day proved stormy and cold, and night had long fallen before he came in the vicinity of the place he sought.

We must leave him and return to Lyme, where events were transpiring of which he little dreamed. At an early hour of the morning the gathering clouds portended a fearful strife of the elements, and by ten o'clock it burst in a wild tempest that soon lashed the sea into foam, and dashed the impetuous waves upon the precipitous shore in deep-toned reverberations.

At the height of the storm a ship was seen driving helplessly toward the rock-bound coast, and amid the wild wailings of the wind minute guns were at intervals heard. The hardy fishermen who frequented the coast gathered under the shelter of the cliffs, and awaited the moment when a lull in the gale would permit them to go to the assistance of those in such dire extremity.

The ship drove onward with reckless speed, evidently at the mercy of the winds and waves. She struck upon a reef of rocks which extended outside of the harbor, and for two hours lay there, those within her expecting every moment to find a watery grave.

At length there was a slight lull in the tempest, and boats were got ready and manned to go to the assistance of those on board. It was a work of much difficulty and danger to approach the wreck in such a sea, but the practised seamen

who undertook to do so were daring and skillful, and they finally succeeded in bringing the passengers and crew in safety to the shore.

The only passengers were a gentleman and lady, the latter of whom seemed suffering in mind and body. Her companion, who spoke English imperfectly, inquired if a quiet place could be found for her where she could rest and recruit her strength for a few days. The man to whom he applied said :

"If Jessie Lithgow can take her in, the lady will be better cared for there than at the inn. We can stop there, at all events, and see if she has a spare room."

"Money is no object," said the stranger; "we will pay doubly for private accommodations just now."

Menard, for he it was who spoke, had watched carefully over Sylvie, but the state of her health filled him with apprehensions, and at moments he feared that he should be compelled to place her in a mad-house before their quest was accomplished.

In a nearly insensible condition she arrived at the door of Jessie Lithgow's shop; she was standing at it herself, compassionately regarding the drenched and half-frozen creatures who had just been rescued from such imminent peril, and the fisherman to whom Menard had appealed came forward and spoke to her.

"Here's a lady, Miss Lithgow, who is half-drowned and very sick. She wants a quiet place to stay in, and I thought mayhap you could take her in."

After the news she had so lately heard Jessie's heart was easily touched by the sufferings of those who "go down to the sea in ships;" she knew the rude little inn was not a fit place for a sick lady, and she impulsively replied :

"I will take her in, even if it does put me to some inconvenience."

Sylvie was carried into the back room, where a warm fire was blazing, and left to the ministrations of the tender-hearted girl. She summoned Mrs. Vethmen to her assistance, for by that transposition of the name of Methurn the Gipsy was known, and they soon placed the worn-out stranger comfortably in bed and gave her warm negus to drink.

The fatigue, exposure and excitement brought on Sylvie an attack of fever which lasted several days; the deep agitation of her mind induced delirium in which she raved of the recent events in her broken life, sometimes in French, sometimes in English, for the latter language she had learned to speak from Vernor.

Jessie was compelled to divide her time between her shop and the sick stranger, and Minchen established herself as nurse beside her couch. Vernor's name was constantly upon her lips, and the passionate entreaties she addressed to him not to forsake her for the former bride, gave the quick-witted woman a clue to the tragic story of her life, and also to him who had inflicted such wrong upon her. In her wanderings upon the continent, Minchen had acquired a competent knowledge of the French language, and she listened eagerly to the broken words of Sylvie, and sometimes questioned her in such a manner as to draw from her more connected replies from which she drew her own conclusions with unerring sagacity.

To give certainty to her conjectures, she carefully examined the clothing which Sylvie had worn when brought there, and in the lining of her dress she found the farewell letter Vernor had addressed to her. Minchen was not familiar with his writing, but the facts revealed in it tallied too well with his former history to admit of a doubt as to his identity, and she revelled in the thought that the avenger was indeed upon his track.

She accurately read the character of the passionate and

wronged woman before her, and she felt assured that she would stop at nothing to bring retribution to her false lover.

Sylvie, after days of acute suffering, regained the exercise of reason; but she was weak and wretched; devoured with anxiety to regain her strength and set out upon the search she had undertaken. Menard remained at the inn, but he visited her constantly during her illness, and manifested the utmost solicitude for her recovery. When she was able to sit up, Minchen sought an opportunity to converse with her, and after carefully approaching the subject that so deeply interested her, she said:

"From your ravings during your delirium I have learned that you came to England in pursuit of one who has been false to you. You called him Vernor—a name very familiar to me; and if you will tell me your whole history, I may be able to assist you in your search."

The wild black eyes of Sylvie were turned on her with a startled expression, and she rapidly said:

"Oh! if you could do that I would nobly reward you. I am rich; but I care little for money now only as it enables me to reach and strike a fatal blow at him who has degraded my life, and broken my heart. But Vernor is not his true name; he avowed it himself; then how can you help me?"

"Vernor may be, and I think is, a part of his name; and if I am made acquainted with his history as far as it is known to you, I may be able to furnish you with a sure clue to the one he is known by in this country."

Thus urged, Sylvie, in broken tones, gave the story that was already partially known to the crafty listener. Every word she uttered brought confirmation to the suspicions of Minchen; and when she ended her recital, and imploringly asked:

"Can you give me a clue by which I can trace him, and

prevent the new wickedness he meditates toward the woman he declares he has never loved?" The Gipsy replied:

"I can, and I will. I know the man you seek; but he is cautious and wary, and we must be very careful if we would ensnare him in the net he has prepared for himself. Is it your purpose to take vengeance upon him yourself, or will you leave your wrongs to be redressed by a court of law?"

"What!" she passionately cried—"bring my outraged womanhood—my bleeding heart—before a tribunal of law, to become a jest and by-word to those who listen to the trial! Never! with my own hand will I avenge his desertion—his craven falsehood."

"But have you the nerve to do so? Will not your hand fail you at the last moment?"

"My hand is steel—my heart is adamant to him now. The love I bore him has turned to hatred so dire, that it is capable of accomplishing anything that will fitly punish him for his base and cruel conduct to me."

Minchen looked searchingly into her face; she read there the unflinching resolution she had expressed; but she saw also the unmistakable evidences that the mind of Sylvie was shaken from its balance by the terrible mental agony she had endured, and calm reason was no longer the guide of her actions.

For Minchen's plans this was well; and if Vernor could be brought to condign punishment without risk to herself or her son, she cared very little for the subsequent fate of the instrument by which it was accomplished.

She had vowed in past years to destroy him, and time had not softened her feelings toward him. Though there was now no hope that her son could ever stand in the place once occupied by his father, she did not the less detest him

who possessed the right to supersede him in his ancestral home.

Toward Gerald her feelings were different, because she was aware that he had not acquired his uncle's estate by inheritance, but as the reward of honorable toil; and bitter and hard as her nature was, Minchen respected the man who had won his own way to independence and high station.

In a long conversation with Sylvie, it was settled that, so soon as she was able to bear the journey, she should go to Cliffden, lay her claims before Ethel and her betrothed, and demand to be brought face to face with Vernor. The dagger with which the Gipsy had once menaced Sir Hugh was brought from its place of concealment, and placed in the feverish hand of the invalid, with the assurance that the subtle venom with which its point was imbued would produce death a few moments after a wound was inflicted with it.

Sylvie gazed upon the glittering blade with dilating eyes, and muttering some unintelligible sentences, she carefully sheathed it, and placed it in her bosom.

The eagerness to commence her journey seemed to act upon her physical system, for she recovered with surprising rapidity, and in a few more days she was strong enough to undertake the journey she meditated.

Her cousin was the confidant of only a portion of her plans, and he willingly undertook to aid her in their accomplishment so far as he understood them. The fatal resolution she had taken to destroy her lover in the first moment of their meeting she carefully concealed from Menard, for she knew he would oppose a consummation which must bring her into such imminent danger.

Of herself Sylvie thought not; she was reckless of her future fate, and hoped that death would release her from the promise she had made to become Basil's wife if he would aid her in tracing her false lover.

On the day before her intended departure, news of so startling a nature was circulated in Lyme, that the journey to Cliffden was at once abandoned, and a more secret one undertaken, without the knowledge of Menard.

Melchoir, who had undertaken a journey to Cliffden to inform Gerald of the arrival of his cousin in England, had been detained near there by a severe accident to himself, and his return at this crisis confirmed the intelligence they had already received.

Wrought up to a pitch of wild excitement by hearing of Vernor's late doings, Sylvie was ready for anything, and she blindly submitted herself to the guidance of those who so ardently wished to make her the Nemesis of her late lover, while they escaped the punishment of the crime they instigated.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A STARTLING REAPPEARANCE.

CLIFFDEN was an ancient castellated mansion which had belonged to the family from whom it was named, for many generations. It stood upon a lofty crag that overlooked the sea, and the music of the sounding waves ascended to its storm-beaten walls.

A wide lawn, on which larch and fir trees had been planted by some of its former lords, sloped toward the edge of the cliffs, through which a flight of rude steps was cut to the beach below.

On Ethel's first arrival at her new home, the weather had been mild and pleasant, and she took great pleasure in wandering upon the sands, accompanied by Alice, or with Gerald during his brief visits; for his time was occupied in London



in hurrying forward the settlements which would enable him to claim his bride.

Even when the weather became cold and dreary, as chilling winter approached, on the days when the sun shone brightly, Ethel was often tempted to brave the cold breeze and descend to her favorite promenade, sometimes with Alice, but as often alone, as she had no fear of meeting strangers in that secluded spot, and she felt herself quite safe so near her own home.

The young heiress was received by her tenants with enthusiastic demonstrations of welcome when, after a short stay in London, she came down with her friends from Taunton and took formal possession of her inheritance. Since the death of her grandfather the place had not been occupied, as the late Lord Clifton had preferred a residence nearer the metropolis.

The bridal trousseau arrived, and the two girls were immersed in the delightful occupation of trying on, and criticizing or approving the taste of the modiste who had been employed. Alice was to act as bridesmaid, and a young friend of Gerald, who had paid her marked attention while they were in London, was expected to be present at the Christmas festival which was approaching, after which he was to take part in the ceremony as groomsman.

Extensive preparations were made to give a festival on Christmas Eve to the tenants on the estate in true old English style, and the wide hall was decorated with holly branches mingled with mistletoe. The table, groaning with the profusion of good things was decorated in a similar manner, and the farmers, with their wives and children gathered around it as in the days of feudal rule.

Ethel, supported by her friends, presided, and with the perfect tact which is the offspring of good feeling, she soon placed her rustic guests entirely at their ease. At the close

of the feast, her health was drank with enthusiasm, and with cries of:

"Long life our beautiful lady, and may heaven bless and prosper the marriage she is about to make."

Blushing vividly, Ethel thanked, and then left them to examine the Christmas offerings she had prepared to distribute among them. She was glad to be released from her onerous duties, for Gerald, who was momentarily expected, had not arrived, and a vague sense of uneasiness began to fill her heart.

The heavy clouds portended a stormy night, and she was fearful he might be detained till too late an hour to take part in the amusements of the evening.

The hall was cleared, the musicians played their liveliest tunes, and the younger portion of the guests entered with spirit into the revelry of the hour. In the interludes of the dance, Christmas games were played, and each fair one who passed beneath the mistletoe bough that hung from the centre of the ceiling, was compelled to pay the penalty of a kiss to him who had the hardihood to demand it.

There was much laughing and romping among the young people; fortunes were tried by throwing the leaves of the mistletoe upon the hot hearth, each one having the name of a youth and maiden given to it, and shouts of laughter arose when the heat caused them to spring away from each other, as was often the case.

The ladies of the family looked on the scene with amusement and interest from an apartment which opened into the hall; but, as the hours rolled on and Gerald did not arrive, Ethel's heart grew apprehensive that some disaster had befallen him.

She drew aside the heavy damask curtain that hung before the deep embrasure of a window, and sheltering herself behind its shrouding folds, endeavored to peer into the dark-

ness without. A light snow was falling, and, as her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, she distinctly saw the figure of a man crouching beneath a leafless tree near the window. Wondering who it could be, and why he acted thus on so inclement a night, she lifted the sash and spoke to him.

"Who are you, and why do you not enter the house where you will find light and warmth?"

Thus addressed, the stranger started forward and said:

"Pardon me, lady. I came on a private errand to Sir Gerald Methurn, and I do not wish my presence here to be known. I was watching an opportunity to speak with some one. Will you tell him that I wish to see him on business of vital importance to himself?"

"Sir Gerald is not here; he has not yet returned from London. The night is cold and cheerless; come in, and remain till morning—by that time he will surely be here."

"Thanks, lady; but my news will not bear a moment's delay. I must go on the road to meet him. I do not fear the cold. Good night, Lady Clifton; I only seek to serve you, as well as your betrothed husband, and I will yet save you from the mischief that threatens you."

Melchoir touched his cap and moved swiftly away. Ethel shut the window with a feeling of dread she could not conquer for many moments. But she reflected that no cloud lay upon the bright horizon before her; that she had no cause to fear evil; and she dismissed the thought of the strange visitor with the conviction that he could not have been perfectly sane. If he had been, he would have entered the house and have asked an interview with him he came to seek without this affectation of mystery. But Melchoir had his own reasons for not doing so. Several of the servants at Cliffden had been at the Priory at the time of its occupation by Kirke and his followers, and they were all

acquainted with his agency in the arrest of Vernor. He feared to be recognized by them and pointed out to Gerald as the enemy of his cousin, thus jeopardizing the annuity which had been lately restored to himself and his mother.

To see Gerald a few moments, and warn him of the return of his kinsman, was his object, and he again mounted his jaded steed, and took the direction of the London road in the hope that he should encounter the traveller. He had proceeded but a few miles when his horse stumbled, and threw him with such violence over his head, as to severely sprain one of his ankles. The pain was so acute, that he was glad to find a refuge in a peasant's cottage, from which a light was still streaming.

The injury proved so severe that he was detained more than two weeks before he was able to leave his asylum, and in the meantime, events had happened at Cliffden, which rendered his information surperfluous.

The hours passed on; ten o'clock sounded from the great clock in the hall, and Gerald had not arrived. The guests were preparing to depart for their own homes, and he had had no opportunity to exchange the joyous greeting of the season with them.

Ethel's fears began to communicate themselves to those around her, when the bustle of an arrival was heard. In a few moments Gerald, glowing with health and happiness, entered the room in which the family was gathered, accompanied by his friend, Edmund Bertie, who soon found his way to the side of Alice, and the blushing reception she gave him, showed that the prepossession on her side was at least as strong as on his.

Gerald clasped his betrothed to his manly heart, and whispered—

"Never more to part, my dearest Ethel. A few more hours, and you will be mine by the most sacred of all ties."

She raised her eyes to his, in which love, and trust were mirrored, and replied in the same tone :

"Yes, forever yours—yours in heart, and soul. Oh! Gerald, nothing can part us now."

The party gathered around the blazing Christmas fire, and while the new comers enjoyed its grateful warmth, they gave a laughing account of the adventures of the journey, and the causes which had delayed them to so late an hour.

Suddenly Ethel remembered the strange colloquy she had held through the window, and she drew Gerald aside, and asked :

"Did you meet a messenger who came hither in a mysterious manner to see you? I accidentally saw him through the window, and spoke with him."

"That was a singular proceeding on such a night as this. I have not seen any one on the road. Did he say he would seek me?"

"Yes, he said his message was of such importance that he must go on the road to meet you."

"The inclemency of the night must then have driven him to seek shelter before we came along. His news could not have been of much consequence, or he would not have failed to deliver it."

"Perhaps not; but he seemed very much in earnest."

Gerald mused a moment, and then said :

"It must have concerned himself then, for I am expecting no news that can mar the perfect happiness of this joyful reunion. Dear Ethel, I have labored for you, and Heaven has blessed my exertions. I hold in my grasp the fruition of long years of toil, and all I have now to do, is to enjoy the supreme happiness I have won with a thankful heart, to the giver of all good. The settlements are completed, and to-morrow we will be married. Thus the blessed Christmas season will be twice hallowed to me."

Ethel would have petitioned for a delay of a few days, but Gerald reminded her that he had already submitted to many; that her trousseau was prepared, and everything in readiness, then wherefore defer their union for a single day? She finally yielded, and he announced to the groups around the fire, that the Christmas bells would also ring the peal for their marriage. They received the hearty congratulations of their friends, and Gerald went out among the tenants, and after informing them of the approaching ceremony, requested their presence at the parish church on the following morning.

His graceful person and cordial manners had already won the hearty approval of their lady's choice from those hardy sons of toil, and his communication was received with acclamations and wishes for the health and happiness of the new lord and lady.

Soon after they dispersed to their homes, and Gerald returned to the room in which the family was collected, where he found a cozy supper served, with the accompaniments of egg nog, and mulled wine.

The bowls that contained them, were wreathed with mistletoe, and when the merry meal was ended, Alice took the wreath from one of them, and placing it on Ethel's head, chanted some old rhymes which had struck her fancy :

"On Christmas eve the bells were rung;  
On Christmas eve the mass was sung;  
That only night in all the year  
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear;  
The damsel donned her kirtle sheen;  
The hall was dressed with holly green;  
Forth to the woods did merry men go,  
To gather in the mistletoe;  
Then open wide the baron's hall  
To vassal, tenant, serf, and all."

"We have carried out the programme pretty well, Ethel, considering that we live in such degenerate times; and now

that we may act out our own nonsense, with no strangers to criticize us, I wish to indulge a fantasy of my own."

"What is it?" asked Gerald laughing. "You may be sure of an appreciative audience."

Alice went on with smiling gravity:

"The name by which this plant is known in Germany is *der mistel*, and the people of Holstein call it the branch of the spectres. They believe that if a person has nerve enough to hold a bunch of mistletoe firmly in the hand, and invoke the spirit of the dead, he will see the one of whom he thinks arise before him. If he wills to do so, he can speak with the spectre."

"But, my dear Alice," said her father, "this seems to me a silly tampering with things too solemn to be lightly regarded. Besides, it is most unsuitable to the festival we have just celebrated. Do not attempt such a thing to-night, or indeed on any other night, lest you might get frightened at your fancies."

"Dear father, I have set my heart on trying it now, so do not oppose me. One would think you really believe in ghosts. I do not, and you may safely let me verify the German superstition."

Alice seldom failed to carry out whatever she undertook, and after some persuasion, her father consented that the trial might be made. She said:

"I have prepared an invocation, which will undoubtedly bring the airy phantoms around us, if there is any truth in the belief."

She placed herself in the centre of the floor, grasped a branch of the mistletoe, and assuming a tragic air, commenced:

"Spirits of the vasty deep,  
On the wings of night now sweep;  
Come through storm, come through air,  
And answer to my earnest prayer;

If the dead may rise to light,  
Come and speak with me to-night."

There was a mystic silence, only interrupted by the sound of the rising wind sweeping against the walls of the house. After a pause of several moments, Alice threw aside her tragic air, and said, in a disappointed tone:

"I am not spiritual enough to have the weird vision revealed to me; but you, Ethel, can perhaps try it with better success. Come, priestess, you are already crowned with the Druidical wreath, and you shall take my place."

With playful force she drew her friend forward, and unwilling to refuse her request, Ethel permitted the branch of mistletoe to be thrust in her hand, and in her turn she repeated the invocation.

Her face was turned toward the door, which opened in the hall, and while she repeated the invocation, her eyes became fascinated to it as she saw it begin slowly to unclose. A figure appeared in the open space, that curdled the life-blood around her heart and froze her lips into silence.

A tall man, wearing a light-colored overcoat, made white by the snow that had fallen upon it; his long, fair hair, sprinkled with the same fleecy flakes, fell in disorder upon his shoulders, beneath which was seen a face as pallid as that of any ghost. He spoke in a tone of hollow mockery:

"You have called me, and lo! I come."

A cry escaped Mrs. Digby, and she exclaimed:

"It is Vernor! you have summoned him from the realms of the dead. Drop that branch, that he may forever vanish."

"That is easier said than done," said Vernor, in his natural voice, as he strode forward and confronted the group. "I am no 'goblin damned,' but a flesh and blood entity, which I can well believe you would all be glad to drive back into the realms of everlasting nothingness. But I am

here, and I have come to claim my own from him who has unlawfully seized upon it."

For a moment Gerald stood frozen into silence by this terrible interruption to their mirth. But he was aroused from his immobility by a faint cry from Ethel, and she fell insensible in his outstretched arms. As they folded around her, the wretched conviction came to him that another present possessed the right to stand between himself and her he had deemed so entirely his own. He stifled the deep groan of agony that arose in his tortured soul, and endeavored to restore animation to Ethel by sprinkling water from the table over her inanimate features.

Vernor made a step toward him, and hoarsely said:

"Unhand that lady, sir; let my aunt minister to her, for I do not choose *my* wife to lie thus in the arms of another man. I am too frozen to touch her myself, or I would tear her from your defiling grasp."

He had drawn near the fire, the others shrinking away from him as if they still regarded him as a supernatural presence, and was attempting to thaw his chilled hands over the blazing fire. Gerald cast upon him a glance of defiance and sternly said:

"This lady need not become an object of contention between us. Her own decision shall govern both of us as to which one she will prefer as her future husband."

"I comprehend that ruse," replied Vernor, with a contemptuous curl of his haughty lip. "You think yourself secure of getting it in your favor; but the law gives her to me; and I defy you, or any one else, to invalidate my claim."

"You resigned her long ago to me, I thought you dead, or I should have placed her fate beyond your control."

"But you see that I am not dead; and you have failed to accomplish that necessary duty. Since you neglected it,

I shall avail myself of every right I still possess over that girl, who offers a pretty welcome to her long-absent husband by fainting when he appears in her presence."

"Do not dare to call yourself her husband, for in the sight of God you are not! you never have been that. You sacrificed her once to your desire for the wealth she inherited, and you have now returned to force her odious bonds upon her because she again has fortune to bestow upon you. Listen to me, Vernor! Sooner than you shall claim Ethel as your wife, I will destroy you! I will die myself if it becomes necessary to do so."

Vernor coolly replied:

"In your disappointment you may commit suicide if you choose, but I shall live to make my pretty Ethel happy, and to regain the fortune you have wrested from me. Sir Gerald Methurn indeed! Lay aside your usurped title, and resign all pretensions to Lady Clifton, if you are what you pretend to be—a man of honor."

"No true man would give up the idol of his life to such guardianship as yours would prove," was the disdainful reply. "As to our rival claims, the law itself, backed by the wishes of Ethel, will decide that she shall belong to me. But this is no time or place to settle that question. See—she revives; she wakes to woe enough, without witnessing this contention over her in the first hour of our meeting."

Mrs. Digby, with trembling hands, had been bathing the brow of Ethel, and she now unclosed her eyes, looked around, and seeing Vernor, buried her face in Gerald's bosom, while she murmured:

"It is true, then! It was no phantom! Take me away—hold me fast—Gerald, for I will cling to you even in death itself."

Vernor strode toward her, and mockingly said:

"So-o—my lady bride will not even look upon her long-

absent one. I can well imagine the vigils you have held—the tears you have wept over my supposed fate—my pretty Ethel, and if they have dimmed your beauty I can forgive it. Let me look upon your face, that I may judge if it is much changed since we last met.”

Ethel raised her hand as if to deprecate a nearer approach, and turning her colorless face toward him, she said :

“Leave me forever, I implore you ! Take my fortune, take everything I claim, but leave me free to walk my path of life without your companionship. You never loved me ; you gave me up yourself, and I call on you to redeem your plighted word.”

“On my soul if it were possible to claim your wealth without the encumbrance, I would take you at your word,” he fiercely rejoined. “But so important a personage as Lady Clifton cannot so easily renounce her hereditary estates in favor of another. Only as your husband can I hold them, and as such I intend to enjoy them. Loose your hold on that man ; cease to cling to him, or my passion may pass the bounds of prudence.”

Ethel relaxed her grasp on Gerald's arm, stood upright before him, and a faint shade of color swept over her pale face as she spoke with dignity :

“I obey you, since the right to command me is still unfortunately yours ; but hear me in my turn. No earthly power shall ever compel me to live with you as your wife. You may, for a season, stand between me and the man I love, but I shall find means to break the wicked bonds in which you bound me while I was yet too young to comprehend how odious they might become. You *never* loved me ; my fortune was all you sought in gaining my hand, and the wealth I now possess shall yet purchase freedom for me from your cruel power.”

“It might perhaps, if I permitted you to use it for that

purpose ; but I shall take good care not to do so. The laws of England give a man absolute control over his wife, and I advise you to submit to the fate that is inevitable. Almost by a miracle I escaped the shipwreck in which you thought I had perished. The letters I wrote you were never received, it seems ; or they may have been suppressed. He who sought to supersede me in my family inheritance, and also in your affections, can doubtless give an account of them.”

He fixed his eyes insolently on Gerald, who proudly replied :

“My whole course in life refutes such an absurd charge ; neither do I believe that such letters have ever been written. Where have you been during all these years ? ”

Vernor dared not name the place of his late residence, and he said :

“I was picked up by a ship bound to Virginia. When the news of the revolution in this country reached there, I immediately embarked for my native home. On landing at Lyme, I learned that you had usurped my title and fortune, and that my bride was also about to bestow her hand upon you. I hurried hither to put a stop to such a proceeding, and now, Sir Gerald Methurn, I demand the restitution of my wife and estate.”

“On the last you have no legal claim, for the property of my uncle has become mine by purchase. The title has also been bestowed on me for services rendered to the present King ; but I waive my right to bear it, if you choose to assume a barren distinction unsupported by the wealth that can alone render it respectable. As to Ethel, she has already declared her resolution not to be claimed by you. I will maintain her right to do so at any cost. No man, worthy of the name, would insist on the fulfilment of a contract made as this was, and shrunk from on her part with a degree of antipathy which must, every hour, wound him in



the most sensitive part of his nature. But yours is a callous one, Vernor, as I have long known, and in dealing with you I must use such weapons as are in my power. In my turn, I will threaten you. You are here without permission from the authorities; I have influence, which shall be used against you to the utmost limit, if you persist in your iniquitous demands. I will have you thrown in prison, and there dictate the only terms on which freedom will be granted you again."

Vernor laughed disdainfully.

"If I am sent to prison, I will have my lady wife to minister to me. *That*, at least, will not be denied to me in a land of equal laws."

The rest of the group had listened in appalled silence to this passionate colloquy; but Mr. Digby here interposed:

"It is useless to recriminate thus. Mrs. Digby, remove Ethel to her chamber, for she seems scarcely able to sustain herself. Go with them, Alice, and send a servant to conduct Mr. Bertie to his chamber. Gerald and myself will talk with Vernor, and endeavor to bring him to a more reasonable frame of mind."

Vernor stepped forward and attempted to take Ethel's hand in his; but she shrank away, saying:

"No—no—never shall my hand be clasped in yours again. You resigned it to him to whom it is now plighted, and my heart ratifies the contract."

A dark frown gathered on his brow, and he said, through his closed teeth:

"We shall see who will be the winner. I play for a great stake, and the opposition of a feeble woman shall not mar my game. I give you this night to reflect upon your position and make up your mind to your inevitable fate. Ethel Methurn, I claim your allegiance as my lawful wife, and, mark me, *it shall be rendered.*"

Ethel seemed on the verge of fainting again, and Mrs. Digby hastily drew her away. The three ladies left the room together, Alice almost sustaining the sinking frame of her friend, whose strength was exhausted by the violent emotions of the last few moments.

When in her own chamber, she wept upon the bosom of her adopted mother, and wildly asked if it would be possible for Vernor to force her to live with him as his wife.

"Calm your agitation, my love," said Mrs. Digby, soothingly. "Vernor assumes a high tone, but he must feel the weakness of his cause. He cannot compel you to return to him. It will take time to obtain a divorce, but no English jury will refuse a verdict in your favor, when the facts of the case are set fairly before them."

"But Vernor may attempt to avenge on Gerald the preference I feel for him. Oh! Aunt, he looks so savage—so revengeful, that my heart dies within me when I think of him."

"My son can protect himself, Ethel, have no fear for him. Bad as I am afraid Vernor is, he will attempt no violence toward his cousin. He has too tender a care for his own safety, you may be sure."

Thus reassured, Ethel became more composed, but for her aching heart there was no repose during the long hours of that wretched night. She could not lie upon her bed; the restless spirit within her impelled her to constant motion, and she paced the floor till morning broke dark and chill as her own dreary fate. Then, exhausted by her vigil, she threw herself upon her couch and fell into a feverish, broken slumber, which was disturbed by terrible visions of Vernor tearing her from her friends and home.

The light of that day, which was to have witnessed her espousals to the man she adored, fell upon her wan and wretched, fearful of the evil influence which had darkened

her life and half broken her heart. She was too ill and miserable to descend to breakfast, and Alice came in to share the repast which was served in her own apartment. She endeavored to cheer the sinking spirits of her friend, but she had as yet no favorable news to communicate.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### VERNOR DISMAYED.

VAINLY did Mr. Digby endeavor to mediate between the two cousins. Vernor pertinaciously adhered to his demands, and declared that the full and ample restitution of his fortune, together with the surrender of Ethel, were the only terms to which he would listen. He derided the threat of Gerald to have him arrested; William of Orange, the hero of a successful revolution, would scarcely punish an adherent of Monmouth for venturing back to his native land, especially after having endured so long an exile as his had been; and if he were thrown in prison, so soon as his case was made known and the motives of his arrest laid before those in power, he would certainly be released.

Gerald felt this to be true, and his soul writhed within him at the thought that his own neglect of Ethel's best interests had placed such fatal power in the hands of a bold and unscrupulous man.

He wrote to Mr. Clyde and begged him to lose no time in taking the preliminary steps toward obtaining a divorce for her, stating clearly the grounds on which it was demanded; though, alas! many months must elapse before the delays of the law would enable him to bestow on Ethel the protection of a husband.

Several days were consumed in fruitless negotiation, during which Ethel confined herself to her own apartment, and steadily refused to receive the intruder. Vernor assumed the command of the house as its lawful master, and the servants learned to their dismay that the wedding of their lady would not take place, as a former husband, long supposed dead, had returned to assert his prior claim to her.

Gerald was almost in despair at the firmness of Vernor, when a letter from Lyme was delivered to him which changed the aspect of affairs in his favor. It was directed in the cramped hand of one not much accustomed to writing, and on opening it he found these lines:

"SIR GERALD METHURN—*Honored Sir*:—I write this to let you know of a discovery I have made which may be important to you.

"Three days ago a ship went ashore near this place; the people on board were saved, and one of the passengers was brought to Jessie Lithgow's, where I lodge. She is a young and beautiful woman, I can see, although she has been sick almost unto death since her arrival here. During her illness her wild ravings informed me of some facts that bear upon the history of your cousin, Vernor Methurn, who I am aware is now in England.

"I know much of Vernor's former life, and when his first name fell so often from her lips I listened to her words with interest, believing that they referred to your uncle's son. I sought for a confirmation of my suspicions, and found a letter concealed in the dress she wore when she was brought hither, which proved to me that I was right in my conjectures.

"I enclose you a copy of that letter, as I dared not remove the original. You can judge for yourself if the facts it contains can be of any use to you at this crisis. He has mar-

ried a second wife while his first one is yet living, and this poor girl has followed him to demand such redress as the law may afford.

"Four nights ago Vernor Methurn was in this place, and by this time he is undoubtedly at Cliffden. I know the Lady Ethel was soon to marry you, and the information I send may enable you to deal with your adversary on more equal terms. You may rely on the truth of this statement from a friend, although my name is not signed to it.

"M. V."

Below this was copied the letter Vernor had written to Sylvie, and Gerald no sooner glanced over it than he saw from internal evidence that his cousin must have been the author of the original. The date also confirmed his suspicions that Vernor had not told the truth as to the place of his refuge during the years of his absence.

In a tumult of feeling he sought Mr. Digby and laid the important missive before him. He read it carefully, and then said:

"This places Vernor at your mercy. The woman he has thus wronged will expose his treachery, and to avoid a prosecution for bigamy he will be compelled to fly from the country. A delay of a few months will enable you to claim your bride, for now all legal difficulties to a divorce must vanish before the proofs you can bring forward of his utter want of principle and feeling. Let us seek an interview with him and show him the critical position in which he stands."

Vernor was walking on the sea beach, but in a short time he came up and returned to the house. Gerald met him in the hall and requested a private conversation in the library.

"Our interviews lead to so little that is satisfactory, that it seems useless to hold them," he said, with a sneer, "but I will not refuse your request."

"This one at least will be more decisive," was the significant reply; "I have something of importance to communicate to you which will probably change your plan of action."

"I fancy not; but we shall see," and he indolently followed his cousin and threw himself in a chair in front of the fire. Mr. Digby was seated beside the library table, and Gerald carefully closed the door of the room. Vernor haughtily said:

"You take many precautions which are now useless, for every servant in this house knows who I am and why I have come hither. They also begin to comprehend that I intend to maintain the footing I have gained here as the lawful master of the domain."

"I am quite well aware of that; but they do not know what I am about to communicate to you. It has been known to myself only within the last hour, and I warn you that it will be a terrible blow to you."

"Let it fall then," was the reckless rejoinder. "I am prepared for anything *you* can have to tell me."

"I think you are scarcely prepared for this. How long is it since you left Barbadoes, and deserted the woman to whom you were united there? I am aware that you have never been in Virginia; that the years of your exile were spent in the West Indies."

As Vernor listened his cheeks blanched, he visibly trembled, though he faltered:

"It is false! No woman has a legal claim on me save Ethel; why should you presume to doubt my word as to the place of my exile?"

"I doubt it because it is satisfactorily proved to me that you have never been in Virginia. The woman you lately deserted is already in England in pursuit of you, and by this time the clue to your identity is furnished to her, though you wedded her only under your baptismal name."

He looked fixedly on the changing face of the listener, and if confirmation had been needed the agitation of Vernor supplied it. He faintly gasped:

"Sylvie in England! Sylvie on my track! then I am indeed undone!"

After a moment of perturbed thought he passionately asked:

"Who has told you this? What proof have you of what you assert?"

Gerald offered him the letter of the Gipsy and calmly said:

"Read that, and see that you are no longer safe in this country."

With dilating eyes Vernor read the lines, then glanced over the copy of his own letter to Sylvie, and the fidelity of the last assured him that no deception against him was attempted by his cousin. He saw that an avenging fate had thrown into Sylvie's hands the means of ruining him, and he knew her too well to hope that she would spare him. To remain in England was to subject himself to a prosecution which must end in a long and ignominious imprisonment; and, in a depressed tone, he said:

"Fate is against me. I must evade this woman at all hazards; and I accept from you the terms I have hitherto rejected. I must leave the country before this infernal tigress can take any steps against me. I must say in my own defence, however, that when I gave my hand to Sylvie Menard, I thought sufficient time had elapsed to have the tie between Ethel and myself broken here. I did not mean to act the villain by her, for I loved her."

"Then why have you so cruelly deserted her?"

"Does not my letter to her tell you plainly enough? I am no saint, and her temper exasperated me beyond endurance. I was weary of her before the news came that you

were about to marry Ethel; I frankly own that if she had not been Lady Clifton I should have remained in Barbadoes, and suffered the wedding to take place; but I could not give up such a prospect for a woman I no longer cared for."

A silence of some moments ensued after this frank avowal, which was broken by Mr. Digby:

"My advice to you, Vernor, is to leave England as soon as possible. Ethel is my ward, and on her part I promise the sum of three hundred pounds to be paid to you annually. Gerald will allow you as much more from the income of your late father's estate, and that is nearly equal to the sum enjoyed by Sir Hugh. On the continent you can evade the person who has followed you hither, if you are resolved not to do such justice to her as the lapse of a few months will place in your power. If your union with her was prompted by love, Vernor, you may be happy with her yet."

His lip curled contemptuously:

"I thank you for your advice, but I prefer freedom to the life Sylvie has led me for the last year or two. Neither would she accept such reparation, for she will never forgive me for abandoning her. My life would hardly be safe if we were shut up in the same room together, for these tropical woman are devils incarnate when they are wronged as I have wronged her. Pay me the first instalment of my annuity; give me such writings as will secure it to me for life, and I will seek my own safety in my own way."

This was gladly assented to. Gerald drew up the obligation, observing such legal forms as were necessary to render it valid; and Vernor prepared to depart.

He requested a last interview with Ethel, and after learning from Gerald the secret of his sudden submission, she consented to receive him in the presence of Mrs. Digby.

The young girl sat near the fire, in a large crimson chair, dressed in a becoming morning robe, with a bright colored

shawl thrown around her. Her hair, of a bright golden brown, fell in natural ringlets around her polished brow; the news she had lately heard had recalled the color to her cheeks, and the soft eyes had lost the expression of terror that lately dwelt in them.

Vernor gazed on this picture of youth and innocence with rage and mortification in his heart. He saw that Ethel had developed into a most charming woman, and in that moment he felt that he could have loved her. He remembered all the sweet and feminine traits of her character, and contrasted them with those of the wilful being who had once so deeply enthralled him, and he cursed the blindness of heart which had led him to estrange her from him by his long neglect.

Ethel greeted him with a faint smile, but she did not extend her hand to him. Mrs. Digby sat beside the window, partially concealed by the heavy curtain, and Vernor threw himself on a chair beside Ethel. He abruptly said:

"I have come to bid you farewell, Ethel. I have made you miserable in the last few days, and if fortune had not turned against me, I might have still continued to do so, for I do not pretend to be better than I am. You once loved me well enough to give me your hand, and if time had been granted me I would have won you back again. You would have recalled all my father's kindness to you, and you could not utterly have cast off his son. Tell me, Ethel, did you not once love me?"

"I always have felt for you the affection of a sister, Vernor, and as my brother I would gladly receive you. I will own, that if you had treated me differently after you obtained my hand, I might have learned the task that was set for me; but you neglected me; you showed me plainly that you had sacrificed yourself to the wishes of your father, and my heart shrank away from you. Then came those terrible

days in which you were condemned to exile; if you had even then shown that you wished my companionship, I would have followed you, and shared your fate. You remember how you refused; you may recall your own words by which you restored to me the right to cherish my childish preference for Gerald. I mourned over your misfortunes; I wept over your supposed death, and—my heart clung to him who stood beside me and sustained me through all my trials. Now—I can never become the wife of any man save Gerald. I love him, as perhaps I might have loved you, if you had taken the same pains to win my affections."

The avowal that she might have been won to love him awoke new hopes in the breast of Vernor, and dropping on his knees before her, he supplicated:

"Oh, Ethel, return to your allegiance to me, and I promise to be to you the best, the tenderest of husbands. We can seek a new home in a fairer land than this, where I shall be free to devote my life to you."

An expression of severity swept over her face, and her soft eyes lighted with anger at this daring proposal, she proudly said:

"What! take back the perjured hand that has been plighted to another! Accept the false heart which has blighted the life of the woman that really loves you! Never! If Gerald did not stand between us, your own acts would place an invincible barrier to our union."

He sprang up, and passionately said:

"So—Gerald has told you of that! The girl was madly in love with me; I was ruined—dependent upon her father for the means of life, so what could I do but accept the advances she made to me? I thought our union had been dissolved when I married her, for I did not mean to play the villain to her. But she made me miserable; she was jealous and passionate, and my heart grew cold to her.

When I heard that I could reclaim my first love, my thought recurred to you with a tenderness I had never before felt for any one. Oh, Ethel, take me back; fly to the continent with me where I shall be safe, and I swear to make you happy, I swear to—"

She raised her hand deprecatingly—

"Say no more, Vernor. Do not humiliate yourself by entreaties that can avail nothing. Since you abused the hospitalities of the good Samaritans who took you in, in your hour of need, you owe to this lady the only reparation it is now in your power to make, when you are free to do so, legalize the tie that binds you to her, and thus regain her respect and affection."

"That advice is easier given than acted on. If you knew Sylvie you would comprehend that she will never forgive me for deserting her, and if she believed you to be really her rival, she would be capable of destroying you."

She shuddered, and presently said:

"Such love as she must have felt for you cannot easily be estranged. Vernor, you can make your peace with her, and I conjure you to seek her, and make the attempt at all hazards."

"Then your resolution is irrevocable?"

"Irrevocable as fate itself," was the firm reponse, and Vernor arose, and stood pale and haughty before her.

"Then all that remains to me is to bid you farewell. If I have treated you badly, Ethel, you have in your turn crushed the best hopes and impulses of my heart. With such a woman as you are, I might have been elevated, and made a better man; with Sylvie, I shall go down—down deeper in the slough of iniquity. But let that pass."

"Then you will seek her? You will atone for the injuries you have inflicted on her?" she eagerly asked.

"Perhaps I may; I do not know—I am tossed on a sea of perplexity and doubt as to the best course to pursue."

"Oh! Vernor," she imploringly said, with clasped hands and weeping eyes—"Let your better angel speak within your soul. Pray to God for guidance in this hour of indecision, and He will teach you to be just, to be honorable toward this unfortunate woman. Bind up her broken heart, and find your reward in a deeper, tenderer love than she has even yet felt for you."

He gloomily replied:

"Since all hope is ended here, perhaps it will be the best course I can pursue. Give me your hand for the last time, Ethel. It will soon be bestowed upon another, but my last kiss cannot defile it."

She reluctantly extended it, and pressing it to his lips, Vernor turned away to meet his aunt standing between himself and the door.

"Dear Vernor," she said with emotion, "may God confirm you in your good resolutions. Follow Ethel's counsels, and find happiness, and respectability in the future."

He hastily wrung her hand, and said:

"I promise to seek Sylvie, and if she will listen to reason, perhaps the best thing I can do will be to follow your counsels. Good-bye, Aunt Agnes; forget your unhappy nephew, and rejoice in the rising fortunes of your son."

He hurriedly left the apartment, and in half an hour was on his way to Lyme with a heart filled with chagrin and bitter disappointment. Ethel, lovely, tender, endowed with a brilliant fortune, he had cast away, and for what? The fascination and brilliant charms of Sylvie which had once so deeply enchanted him, were in that hour valueless in his sight, and he revolved plan after plan for getting Ethel in his power, and evading the pursuit of her who came as an avenging fury upon his path. But the whirl of thought soon settled into the conviction that the best thing he could do for his own interest, was to make his peace with Sylvie,



return with her to her island home, and when the power was his, make her his lawful wife.

That he was swayed by any but selfish motives in this determination, it would be false to state.

He reflected that the sum he would annually receive from his relatives, would suffice to render him independent of Sylvie, and he would have the enjoyment of a luxurious home in a climate that was congenial to him; so balancing one evil against another, Vernor finally made up his mind to humble himself before the loving heart which he felt assured would not refuse his prayer for a reconciliation.

He reached Lyme in the dusk of evening, and seeing an excited group gathered on the pier, he rode down to it and enquired what had happened. He learned that a woman had drowned herself in the sea a short time before; that she was a foreigner who had been in the country but a few days, and Vernor's heart gave a great bound as he thought that it might be Sylvie. If so, he was free to make another effort to regain Ethel, and no scruples of humanity should stand in his way.

The inquiries he made were answered in such a manner as to mislead him completely, and Vernor arrived at the triumphant conclusion that in her despair, Sylvie had committed suicide. As if to give certainty to this delusion, he saw Jessie Lithgow among those who were seeking some clue to the fate of the unfortunate woman, and beside her was Basil Menard, whom he instantly recognized, but he was very careful to conceal his face from the keen glance of his old enemy.

There was no time for the indulgence of remorse, if his callous heart had been susceptible of such a feeling, and he turned his horse's head from the town and rode slowly toward the cove in which he knew the smugglers concealed their vessels while discharging their contraband goods.

Had he paused long enough to make inquiries in the town, he would have learned that Sylvie was still in the house of Jessie Lithgow rapidly recovering from her late illness, and that the poor stranger who had destroyed herself was an Italian who had been left destitute in a foreign land.

As if Fate had resolved to destroy him, Vernor rashly adopted the belief he wished to entertain; for, much as he had once loved Sylvie, he now felt that her death was a welcome release to him, and an earnest of future prosperity.

As he rode forward, his plans were rapidly matured, and to his great joy when he came in sight of the cove he found the same lugger still detained there in which he had voyaged to Lyme. Dismounting, he descended the rugged pathway and stepped on board. The captain came forward to receive him, and said with much surprise:

"So it's really you, Mr. Methurn! I did not expect to see you again so soon. I thought you would be away to claim your estate."

"I found a usurper in possession," he drily responded, "and I have come to you to help me out of a strait. But what has detained you here so long? I thought you would have gone on your voyage back before this time."

The man uttered an oath and said:

"The cursed revenue officers are on the watch, and I have been penned up here, watching for an opportunity to escape for days; but I'll give 'em the slip yet."

"Perhaps you will find that it has been as much to your interest to be detained as if you had sailed. Come with me into the cabin, for I have something of importance to propose to you."

The skipper left the deck in charge of a sailor he summoned from below, and accompanying Vernor into the cabin closed the door. When they were alone he said:

"And now, sir, I am at your service. What can I do to help you?"

"Captain Tompkins, will you aid a deeply wronged man to right himself? and at the same time do a handsome thing for yourself."

"If I can kill two birds with one stone, you may be sure that I shan't refuse to do so. What has happened, and how can I serve you?"

"I will tell you. My cousin has taken advantage of my absence to possess himself of my inheritance; he has traduced me to my own wife until her mind is so deeply poisoned against me that she refuses to return to me; she even threatens to apply for a divorce that she may give her hand to him who has so deeply injured me. Since I have returned to England without the formality of a pardon from the government, I cannot show myself openly, and Gerald Methurn has taken advantage of this to defy me even in the house of my wife. The service I wish from you is, to slip out of this cove, and lie in wait about twenty miles above, till I come on board with the faithless woman who has acted thus; for it is my purpose to seize her and bear her away by force. If you will do this, and land me safely on the coast of France, I will reward you in proportion to the magnitude of the service."

The captain listened in surprise.

"I have heard that Lady Clifton has been married before, but I did not learn who was her husband. If she refuses to live with you, what can you do with her?"

"Once in a foreign land, I can easily manage her. Besides she loved me in other days, and when she knows that her fate is irrevocably linked with mine, she will forget her lover and content herself with me."

"It's a ticklish affair, sir, and I hardly know what to say about it. You know the old adage—'If a woman will, she

will; and if she won't, she won't; and if this young lady loves your cousin she won't be likely to stay with you on any terms."

"I'll risk that," said Vernor, resolutely. "All you have to do is to help me regain my lawful authority over her, and if she escapes from it again it will be my own fault. I have money—I will pay you a large sum in advance for the service, and when my wife is reconciled to her fate I will give you another bonus for helping me to regain my lost happiness. The King's vessel watches for you below the town—you can slip out above, perform the service I demand, and make a good use of the time you are losing here."

"I don't know but you're right, sir. It is now ten days that I've laid cooped up here, hoping to tire out the patience of that revenue officer; but he still hangs on, and he'd have been here after me before now if his cutter wasn't of such heavy draft. After all, I don't see as a woman has the right to refuse to go with her lawful husband when he commands her to do so, and if your pay is good, I may as well take the job as another."

"That is well," said Vernor, drawing forth his purse, from which he took the money that morning given him by Gerald as the first instalment of his annuity, and offered the larger part of it to the captain. He seemed surprised at the amount tendered, and Vernor jauntily said:

"You see that I pay munificently. I always do so when I demand good service; and now, how soon can you be at your post?"

"In twenty-four hours at farthest; but how are you to gain possession of your prize?"

"That will be easy enough. She often walks alone on the sea beach below Cliffden, and I shall lie in wait for her till she appears, then seize on and bear her away. The weather is mild and beautiful for the season, and, now that

I am believed to have taken my final leave of her, Lady Clifton will resume her usual habits. You may be detained a few days; but I am almost certain that in that time I shall make sure of my quarry."

If the skipper had any scruples they were silenced by the voice of interest, and he prepared to go on this iniquitous errand. Vernor remained on board, and in the darkness of night, the lugger slipped her cables, and eluding the cutter, which was cruising around her place of refuge, sailed up the coast till she came in sight of the lofty hight on which stood the mansion of Cliffden.

About two miles below was an indentation in the shore, sheltered by a projecting headland, which offered a secure haven in mild weather; here the anchor was cast, and Vernor went on shore to watch for the prey he had come to entrap. A boat rowed by two men was kept constantly at his command, and a signal was agreed on between himself and the captain by which the latter would learn when the capture was made, and prepare his vessel to sail as soon as Ethel was safe on board.

Having thus arranged his plans, Vernor sought a cavern below the cliffs which he had discovered during his late visit. The opening from it commanded a view of the pathway leading to the beach, and if Ethel descended it he must see her.

Three days passed away, and she came not; he had almost despaired; the captain was becoming impatient, and Vernor was meditating the chances of success in a foray against the house, when he saw a light figure wrapped in furs descending the pathway alone, in which he recognized Ethel. The signal agreed on was instantly given, and Vernor left his covert and prepared to spring upon his victim.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE ABDUCTION.

WHEN Vernor took his departure from Cliffden, Gerald sought the apartment of Ethel, to impart the welcome tidings to her that she need fear no further persecution from his cousin.

During Vernor's stay in the house the lovers had scarcely met, for each was too wretched to offer even the consolation of hope to the other. With so bold and corrupt an adversary as Vernor, they could not tell what base ruse he might employ to frustrate their future happiness. Ethel dreaded his presence near her even more than death itself, and in his unsuccessful efforts to deal with him, Gerald lost the little confidence he might once have felt in his good feeling. He clearly saw that the lapse of time had confirmed the worst traits of Vernor's character; that he had become a thoroughly hard-hearted, self-indulgent sensualist, who was ready to trample on the most sacred rights of others to attain his own personal gratification.

Gerald had nothing in common with such a man, and he recoiled from him with a depth of repulsion which gave additional poignancy to the thought that he held such fatal power over the destiny of the woman he loved. To rescue her from him even if she could never become his own, was the strongest desire of his soul, and a terrible weight of anxiety was lifted from his heart when the letter of Minchen placed it in his power to dictate terms to Vernor.

He came in smiling and joyful, and seating himself beside Ethel, without even attempting to take her hand, he said:

"Vernor is gone, my dear Ethel, and I think we shall see him no more. He is no longer safe in this country, and he

has pledged his word to embark for the Continent within four days."

"Thank Heaven! I trust that I shall never see him again! The consciousness that he was so near me, has weighed as an incubus upon my spirits since he has been here. Yet, as he was still living, Gerald, it is well that we learned it in time to prevent our union."

"But it was a terrible blow, Ethel, and I feel as if I have grown ten years older within the last few days. Never again will I trust anything to chance. The presumption of Vernor's death caused me to quash the law proceedings, which would have restored to you the control of your own fate. I blame myself for this, for if Vernor had been in a position to contest his claim to you, I cannot tell what the result might have been. Unless both parties are agreed, it is extremely difficult to obtain a divorce in this country."

She shuddered and became slightly pale.

"Oh, Gerald, I would never have consented to receive him as my husband! I would have buried myself in some obscure retreat, and left to him what he alone covets, the enjoyment of my fortune. You will now take steps to free me from him? Since he withdraws his claims, there will be no difficulty in the way."

"I have already written to Mr. Clyde, and requested him to take such steps as are necessary on your behalf to gain the divorce, which I am now certain will be readily granted. Do not be alarmed by imaginary terrors, my dear Ethel, for you are now perfectly safe from the machinations of Vernor. Oh! if he had wrested you from me, I should have been the most miserable of men! But, deep as my recent disappointment is, I am now reconciled to it. A few months of delay, and no obstacle will exist to our union."

"Those months will soon pass away, Gerald. You will spend as much of your time as possible at Cliffden, and

when the joyous springtime comes, we can celebrate our marriage. We shall not be the less happy for this delay."

"Will you not go with me to London? My mother and Mr. Digby have already spoken of taking you and Alice there to spend the remainder of the winter. Perhaps it may be best, but you can consult your own inclinations."

"If I do, I shall certainly remain here," she quickly replied. "Our friends in London are aware that our marriage was to have taken place at Christmas, and the cause of its interruption must become the subject of gossip and remark. No, dear Gerald, I think it will be too severe a trial to me to appear in society in my present position, nor do I feel that it will be right for me to do so."

"I felt this myself, Ethel, and I referred the proposal to you, sure that your own instinctive sense of propriety would guide your decision. I will hasten to London to see that everything is in proper train to attain our wishes; but I shall return as speedily as possible to the enjoyment of your dear society. With the guardianship of my mother and her husband, and the companionship of Alice, there can be no impropriety in your receiving me for as long a time as I may be able to spend with you."

"That will be best," she cheerfully replied. "The winter promises to be unusually mild, and you can go to and fro without great inconvenience. I have many sources of interest here, for I have already become much attached to the place. I am afraid it has completely rivalled the Priory in my affections, although that was the home of my childhood."

"Then we will make Cliffden our home the greater part of every year after we are married. I, too, like the prospect of the sea, and the neighborhood seems to be a pleasant one."

"Yes—I like those who have called since I came here

very much, and in our late troubles they have manifested little indiscreet curiosity. My tenants, too, seem already attached to me, and my presence on the estate will be very beneficial to them. Will Mr. Bertie return with you to London?"

"Of course—that is, if he can tear himself from the fascinations of Alice. If I am any judge of the symptoms, I should say that they are both ages gone in love, and Mr. Digby will soon be called on to give up his daughter."

"Then you approve of his addresses?"

"With all my heart. Bertie is a noble and true man; he will have a good fortune when his father dies, and he has now an allowance amply sufficient to enable him to marry, and live as befits his station. He has not much ambition, but Alice will infuse some of her own spirit into him, and urge him on in the race of life, till he wins the position his talents fit him to adorn."

"Alice is a dear girl, and she will make one of the best of wives; but I am sorry to give her up, even to Mr. Bertie."

"Oh, you will not be separated very far, for Bertie has purchased a small property near this, on which is a handsome hunting lodge, to which additions can be made if Alice accepts him. To tell you the whole truth, Ethel, he is with her now, pouring his tale of love in her ear, and with the approbation of her father, too."

"So—while I have been shut up in my own room, the destiny of Alice has, it seems, been settled. I shall be bridesmaid to her, in place of her acting in that capacity to me."

"I do not think the marriage will take place immediately. Mr. Digby has stipulated that he shall keep his daughter till our fate is decided. Then, if the decision is favorable, Bertie and myself will both be made happy on the same day."

She smiled brightly:

"So much the better, for I could scarcely have borne the loss of Alice just at this time."

A small time-piece that stood on the mantel chimed the hour, and Gerald arose, and said:

"It is later than I thought; time has flown so swiftly with you, that I have neglected several things I must attend to before dinner."

"I shall come to the table to-day for the first time since the evil phantom I evoked made his unwelcome appearance. I shall not be surprised if, in time to come, it were told that I actually called up the shade of the departed by the magic spell of a mistletoe bough."

Gerald laughed, raised her hand to his lips, and left the room. In a short time Alice came in, looking flushed and excited, and after standing over the fire a few moments, she abruptly said:

"I have something to say to you, Ethel, which must be told before you ring for your maid."

"Suppose a little bird has already whispered it to me," she laughingly replied. "I can see from your face that you have not said 'no' to your true love."

"So—Gerald has betrayed confidence! I will repay him for this breach of trust. You know, then, that Edward Bertie has proposed to me, and——"

She paused, and Ethel went on:

"And you have accepted him. Is it not so, Alice, darling?"

"Well—y-e-s—I believe I have been so foolish, though I once thought I would never accept a man who has not the energy to win his own way in life as Gerald has done. Mr. Bertie's fortune is already made for him, and he has nothing to do but enjoy it, which he seems inclined to do in too quiet a manner to please me exactly. But somehow he has won

upon me, until I had not the courage to refuse him when he told me how much he loves me."

"Right—right, my dainty fire spirit. Mr. Bertie only wants such a wife as you will be to him, to rouse him to run the race his education and abilities fit him to win. He is so much attached to you, that your influence will make him all you can wish."

"I don't intend to rule my husband, Ethel. I should despise him if I could do so. Edward has spirit enough of his own, if it can only be aroused and directed aright."

"I am aware of that, and you can give the impetus without betraying your agency even to him. So, Mrs. Edward Bertie elect, I offer you my hearty congratulations."

She kissed her friend tenderly, and Alice ran off to her own room to prepare for dinner.

A happy group assembled around the table on that day. After the servants had withdrawn, Mr. Digby expressed his entire satisfaction with the choice his daughter had made. It was finally arranged that so soon as the divorce enabled Gerald to claim his bride, Alice, at the same time, should give her hand to her lover.

Bertie was unwilling to leave his betrothed in the first flush of his newly won happiness, and Gerald, little loth, lingered three more happy days beneath the hospitable roof of Cliffden. On the fourth day the two young men reluctantly departed for London.

The morning was bright and unusually warm for the season; there was little wind, and the smooth sea came rolling in soft murmurs toward the shore. Soon after the departure of the travellers, Ethel came into the sitting-room, equipped for her daily walk. She found Alice writing a letter for her father, who walked to and fro, dictating it to her. Mrs. Digby looked up from her sewing and asked:

"In which direction will you walk this morning, Ethel?"

"I am going to the beach, aunty. It seems an age since I have been there, and the day is so deliciously calm that it will be delightful to walk on it again."

"Have you no fears as to your perfect safety there?" she anxiously inquired. "Alice cannot go with you immediately, and you had better wait till her letter is finished."

"I have gone alone so often and encountered no one, that I think I may venture to do so again; but if you wish it, I will wait for Alice. I shall prefer her companionship at any rate."

Alice looked up and smiled:

"I am afraid your patience will be put to a severe test, for father dictates long letters, and I have but just begun my task."

"I will be brief this time, my daughter, for the day is too bright to be spent within doors," said Mr. Digby, good humoredly. "Ethel shall not be long detained."

But he soon became oblivious of his promise, and sentence after sentence was added to the voluminous epistle to an old and valued friend. Ethel became impatient of the delay; she looked through the window at the brilliant sunshine, and presently said:

"I will just stroll about the lawn till you can join me, Alice. I will not attempt to descend to the beach till I see you coming out to join me."

Alice nodded, and she went out alone. Enticing as the view below the cliffs was, where the sands were sheltered from the wind, Ethel continued to promenade through a walk that wound above them till she saw Alice issue from the house. Without pausing till she had time to join her, she gained the head of the rude stairway, and commenced the descent.

Miss Digby was detained on the lawn a few moments by the gardener, who asked for directions concerning some win-

ter roses which had been sent to her by the orders of Bertie; time was thus given for Ethel to outstrip her so far as to throw her completely in the power of him who watched her approach, ready to pounce on her and bear her away to wretchedness.

Vernor waited till his prey had gained the beach, and then, emerging from the spot on which he had concealed himself, rapidly approached her. As fate would have it, Ethel unfortunately turned in the direction from which the boat was approaching; the murmur of the sea deadened the sound of the footsteps that pursued her, and when the unexpected appearance of a boat rowed rapidly toward the shore caused her to turn precipitately that she might retrace her steps she encountered the resolute face of Vernor, who barred her progress by extending his arms and enclosing her in them.

"Fairly trapped, my lady wife," he triumphantly said. "There is no one here to dispute my claim to you, and you had better go with me quietly. It will only be the worse for you if you do not."

"Vernor, for God's sake unhand me!" she implored. "You can gain nothing by this unmanly violence. What becomes of your pledges? You will not act so dishonorable a part as to tear me away from my home and friends."

"*You* should not talk of broken pledges," he rudely replied, "for you have yourself broken the most sacred one a woman can make, you are my lawful wife, and if I am forced to go into exile, I choose to take you with me. Resistance will be useless, so yield to your fate without exasperating me by a show of resistance."

"But I will not yield to it without a struggle. Only let me go, and I will give you half—nay, all I possess for my freedom."

"It is all mine at any rate, Lady Clifton, but I value your

own fair self as much as your lands and gold. Ethel, I swear that I love you. I never did till now, but since our last meeting I love you as I have loved no other woman."

With great effort Ethel had thus far preserved her self-command, but now it deserted her. There was an expression of savage triumph in the face of Vernor, that filled her with dread. As he attempted to lift her in his arms, she uttered a piercing shriek which was heard by Alice as she was descending toward the beach.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### IN THE SECRET CHAMBER.

THE boat touched the strand, the men sprang on shore, and, in spite of her struggles, Vernor raised Ethel in ~~his~~ arms, dashed through the surf, and placed her in the stern, half paralyzed by fright. In another instant they were floating in deep water; and as Alice reached the edge of the shore, wringing her hands and calling on them to return, Vernor arose, exultingly waved his hat to her, and cried out:

"Tell Sir Gerald Methurn that Lady Clifton has gone with her husband, and I defy him to tear her from me again. Farewell, Miss Digby! you will see your friend no more, or you will see her as my willing wife."

The sailors bent to their oars and rowed rapidly toward the projecting point which concealed the lugger, but as they drew near it a sudden roar of firearms, which startled them, was heard. The deep boom of a cannon followed, succeeded by rapid discharges of musketry, and with an imprecation Vernor exclaimed:



"The cutter is on our track. She has found out whither the lugger came, and has followed her. This is a cursed chance, and may ruin all my plans. Pull with a will, boys, till we get into the bight below this. There we shall be safe, and I will take care that the lady makes no noise."

Ethel wore a long scarf around her throat, and he wrapped it over her mouth and knotted it at the back of her head in such a manner as effectually to prevent her from screaming. She was passive in his hands, for in the deadly terror that fell on her she seemed to lose all power of resistance.

The sailors, fearful of the fate that might await them if taken by the revenue cutter, rowed rapidly around the headland and entered a narrow stream which flowed beyond it into the sea. Once in this, they knew they were safe, for the beetling crags nearly met overhead, and the water was too shallow to permit a successful pursuit.

The noise of the conflict continued, and just as they were gaining their place of refuge, the smoke in which the combatants were enveloped lifted, and they obtained a glimpse of two vessels engaged in deadly strife. When the boat was safely moored, one of the sailors scrambled up the precipitous bank to a point from which he could see the fight.

For the space of twenty minutes the smuggler was fiercely defended; she then attempted to sheer off, but the revenue cutter intercepted her, and nothing was left but to surrender to the superior force of the king's vessel. The flag was struck, and the prize was grappled to the side of the conqueror, which sailed away in the direction of Lyme. The man came down to his companions with a rueful visage.

"It's all up with us," he said. "The poor old craft is taken, and we must do the best we can for ourselves."

Vernor uttered a volley of curses, and presently said:

"We can't stay here. The country will be alarmed, and

people will soon be on our track for doing what will be thought worse than smuggling. Get out of this place, and move cautiously down the coast. Ten miles below here there is a place where we can land in safety. I will give you ten pounds to take me there with this lady; from the coast I can easily reach a place of security for both her and myself."

Ten pounds was a large sum to these men, and one of them cheerfully answered:

"Ay—ay, sir. We'll help you out of the scrape, and you shall keep your wife. A dutiful one she must be to refuse to go with you at any rate."

Ethel struggled to speak, but Vernor placed his hand over her mouth and commanded her to be silent.

When the boat reached the open sea they saw the cutter receding in the distance, and in a little while she was lost to view. There was little wind; but what there was, was favorable to their progress, and after a few hours of steady rowing they came in sight of a solitary house standing upon the beach.

Fishing nets were spread upon the sand to dry, and Vernor, who knew the place well, desired the sailors to land him there. The head of the boat was turned toward the shore, and Ethel was lifted in Vernor's arms and placed upon the strand. The sum agreed on was paid to the men, who declared their intention to seek the smuggler's cove and, if possible, learn the fate of their late companions.

After taking leave of them, Vernor led Ethel to the door of the cabin and placed her on a bench in front of it, while he went in and called aloud to the owner of the premises. But the fisherman was not at home, and after deliberating a moment he rejoined Ethel and said:

"I know of old that you are a good walker, and five miles will not fatigue you. Come with me to the Priory; I know

every step of the way there, and I mean to take possession and install you as mistress in the halls of my father. Gerald shall no longer have everything his own way. I am freed from the pursuit of Sylvie Menard, for she has committed suicide; so make up your mind to come with me at once."

To the Priory! There was some hope in that, for there she must find friends who would protect her from Vernor till she could be rescued. He removed the scarf from her mouth, and more gently said:

"I do not wish to treat you ill, Ethel; but this was the last chance left me to regain you. As soon as I heard of Sylvie's fate I was resolved that Gerald should not take you from me. Come, let us lose no time, for the sun is sinking, and we shall barely have time to gain the Priory before night comes on."

Ethel made no reply; she felt that words would be useless, but she endeavored to collect all her energies that she might be ready to avail herself of any chance of escape that offered itself. Vernor again entered the hut, looked around for some means of striking a light, and took possession of the lantern and tinder box used by the fisherman, for which he left a piece of money. When he came out with them Ethel asked:

"What use will you have for those?"

"Oh, if we should be benighted in the woods they may be of use to us. I know the old fisherman well, and I have left something to pay for what I have taken. Will you take my arm? You had better, for you will find the path rough in places."

She shrank away:

"I can go alone; walk on, and I will follow you."

"Understand one thing, Ethel," he said, with a tone of savage earnestness in his voice—"if you make an effort to

get away from me, I shall no longer play the courteous gentleman to you. If I can win you by fair means I am willing to try them; but if not, you may take the consequences."

A bitter retort sprang to the gentle lips of Ethel, but she repressed it and said:

"I will follow you, as I said before. Keep your threats for me till I have attempted to escape."

Leaving the beach he strode on through the tangled pathway that led into a narrow road which wound through the thick forest. It bore few evidences of travel, and seemed to have been rudely cut by the lonely fisherman to facilitate his access to some neighboring market.

Vernor had often threaded its mazes in other days, and he knew that there was little chance of encountering any one in their progress. Like most of her countrywomen, Ethel was accustomed to take long walks nearly every day of her life, and although she followed her ruthless guide with a fainting heart and unwilling steps, she easily kept up with him, the latent hope sustaining her that once at the Priory she would find those who would be both able and willing to protect her. Why Vernor should venture to take her there she could not fathom: she supposed that it was his intention to hold her in a species of honorable captivity while he endeavored to win back the affections he had lost. She felt this to be a vain hope on his part, and when once convinced of its futility, he would surely release her.

Buoyed up by this forlorn hope, she walked on in silence, meeting no one on their route to whom she could have appealed for assistance, and she gladly saw the old familiar woodland appear in sight. The sun was setting, and his last rays glinted on the moss-covered walls of the venerable pile as Vernor unclosed a gate which led toward the rear of the most ancient portion of the building. Ethel then asked:

"What is your purpose in bringing me hither?"

"You will soon learn," was the brief response; and taking her arm firmly in his own, he led the way to the decaying door which opened into the vaults. He stopped in front of it, and by a dextrous movement threw the scarf he had before used over her face, and in spite of her struggles and faint cries for help, secured it in such a manner as to prevent her from seeing whither he was about to take her. Then lifting her in his arms, he carried her through the opening and placed her on a pile of fallen stones, half senseless with fright and surprise. He imperiously said:

"Don't attempt to take that bandage off, for if you do, I will not answer for myself. I may take your life as the punishment of your disobedience. Sit still, and do not utter a cry, I command you; but if you should, there is no one to hear you in this lonely place."

He rapidly lighted his lantern, threw his arm around the unresisting form of Ethel, and finding that she had fainted, he muttered:

"So much the better; I can now take her to her prison without her knowing anything about the way we came."

Her light weight was not much encumbrance, and he rapidly threaded his way toward the Secret Chamber. He gained it, sought and found the spring, and conveyed her to the upper room. It was exactly as it had been left years before; and throwing aside the heavy hangings of the bed, Vernor placed his insensible burden upon it.

Ethel again awoke to consciousness to find her captor standing over her, holding his lantern so that its light fell upon her pallid face, from which he had removed the scarf. She started up, exclaiming:

"Where am I? Oh! Vernor, where have you brought me? You can never be so cruel as to immure me in such a place as this!"

"It is my fixed purpose to shut you up here till you come to your senses. The existence of this room is unknown to any one but myself, and you may die in its darkness unless you consent to leave it as my obedient wife. You shall never go from it except under a solemn pledge to remain true to the vows you have plighted to me, to the last hour of your life."

A faint wail of anguish broke from her lips; she started up, threw herself before him, and imploringly said:

"Be human—be merciful, Vernor! I have never injured you. I will give you what you may demand from my fortune as the price of my freedom. Vernor, I shall die in this desolate place, and you will not be the better for what I possess."

"I will see you die by inches sooner than I will permit you to give yourself to Gerald. I hate him, and I will thwart him at all hazards. He thought to trample on all my rights, but I have outwitted him. He shall never see you again except as my wife; so the sooner you make up your mind to accept my terms the better it will be for you."

She arose, defiant and scornful:

"I will *never* accept them! I will perish first!"

"Ho! ho! will you indeed!" he sneered. "Let me tell you what you will have to bear: For three days I will furnish you with light; after that, if you are still obstinate, I will see what darkness will accomplish toward bending your stubborn will. Your food shall be bread and water, and perhaps your dainty palate will soon find such nourishment unpalatable. The sooner the better for my purpose. No human being will ever be able to discover your prison, and I shall keep myself where Gerald cannot find me. Ha! my pretty Lady Bird, I have snared you at last, and placed you in a cage so strong that there is no possibility of breaking from it."

She listened to him in silent despair; but even at that moment a ray of faith darted into her trusting soul, and she firmly said:

"Man's help may fail me, but God's will not; *He* will send deliverance to me from your cruel abuse of power."

Vernor laughed mockingly:

"Say your prayers as much as you will—I have no objection; but if you ask to be delivered from this place without my agency, it is my belief that your Deity will be deaf to them. I must leave you to solitude and darkness now. I am as hungry as a wolf, and you must want food yourself. I will return with your allowance of bread and water as soon as possible, and then I will leave you a light."

Without further ceremony he stepped through the trap-door, closed and bolted it behind him, leaving Ethel standing in the dense darkness of the subterranean chamber.

Feeling faint and worn out by all she had gone through that day, she felt her way to the bed, and sat down upon it, trembling with fear. She tried to collect her thoughts—to form some plan of action in this terrible crisis of her life; but the palpable darkness that seemed to fold around her as the mantle of oblivion, scared away the power of thought.

Ethel was as little superstitious as most people were at that day, but she was young and sensitive. She had never before been left alone in darkness in her life, and her heart died within her as she thought that she was cut off from human sympathy; left to the mercy of a man who so deeply resented her indifference that he might be capable of punishing her even with death if she persisted in refusing to comply with his demands.

Vernor was absent about three hours, during which time the poor captive endured all the agonies which fear and despair could inflict. When he returned he merely unclosed the trap, and thrust through it several wax candles, one of which

was in a tin candlestick and already lighted. He placed beside them a loaf of bread, a pitcher filled with water, and mockingly said:

"I leave you to do penance for your faithlessness to the vows you have taken. This is your home—this your fare as long as you live if you refuse obedience to me. Good night, my pretty one! dream of me—think of me: love me, for that is your only chance of escape."

With a sinking heart Ethel heard the bolts shot that fastened her in that terrible place, and throwing herself upon her knees beside the bed, she sobbed out a prayer for mercy and deliverance: even amid her present desolation she felt the consoling assurance that it would be heard and responded to, and she arose calmed and capable of thought.

The superstitious dread which had overwhelmed her in the darkness now passed away, and she examined the prison in which she was immured only to discover how hopeless were the chances of escape through any effort of her own.

She knew that Gerald would leave no means untried to discover her place of detention, but how was it possible for him to find her in this secluded dungeon, the very existence of which Vernor had assured her was known only to himself?

At length, exhausted by the fatigues and emotions of the day, she threw herself upon the bed, and fell into a feverish and broken slumber.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## DELIVERANCE.

ALICE, after witnessing the daring abduction of her friend, fled rapidly toward the house, and gave the alarm to the family. A messenger was dispatched in hot haste to bring Gerald back, and a group soon collected on the sands, but there was no sign of the boat in which Ethel had been conveyed away.

The sounds of the conflict between the two vessels reached their ears, and Mr. Digby ordered a barge which was kept some distance above, to be brought down as soon as possible. By the time it arrived, and he was rowed far enough from the shore to obtain a view of the combatants, the fight was nearly over, and in a few more moments, the cutter moved slowly away, carrying her late antagonist with her as prize.

He saw that it would be hopeless to attempt to overtake her, and he returned to the group upon the shore, with the consoling assurance, that if Vernor had taken refuge on the lugger, he was now a prisoner, and Ethel under the protection of its captain, who was known to him as a humane and courteous man.

With their fears a little allayed by this belief, Mrs. Digby and Alice returned to the house, and Mr. Digby only awaited the return of Gerald to set out with him for Lyme to inquire into Ethel's fate.

An hour had scarcely elapsed, when Gerald rushed in, pale with anguish; the messenger had overtaken him a few miles from Cliffden, and he returned at a fearful rate of speed, to learn the slight ground of hope, that Vernor had taken his prize on board the captured lugger.

"I trust in God it may prove so," he hoarsely said.

"We must go to Lyme at once, and learn if she is there. If not, I will search the world over for her, and never rest till I have brought condign punishment to him who dared thus to outrage every principle of honor and justice."

The horses had already been ordered, and the two gentlemen set out without delay, leaving Bertie, who had also returned, to console Mrs. Digby and Alice.

Gerald's impatience soon outstripped the pace at which his older companion was accustomed to ride, and waving his hand to him, he set off at a furious gallop, as he said:

"Come on, and meet me at Lyme, but on such a quest as this, I must ride for my life."

With headlong speed, he dashed over hill and valley, and it was fortunate both for himself and the horse he rode, that the last was thorough-bred, and accustomed to follow the hounds at a breakneck pace. The noble animal sped away as if animated by the spirit of its rider, and in a few hours he had passed over the space which lay between Cliffden and Lyme.

When Gerald came in sight of the town, he slackened his pace, and looked anxiously toward the pier. The cutter was already there, and dismounting, he secured the bridle of his panting steed to a tree, and descended through a rocky ravine to the landing place. A group of people had collected, through which he made his eager way, and inquired for the captain of the vessel. A bluff, good-humored looking man came forward, and Gerald took him aside and inquired if there was a lady on board of the lugger when she was taken. The officer looked surprised, and said:

"I found only a few men, sir. I don't think the skipper smuggles ladies as well as other contraband articles."

"A lady has been seized, and carried from her home by

force, and there is every reason to believe that the lugger was waiting to receive her on board.

"Can I see her captain?"

"If he will receive you; but he is wounded, and rather sulky."

After some delay, Gerald was admitted into the cabin where the wounded man lay. At first he obstinately refused to reply to his questions, but when he informed him who he was, and assured him that he would use his influence to obtain a mitigation of his punishment if he would give the information he sought, Tompkins stated to him, that as soon as he had obeyed Vernor's signal and made ready to sail, the cutter which had been lying in wait for him, had commenced the attack. Vernor was unable to get on board, and he had doubtless landed on the coast, and made his way into the interior of a country that was familiar to him from boyhood.

This was all Gerald could learn, and when he stepped upon the pier again, he paused a moment, and addressed the crowd:

"Lady Clifton has been torn from her home by violence, and I offer a hundred pounds to any one who will discover her place of concealment, and communicate it to me. Between Cliffden and this place her abductor must have turned, and I will give a similar reward for any information concerning Vernor Methurn, who has perpetrated this outrage. I go now to seek him myself, but I hope, my friends, that you will zealously aid me in the search."

A confused murmur arose in reply, but he did not pause to hear, or answer questions. Rapidly ascending the bank, he again mounted his faithful steed, and spurred back on the road on which he had come. He met Mr. Digby, and rapidly related his failure to trace Ethel, and they took separate roads to arouse the country in pursuit of her captor.

The news of what had occurred at Cliffden, soon spread through Lyme; it was repeated in Jessie Lithgow's shop, and thus reached Minchen. Her plans were rapidly formed, and as much of them communicated to Sylvie as she considered necessary to their successful accomplishment. She was hourly expecting Melchoir, from whom she had heard; his injured foot was well enough to enable him to travel, and his messenger had said he would be with her by sunset.

The Gipsy went out, and hired a covered cart, which she ordered to wait her in a ravine near to town. As Melchoir was often in the habit of making mysterious journeys with the contraband articles in which he dealt, this did not excite any surprise in the man from whom the vehicle was obtained; and when Melchoir came back with the news which had hastened his return, he found everything in readiness for a speedy departure.

Sylvie, moving like one in a terrible dream, mechanically obeyed the directions given her. She was assured that she should see Vernor once more—should speak with him; and the wild glare in her eyes revealed to the subtle observation of the Gipsy the fierce fires that lay smouldering beneath her apparent docility.

When supper was over, the three silently evaded the observation of their hostess, and issued from a rear entrance leading toward the open country. After a walk of half a mile, they gained the ravine in which the cart awaited them. Melchoir took the reins, and dismissed the man in charge of it with the assurance that he should return in a few days.

The two women took their places, and they set out over the rugged road which led to the Priory.

Minchen's acuteness had assured her that, in such an extremity, Vernor would make use of the secret chamber to conceal Ethel from every one till an opportunity offered to

escape with her to the continent. He was ignorant of the vicinity of herself and her son, and would, therefore, feel secure of keeping his prisoner as long as was necessary to his plans without being interfered with by any one.

She exchanged exulting whispers with her son; but both were careful that they should not reach the ears of Sylvie, who lay supine in the bottom of the cart wrapped in shawls, which Melchoir had brought with him for that purpose.

The night was clear, but not very cold; the road was uneven, and in some places almost impassable, and the sun was rising when they reached the beach wood in which their encampment had formerly been erected. Accustomed to such exigencies, the Gipsy had brought with her a supply of food and the means of striking a light.

A fire was soon kindled, over which wine was mulled for Sylvie, into which the old woman slyly poured a few drops of transparent liquid from a vial she drew from her bosom.

"This will fire her blood," she muttered, "and make her more reckless than she naturally is. If she does not kill him, I will do it myself, for he shall never escape me now."

Sylvie ate but little of the food that was offered her, for she had no appetite; but she eagerly drank every drop of the wine prepared for her, and a few moments afterward impatiently asked:

"What are we to do next? The traitor is not here, and you promised that I should find him at the end of my journey."

"So you shall. We are on his track, and a few moments more will bring you where he will be sure to come very soon, if we do not actually find him there."

"Let us go, then. Every moment that detains me from my vengeance only sharpens my desire to reach his false and perjured heart."

The two confederates exchanged significant glances, and

Melchoir prepared to conceal the cart and horse in the recesses of a neighboring thicket. Then striking into a sheltered pathway which led toward the opening in the vaults, they skirted the lawn, and gained the place they sought without observation from the house.

Melchoir carried a lantern already lighted and, after reconnoitring a few moments to satisfy himself that Vernor was nowhere near, he entered the gloomy subterranean vaults, followed by the two women. In silence they threaded their way to the secret chamber; with dilating eyes Sylvie saw the door spring back, and she asked, with some apprehension:

"Why should you bring me here? Vernor would not voluntarily seek such a place as this."

"Not for himself, perhaps; but he has brought her of whom I told you hither, to conceal her from her friends till she consents to receive him as her husband."

Sylvie uttered a cry that sounded more like the voice of some wild animal than the tones of a human voice. She pantingly said:

"My rival—my rival is there. Let me immolate her, and then Vernor and I may be happy."

She sprang through the opening with a bound like that of an enraged tigress, and glared around the empty room with her hand upon the handle of her poniard. Minchen firmly grasped her arm, and, looking into her blazing eyes, sternly said:

"This young girl is innocent of wrong toward you, and I will not conduct you to her presence unless you pledge me your word that you will make no attempt to injure her. It is my purpose to remove her and restore her to her friends, leaving you in her place to avenge your injuries on him who will come here expecting to find her. You must promise me this, or we return as we came, and you may find Vernor as you can."



Her look subdued Sylvie with its magnetic power, and she feebly said :

"Let me look on her, then. I will not attempt to strike at the heart which has desolated mine. To see Vernor once more I will promise anything—anything."

Whispering a few words to her son to guard Ethel from any sudden impulse of fury from the half-maddened woman beside her, Minchen closed the aperture and ascended the stairs, followed by the others.

The noise of their approach did not arouse Ethel from the troubled slumber into which she had fallen; she had placed her candle upon a tall stand, and its rays fell upon her pale yet lovely face, around which lay the heavy rings of her brown hair.

Minchen placed her finger upon her lip, and drew near the bed, followed by Sylvie, who glared upon that sweet face with an expression of dire hatred. She saw that it was beautiful: she believed that Vernor loved its possessor, and, in a paroxysm of jealous fury, she snatched the fatal dagger from her bosom, raised it aloft, and was about to strike her rival to the heart, when the watchful Melchoir sprang upon her and pinioned her arms to her side. She cried out:

"Let me strike her—let me strike her—for she is my most deadly foe."

At the noise thus made Ethel sprang up in wild alarm, and for an instant she could not remember where she was, or what had happened to her; but all came back to her in a moment, and she imagined those were the emissaries of Vernor come to tear her from her native land. She threw herself before Minchen and implored:

"If you have a human heart remove me from this place; take me from the power of a bad man, who has fatally entrapped me. He has sent you hither to do I know not what; but as you hope for mercy yourself, show it to me now."

The Gipsy raised her up, and gently said:

"My son and I have followed you hither, Lady Clifton, to rescue and restore you to your friends. We are not the agents of Mr. Methurn, but the friends of his deserted wife, who now stands before you."

Ethel seized her hands and pressed them to her heart, while she uttered incoherent thanks for this assurance. After a few moments, she more calmly said:

"God has heard my prayers, and sent you to rescue me from the dreadful doom Vernor would have given me. Let us go—let us go before he returns, for he may come back at any moment."

She started forward as if to leave the chamber; but Sylvie, who still panted and struggled in Melchoir's strong grasp, cried out:

"Let me look on her—let me see the fatal beauty that won his heart from me—from me, who gave him all I had to give, only to be trampled on and deserted for her sake."

Thus arrested, Ethel turned toward her; and although she shrank from the maniac glare in Sylvie's eyes, she gently addressed the excited creature:

"If Vernor has led you to believe that he loves me, he has spoken falsely; he cares nothing for me beyond my power to advance his interests. He had pledged his word to me to seek you, and endeavor to make his peace with you; he promised me that he would legalize your claim on him as soon as the power to do so is his. He violated his word, and tore me from my home to immure me here. Take my place, and when he returns let the affection you have once cherished for each other bring about a reconciliation between you. I only wish for your happiness together, for I love, and have long been betrothed to his cousin."

While she thus spoke, the fire faded from the eyes of Sylvie, and she softly said:

"Pass on, sweet vision of gentleness and purity; I would not harm you now. You can release me, Melchoir; she is safe from me since she refuses to return Vernor's love."

The Gipsy relaxed his grasp, and Sylvie stood free. She returned the dagger to its sheath, and, exhausted by her own violence, threw herself upon the bed. Minchen spoke to Ethel.

"Go now with my son. He will conduct you to the inhabited part of the house, and place you under the care of the agent, who lives in it. A message will be sent at once to Clifden, to inform the family of your safety."

Ethel gladly prepared to obey; she took the hand of Minchen in both her own, and said:

"I shall see you again. This service shall be nobly rewarded, for to you I owe more than life."

"If one good deed can balance many evil ones, Lady Clifton, I shall be happy. Go, now; for the day wears on, and he you wot of may return."

Melchoir took up his lantern and descended the staircase, followed by the trembling Ethel, who scarcely yet believed in the reality of her release. He closed the lower door behind them, and walked rapidly toward the opening upon the park, not without some fear that he should encounter Vernor upon his path, and ready for a deadly encounter with him should he approach; but they reached the door in safety, and with a glad sense of release from her terrible thralldom, Ethel beheld the light of day, and inhaled the invigorating morning air.

Her spirits arose in a glad pæan of thanks for her deliverance, though her lips uttered no audible sound. The two met with no one in their progress to the front entrance, and great was the astonishment of Mr. Weston, the agent for the estate, to see Lady Clifton, whom he knew well, enter the house, attended by her stalwart companion. Melchoir detained her near the door while he said, in a low voice:

"You are now safe, Lady Clifton, and I must return to my mother. But I beg, as the reward of the service I have rendered you, that, until Sir Gerald Methurn comes, you will say nothing of the place from which you came. Its existence is a family secret that should be respected."

She readily gave the promise and Melchoir departed.

Requesting a private interview with Mr. Weston, Ethel informed him that she had been treacherously taken from her home, and desired him to despatch a messenger to Clifden as speedily as possible to inform the family of her safety and to request them to come to the Priory without delay.

Her presence there, for reasons of vital importance, she wished concealed till her friends again surrounded her. Though in a state of extreme bewilderment as to what had really happened to her, the agent made every arrangement for her security; she again took possession of her old apartment, and locking herself in, hastened to return thanks for her great deliverance.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### SYLVIE AND VERNOR FACE TO FACE.

VERNOR took refuge in the cabin of a poacher, who had been well known to him in other days. The man recognized him at once, and remembering former immunity extended to him by the young heir of the Priory, consented to serve him to the best of his ability in his present fallen state. He represented himself as in danger of arrest for his premature return to England, and offered a reward to the peasant to obtain such articles for him as would enable

him to conceal himself in the vaults beneath the Priory for a season, till an opportunity for escape was afforded.

Through the agency of this man he obtained the articles he had conveyed to Ethel in her dreary prison, and then he set out to retrace his steps to the fisherman's hut. He found Jenkins there, and after taking a few hours of repose, he despatched him to a small village on the coast below to make arrangements with the captain of any vessel that traded to it to take himself and Ethel from England, as soon as possible; for in spite of his threats to her, he fully intended to remove her from her prison as soon as he could find the means of escaping to France.

Jenkins returned at a late hour of the day with the information that a schooner was lying before the village receiving her cargo for Havre, and that she would sail at dawn on the following morning. For the sum the fisherman was authorized to offer him, the captain of the schooner agreed to sail up the coast a few miles, and lie off a point which was easily accessible from the Priory, till his passengers came on board.

Everything thus arranged to his satisfaction, Vernor again set out for his old home. The sun was setting when he came in sight of the pile, and wondering if he should find Ethel in a more submissive mood, he hastily threaded his way toward the concealed door. He muttered:

"Ethel must be pretty well scared by this time, and she will consent to anything sooner than remain another twenty-four hours in that dark hole. It was a terrible ordeal for a young girl like her; but it will bring her to her senses. I shall surely find her ready to supplicate for release on my own terms."

With this agreeable anticipation he moved rapidly forward, unconscious that every step he made was watched by

malignant eyes. Melchoir awaited Vernor's arrival concealed in an obscure angle of the wall, and he saw him walk to his doom with the triumphant certainty that his long-delayed vengeance would soon be completed.

Vernor left the door of the lower chamber unclosed, and his evil fate watched him as he ascended the staircase and opened the trap door. A flood of light fell through it which dazzled the eyes of the new comer, and he looked upon the scene the room presented stupefied with amazement and dread.

The same preparations had been made for his reception which once before greeted Sir Hugh. The hangings were drawn aside, and the stone sarcophagus, covered with a velvet pall on which the arms of the Methurns were embroidered, was displayed to view. The table that was placed in front of it bore several lights, and the worn books Vernor had once before seen, but which had so mysteriously disappeared, were placed upon it.

The curtains of the bed were closely drawn, and a dark-robed figure, whose features were concealed by a shrouding black veil, sat at the head of the sarcophagus.

Vernor's brain reeled, his feet seemed chained to the floor, and for a few seconds his voice refused to utter any articulate sound. Then he furiously cried:

"Who are you? What does this mummary mean?"

Minchen slowly arose, and spoke in low, meaning tones:

"I am the minister of fate. Your doom is spoken, and your crimes are about to be expiated."

Vernor recognized her voice, and sprang angrily toward her.

"Is it you, wretch! You have kept upon my track and baffled me in everything I have undertaken. What have you done with her I left here? Where is my wife?"

Minchen pointed to the bed and said:

"She lies there in a slumber produced by my art. She will awake only at my touch, and I have thrown her into this trance that you and I may exchange a few words together before she is aroused. She will never awake again unless my power bids her do so, so beware how you attempt to injure me."

She stood in front of the bed, with her arms outstretched as if to shield it from his approach, and Vernor stopped, appalled. While travelling in Spain he had witnessed the effect of the mysterious power wielded by a gipsy who had the reputation of being an enchanter, and he knew that among that strange people an artificial sleep could be produced, so profound as to defy the efforts of any one but him who had produced it to arouse the slumberer.

He recoiled from the weird form that confronted him, and sternly said:

"Speak! what have you to say? Name your terms for permitting me to remove my wife alive and well, and I promise to abide by them."

She laughed scornfully.

"Have you ever abided by a contract yet, guilty son of a perjured father? Look upon the name embroidered on yonder pall—did I not once promise you that when you gave the same fate to your wife, which was awarded to her who perished in this room, I would reveal to you all its mysteries? Read for yourself, and learn them now."

Vernor turned at her command, and his eyes rested on the name of his mother. His face blanched—his hair arose upon his head, as he wildly said:

"*My mother there!* Impossible! Sir Hugh could not—could not be so cruel!"

In a cold tone Minchen replied:

"His heart was as hard as the nether millstone. He could do *anything*, and you are his true son. Yes—your mother lies there; months were passed by her in this dreary prison house, while your father made merry on her fortune."

"And you—you were the agent of this fiendish act! that is why the secret of this chamber was made known to you. Why should you have aided Sir Hugh in consummating such wickedness?"

"Your mother was my rival. He pledged himself to marry me when she was removed, so I helped him. But he was false to his word, as he was false to every one that trusted him."

As if seeking some proof of the truth of her words, Vernor lifted one of the books. It was a Bible, and on the first leaf he saw the name of his mother traced by her own hand. Below it a few lines were written which he mechanically read:

"In my desolation, Oh Lord, I will come to Thee. Abandoned by all—persecuted by him I loved, imprisoned in this horrible den, I can only find courage to live on through communion with the Lord of life and light. Light! oh, for a gleam of the blessed sunshine before I die, for perish I soon must in this dreary place."

Vernor read them with a choking sensation in his throat, and again replacing the book, he said:

"We are now on equal terms; for the crime which you aided to perpetrate, I will bring you to punishment at all hazards to myself, if you do not restore my bride to life and permit me to depart in safety with her."

"Your threats do not move me," she disdainfully replied; "but since it is my purpose to awake her, I will do so, if

you promise to stand aside and not attempt to interrupt me."

"I will remain on this spot till I see her arise," he said; and Minchen approached the bed, partially drew aside the curtains, and made several mysterious passes over the face and hands of the motionless Sylvie.

Her large black eyes unclosed, consciousness slowly returned, and, still under the volition of the Gipsy, she arose, stood upon the floor and turned toward the half-paralyzed Vernor. Sylvie had not yet quite emerged from the magnetic trance into which she had been thrown, but the first sound of his voice thoroughly aroused her.

"Sylvie! Good Heavens! where did you come from? What demon has evoked your presence here?"

With a heart-rending cry she rushed toward him, threw herself at his feet and implored:

"Oh, Vernor, is it you at last! Take me back to your heart—let me be your slave—your willing slave, if you will only love me!"

Recovering from his astonishment and alarmed at the apparition of Sylvie when he had expected to see Ethel, Vernor rudely spurned the prostrate woman. and furiously said:

"Get out of my way! What have you and your accomplice done with the only woman I will ever claim as my lawful wife? I thought you were safe in the bottom of the sea, but here you are to torment and annoy me yet. I will *never* reclaim you. Go back to your home and find your equal for your mate. I am of a pure and noble race, while your blood is mixed with that of the degraded negro."

No taunt could so deeply have stung Sylvie as this, for this consciousness had always been bitter to her pride. She sprang up with fury blazing in her eyes, there was the glit-

ter of a poniard as she snatched it from its sheath, and with motions too rapid to be arrested, plunged it first into Vernor's heart, then into her own.

He staggered toward the bed, fell across its foot, and Minchen took the tottering form of Sylvie in her arms, and placed her head upon the pillows. She knew that both wounds must, in a few moments, prove mortal, for the poison with which the blade of the poniard was saturated was of the most deadly nature.

She withdrew the blade from the stiffening hand of the dying woman, and composed her limbs, then lowering the curtain before the sarcophagus, she extinguished the light, and prepared to leave the place forever.

Vernor never spoke after he was wounded. The blood that rushed in a stifling torrent to his mouth, soon suffocated him; Sylvie uttered a few broken prayers for forgiveness, which were heard by her who bent over her, but the motion of her lips soon ceased, and the gray shadows of death crept over her still beautiful face.

Melchoir now entered the chamber, and even he seemed awed by the tragic scene before him. After a long pause he said:

"He is gone, and we shall escape the penalty of his destruction. Come, mother; the girl will soon be dead; let us go at once."

Minchen made a few passes over the face of the expiring Sylvie; her expression grew calm, her eyes closed, and the Gipsy said:

"She is young and fair to die thus, but she had better perish in her youth, than to live to become what I am now."

Leaving one of the wax candles burning upon the table, the mother and son descended, fastened the trap door

securely, and gained the corridor. Minchen sprung back the door, and wrenching off the spring, said :

"Never more shall the Secret Chamber be used by mortal man. Let the victims of jealousy and revenge lie in their secluded sepulchre till the last trump shall sound."

The two returned without delay to Lyme. Melchoir informed his betrothed that it was necessary for him to leave England immediately, and demanded that she should accompany him as his wife. But Jessie had repented of her engagement, and she positively refused to do so. A message was delivered to Menard, purporting to have been sent by Sylvie, requesting him to join her in Taunton, where she had found a clue to her false lover. The Frenchman set out without delay, and in the interval of his absence, the Gipsy and her son made arrangements to leave their late home, and join their own people abroad. Jessie steadily refused to accompany them, and they departed without her.

Menard returned from his fruitless errand, and he remained in England many months, vainly endeavoring to find some trace of the hapless Sylvie. The greater portion of the time was spent in Lyme, and the sympathy and kindness of Jessie Lithgow insensibly won him from his regret for his lost love. When he at length returned to Barbadoes, to claim his uncle's estate as heir-at-law, he bore with him his tidy northern bride, and Jessie never had cause to regret the choice she had made.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## CONCLUSION.

THE messenger dispatched by Weston reached Cliffden a few hours after Gerald and Mr. Digby had returned home, worn out with fatigue and disappointment.

The surprise and joy with which the news was hailed may be imagined. The carriage was ordered, and the two ladies, accompanied by Mr. Digby, set out on the journey to the Priory. Gerald and his friend Bertie were on their way as soon as fresh horses could be saddled, and long before the party was reunited Ethel had been clasped in her lover's arms, and the whole story of her abduction related.

He exclaimed, when she had finished :

"A secluded chamber in this house, Ethel! We must seek and find its entrance, or Vernor may use it to some further evil purpose."

Every effort was made on the following day to do so ; but Ethel could give no idea of its situation, and after many fruitless attempts the search was given up as hopeless. The knowledge of the existence of the room was confined to a few persons, and as time rolled on, even the tradition of its existence passed from the memory of man, and for our day was reserved the accidental discovery of the sumptuously furnished chamber, with its fleshless skeletons as witnesses of the crime that had been committed.

The Gipsy wrote from Spain to Gerald, claiming the reward of her services to Ethel, which were liberally compensated. She informed him that his cousin would trouble him no more, as he had perished by the hand of his jealous wife, though she declined to enter into particulars. Gerald, however, did not trust to this assurance. He prosecuted

the divorce till it was obtained, and as had been previously arranged, Ethel and Alice were married on the same day to their respective lovers.

Sir Gerald Methurn arose to high station; he eventually wore the Chancellor's wig, which Ethel, in her childhood, had so much disparaged. He served his country honorably and faithfully, and received as his reward an Earldom, which had once been in the family of his wife; as Earl of Cliffden, he was beloved and respected by all whom knew him.

Bertie, under the influence of Alice, threw aside his indifference to distinction, and side by side with his friend, arose to fame and power; and no happier or prouder wives were found in broad England than the Countess of Cliffden and Mrs. Edward Bertie.

THE END.



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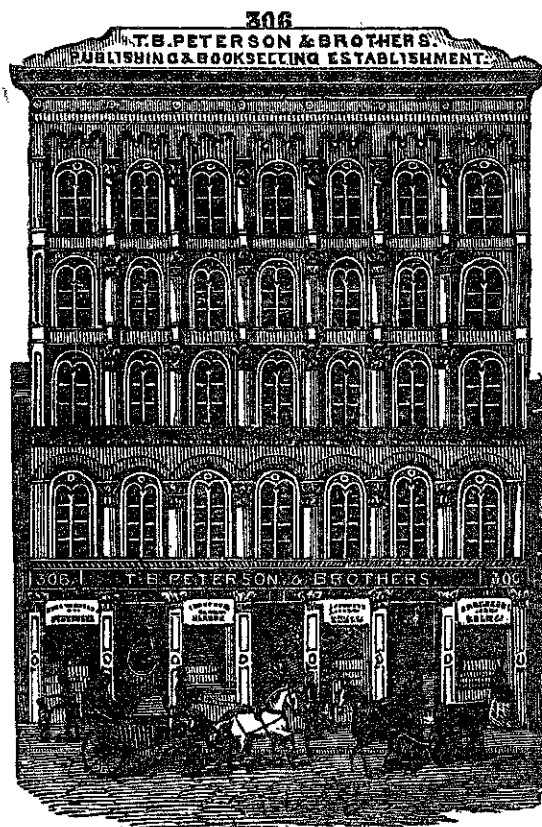
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