

HOW HE DID IT.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "WHY DID HE MARRY HER," "PLANTER'S DAUGHTER,"
"MICHAEL RUDOLPH; THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE,"
"THE BRIDE OF FATE," ETC., ETC.

"Mine Eyes

Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;
Mine Ears that heard her flattery; nor my Heart,
That thought her like her Seeming: it had been vicious
To have mistrusted her."—SHAKESPEARE.

PHILADELPHIA:

T. B. PETERSON & BROTHERS;
306 CHESTNUT STREET.

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HOW HE DID IT.

CHAPTER I.

THE ASSASSINATION.

CLAUDE FONTAINE was the descendant of one of the noble Huguenots who emigrated to Virginia when the edict of Nantz was revoked by Louis XIV. He married the heiress of General John Berkely, and came into possession of a large landed estate lying in a valley of the Blue Ridge. The mansion was an old-fashioned stone building, with towers at the angles, connected with each other by a long piazza, extending nearly around it. This commanded a view over the valley beneath, ranging over many miles of undulating country, bounded by mountain ridges piled upon each other, bathed in that blueish mist to which they owe their name.

The plantation house was built on an elevation several hundred feet above the level of the valley, but in its rear the hills arose on its northern side, protecting it in winter from the cold Boreal blasts, while in the summer the sweet south winds wafted their healthful and refreshing breezes through its wide hall and sheltered piazzas.

The outbuildings were all of stone, and so substantially built as almost to defy the ravages of time. Venerable trees, that for ages had reared their proud heads over the solitary mountain side before it became the habitation of

civilized man, now cast their grateful shadows over the homestead and the sloping lawn in front of La Fontaine, as the present owner had fancifully named it; yet the name was appropriate, for in the rear of the mansion a perennial cascade poured from the hill-side into a stone reservoir, which, with little labor, was converted into a sparkling fountain, that played without ceasing during the more genial seasons of the year.

In the valley beneath lay the rich lands, which yielded a bountiful harvest to the labor of the blacks, whose cottages were scattered at intervals beneath the shade of some monarch of the forest, in place of being crowded together upon a single street, as is commonly the custom in building the negro quarters. A contented community they were, for they were well lodged, fed and clothed, and not overtasked, for the Berkelys had been indulgent masters to them, and Colonel Fontaine endeavored to tread in their footsteps in the management of the people for whose moral and physical welfare he felt himself responsible to Him who had delegated the trust to him.

Fontaine married late in life, and the fair girl who had preferred his mature elegance to the graces of the more youthful suitors who surrounded the orphan heiress, did not long remain with him. Three years of happiness were passed in the seclusion of their mountain home, and then its gentle mistress was laid in the vault of her ancestors, leaving her bereaved husband with two infant sons to solace him for her loss.

As time passed on, the boys grew in beauty and intelligence; but there was a marked difference in the appearance and character of the two brothers. Claude, the elder, was brilliant, flighty, passionate and reckless, though beneath this stormy surface lay great generosity of nature and warmth of heart. Colonel Fontaine recognized in his impulsive waywardness much of his own early nature, and

he smiled at the boy's outbursts with the certainty that time, and the discipline of life, would correct these faults, and develop his eldest born into a noble and true man.

But proud and fond of Claude as he was, his heart clung with deeper tenderness to the fair-haired Henry, who so strongly reminded him of the wife he had lost; and he would sit for moments looking into the deep blue eyes of the child, almost fancying that the spirit of his departed Emily again spoke to him through their crystal depths. The boy had also inherited her quiet and passive temperament, united with a degree of firmness which at times amounted to obstinacy. In childhood Henry was delicate; but as he grew older, the masculine strength of mind and person, derived from his ancestry on both sides, proved him not inferior in person or intellect to his more robust brother.

Many families of wealth and culture resided in the vicinity of La Fontaine, and the two brothers were familiarly thrown into a circle of young cousins, which gave them that ease and polish of manner which refined female society can alone impart to the rougher sex. The Fontaine mansion was often the scene of revelry, for after the first bitterness of his grief passed away, its master opened his doors to his hosts of friends, and entertained with that old Virginia hospitality which has long been the characteristic of the State.

At the ages of seventeen and nineteen two handsomer youths were not to be found in their native county than Claude and Henry Fontaine. A private tutor prepared them for college, and they were sent to their native Alma Mater, William and Mary College.

At that institution the career of the two brothers was honorable; but to the surprise of their friends, the brilliant and erratic Claude permitted the less gifted but more studious Henry to bear away the highest honors from his

grasp. The brothers had always been strongly attached to each other, but the injudicious comments of friends, the raillery with which Claude was received on his return to his paternal home by his young cousins, the children of Tom Berkely of the Vale, annoyed and irritated him, and laid the foundation of a feeling of jealousy which was yet to bear bitter fruit.

In his own youth, Colonel Fontaine had traveled in Europe, and he considered the education of his sons incomplete till it had received this crowning polish. He had set aside a sum to be devoted to this purpose; and after graduating, Claude and Henry spent a few months at the old homestead before setting out upon their tour.

Claude was now in his twenty-third year, and his father considered him competent to take charge of his brother without the supervision of a tutor, so the two young men, amply provided with money, set sail for Liverpool with light hearts and unbounded anticipations of enjoyment.

They spent several months in traveling through Great Britain, and after seeing every object of interest in that country, crossed the channel and visited Paris. Time glided away almost imperceptibly in that gay and brilliant capital, and at length, with much reluctance, the two young men tore themselves away from its enchantments in time to reach Rome before the annual Easter celebration, which they were anxious to witness.

In the society in which they mingled, the feeling of jealousy to which I have referred was strengthened rather than diminished, for Claude found that the admiration which his dashing and genial manners attracted was all he gained, while the quiet and refined Henry seemed to bear about him some potent spell which won upon the deeper affections of those with whom he was brought in contact. Claude saw that he had parasites while Henry made friends, and he felt the distinction keenly, sometimes bitterly, yet

in the depths of his heart he cherished a warm affection for the brother of whom he condescended to be jealous.

The young men reached Rome in time for the Miserere and the illumination of St. Peter's; the city was crowded with strangers, and no accommodations could be obtained at the hotel. In this dilemma the brothers were glad to obtain lodgings with a widow in humble circumstances, who lived in the outskirts of the Eternal City. The family of Senora Savelli consisted of herself, a step-daughter of her late husband, and her own daughter, just budding into womanhood.

Savella Savelli was as lovely a type of young womanhood as was ever embodied in a human form, and her fascinations soon won the hearts of both the brothers, for by some fatality they always admired the same women, and it was the preference which *they* awarded to the younger which so deeply galled the vanity and pride of the elder.

Savella was by nature a coquette, and young as she was, she already had several lovers who watched her encouragement of the young foreigners with jealous eyes; and, with the hot blood of their race, were ready to avenge the preference she might betray for either of them.

Colonel Fontaine heard from his sons on the eve of their departure for Rome, but months of weary watching passed away at the old homestead before further news from them came. He wrote to friends in France, but no tidings arrived; and unable to bear the suspense longer, he made preparations for a voyage to Europe himself.

On the evening before his intended departure a letter bearing a foreign post-mark, the envelope bordered and sealed with black, was delivered to the old gentleman. With trembling hands he unclosed it, glanced over the fatal contents, and fell to the floor insensible.

He was restored to consciousness, but the shock had given a mortal blow to him, and before the month was out, he was laid beside his wife in the family vault.

The letter which had produced this catastrophe was dated from Pisa, and contained these words, written by the faltering hand of Claude Fontaine:

"FATHER:—I hope that the external aspect of this letter will in some measure prepare you for its tragic contents. I cannot offer to console you for I am myself plunged in the depths of anguish for the loss we have sustained. Henry is dead! slain by the hand of a jealous assassin! and I—I live to tell you this! I who should have guarded him from all harm even at the risk of my own life, for I know that he is the darling of your heart.

"I do not reproach you that you loved him best, for you gave to me also a full measure of affection, and I—oh, my father! I never knew how dear he was to me till I saw him lying in his blood before me.

"I will try and be calm enough to tell you of this terrible affair; that is, as much as I know myself, for many of the circumstances are clouded in painful mystery. When we arrived in Rome we found every public lodging so crowded with visitors that we were glad to take refuge in the cottage of a poor widow in the suburbs of the city. She had a young daughter of surpassing beauty, a light-hearted coquette who turned from the admirers of her own degree to listen to the impassioned flatteries of my poor brother, who soon became infatuated with her.

"We lingered in the city—I found interest among its ancient ruins and historical associations, while our unfortunate Henry gave himself up to the bewildering snares of this girl. A jealous lover watched him, surprised him with Savella leaning on his breast, and stabbed him mortally.

"I cannot dwell on what followed. It seems to me now a dream of agony too awful, too heart-rending to picture in words. I, that should have guarded him, that should have shielded him from every danger! I—

"Oh, God! pardon me! Oh, father, do not curse me, for I am wretched enough without that crowning despair.

"I left the city, left the unhappy girl who had caused this frightful catastrophe in a brain-fever, from which I do not know that she recovered.

"I am now in Pisa; from there I shall go, I know not whither, for henceforth I am a wanderer upon the face of the earth. With this sin of carelessness upon my soul, I dare not face you again. It seems to me that Henry's blood cries aloud against me, and vainly I say to myself that I was not my brother's keeper. Alas! I feel that I was the elder—that I should have guarded him from all harm; but he is gone, and with him all the happiness of my life.

"My dear father, forgive me for deserting you; but I *cannot* come back to you with this burden upon me. I must seek forgetfulness in wandering from clime to clime till feeling has exhausted itself, and remorse has loosened its vulture-like hold upon my heart. Bear up against this blow if strength can be given you to do so; but you are old and feeble, and something tells me that you will soon join our lost one in the Heaven to which I believe he has gone. Henry was good and pure, and my only consolation is the hope that the All Merciful One has received him among his angels. Adieu my best loved father; yes—to God I commend you, for He alone can console and sustain you under this bitter blow.

CLAUDE FONTAINE."

When Colonel Fontaine fell from his seat after reading this strange letter, he held it so tenaciously grasped in his hand that it was impossible to loosen his hold upon it. So soon as consciousness returned, he folded and placed it in his breast, and throughout his last illness it never left him a single moment till the day before his death.

Then he summoned to his side a faithful servant who had been with him from his youth, commanded him to close

and lock the door of his chamber, and then bring him an iron box in which his private papers were kept. At his command Cæsar propped him up with pillows, and placed a small desk with writing materials before him.

With a tremulous hand he wrote a few lines, and, enclosing the letter of Claude within them, sealed and directed the package to his son. Placing it in the box, he locked and sealed it, and, giving the key to Cæsar, commanded him to deliver it to no one but Claude Fontaine himself, should he ever return to his native land. If he did not, the box with its contents were to be burned.

A note to the same effect was written to be placed in the hands of the next heir to the estate, should his son never return to claim it. Then a few lines were traced to the absent one:

MY SON:—When this reaches you I shall be at rest. I write from my bed of death, and a few more hours must close the scene. Return to your fatherland, Claude, so soon as your grief will permit you to do so; for you have many duties to perform here; you have many helpless dependents who will be left to the mercy of hirelings in your absence. God, the All Merciful, will, in his own good time, send the comforter to you, and it is the dying prayer of your father's heart that He will do so.

By all the noble traits of your childhood and youth I judge you, son of my pride and hope; and I know you will faithfully perform the life-work allotted to you in this lower sphere. Only thus can you join those who have gone before you to the mansions of the just. That you may be accepted there is the one prayer of my broken heart; for, oh! my son! my son! my heart yearns over you as did that of Abraham over Isaac when he laid him on the altar of sacrifice.

I can say no more—my strength is exhausted, and my

sands of life almost run. Return to your home; here, if if anywhere, you will find peace. Take my blessing, Claude; it is yours even if—— Yet no—no—I cannot refer to that; it is too—too dreadful! Let repentance have its perfect work, and then come to me in the land to which I hasten.

CLAUDE FONTAINE.

This was forwarded to his son, and the box replaced in a secret niche in a closet which had hitherto been known only to himself and his children. To the faithful Cæsar he knew he could confide this trust, and to him had its hiding place been made known in this extremity.

The effort to accomplish this exhausted the little life that remained to General Fontaine, and when the door was again unclosed to admit the friends who had gathered around him, he was lying almost senseless upon his pillow. He breathed nearly twenty-four hours longer, but never spoke again, and in a few more days the kind master, the generous friend, was borne to his last resting place amid weeping eyes and mournful hearts.

CHAPTER II.

REMORSE.

TEN years passed away before Claude Fontaine returned to his native land. The plantation was placed under the care of an agent, with strict orders to maintain the same system of management which had prevailed under his father. Funds were transmitted to a commercial house in Paris for his use, together with an annual report drawn up by his cousin, Tom Berkely of the Vale, as to the condition of his estate.

Brief replies came at long intervals, dated from Germany,

Sweden, Norway, and lastly from Palestine. Like the Wandering Jew, Fontaine seemed never at rest. By his orders, the old plantation house was kept in readiness for his reception at any hour, as he did not know at what moment the whim might seize him to return to his native home, and daily, for years, Fontaine's black nurse, now promoted to the dignity of housekeeper, watched and waited for the return of her beloved young master.

Cæsar had been faithful to the trust reposed in him, and the key of the concealed box still remained in his possession, while he jealously guarded the secret of the spot in which it was placed.

One stormy night, when the wind wailed around the house, and rain dashed at intervals against the windows, the old couple sat together in a room adjoining the kitchen, talking over their absent master, and speculating on the chances of his ever returning to his native home. A roaring fire burned in the chimney, for the night was cold, and a table set for two was drawn up in front of it.

After a long interval of silence, Cæsar said:

"Yes, Aggy, as you was a sayin', it's a long time sense marse Claude went to furrin parts, but suffin tells me dat he'll be coming back putty soon. He mought come to-night, for I've dreamed of him stiddy of late. Has you had a fire to-day in de ole sittin'-room?"

"Sure, an' I has. You knows well 'nuff dat I never forgits *dat*, for I'd not have my own boy come back to a cold hearthstone after being away from his own so long. Haven't I allers kep' fire in dat room in de winter, an' flowers in de summer? Let Marse Claude come when ~~he~~ will, he'll find dat *I* hasn't forgot him, nor stopped lookin' for him every day dat de blessed Lord sends. It's cur'us now, but I has dreamed of de boy too; but sir! he ain't no longer a boy; he's—let me see, he's thirty-three years old now, and never a mistress found for the old place."

"How do you know that? Marse Claude may be married for all we know, for he don't even tell Mr. Berkely 'bout his private 'fairs."

"Hi! don't be a fool, Cæsar. Ef my boy was married, don't you think he'd send word to his old mammer that held him in her arms when he was a blessed baby? Dat tuck his poor murdered brother from his dyin' mother, an' kept 'em bofe as my own."

Cæsar's face assumed an ashen hue, and he huskily said:

"Don't talk 'bout *him*, Aggy; it makes me cold down to my heart, for I've had some strange thoughts 'bout dat 'fair. But I ain't gwine to tell 'em to no mortal creetur—no, not if dey was to tear me all to flinders wid wild hosses."

"Who's a gwine to ax you to tell yer foolishness, you old blind mole," irascibly retorted Aggy. "Ef your thoughts goes agin one o' de ole blood, you'd better not speak 'em out whar I can hear 'em, I can tell you. Ef you is my husbin, you shant talk evil o' Miss Em'ly's child when I'm about."

"As ef I *could*, Aggy," he reproachfully said. "Isn't de honor o' de fam'ly as nigh to me as to you?"

At this, the old woman flared up more angrily than before.

"Who *dars* to talk o' dat as ef 'twas siled? You talk as ef you *knowed* somethin' agin my blessed lad what's a comin' back some day to claim his own, an' make de ole house ring agin as it used to in de ole merry times. What oncountable foolishness *has* got inter yer ole wooly pate now, Cæsar?"

"Why, what has *I* said dat should put you in sich a figary as dat? shet up ole 'oman, an' 'member dat I's yer husbin, and yer marster—'sides, I reckon dere's wool on somebody else's head 'sides mine, ef 'tis kivered over wid a red and yaller hankicher."

Aggy raised her hand, and adjusted her gay looking turban, while she glanced at her black face in a small mirror that hung against the wall near her. She was about to retort, when the grating of carriage wheels on the frozen ground without, was heard. She suddenly clasped her hands, started forward, and exclaimed:

"*He's come!* I knew it—suffin tells me dat my chile is near me."

Cæsar snatched the lamp from the table, rushed through a colonnade that connected the two portions of the building, crossed the wide deserted-looking hall, and opened the front door, on which several loud and commanding raps had been struck.

Aggy closely followed him, and with wild eyes, and half open mouth, she stood regarding the form that appeared in the doorway, but for a few moments she doubted if this could be the long expected lord of the manor.

A tall, stately man wrapped in a heavy furred cloak, with his cap drawn low over his forehead, held by the hand a child, whose fair spiritual face peeped from beneath a crimson hood, but her figure was so bundled in furs, that it was impossible to form an idea of her size. With an expression of keen disappointment, Cæsar courteously said:

"Walk in, sar; de fam'ly's not at home, but we has orders nebber to turn trav'lers from de ole plantation house, do taint many dat comes to dis out-'n-de-way place."

A deep-toned voice, slightly trembling, replied:

"So—I have come back to my own, and they do not know me. Cæsar, Mammer, it is I—your long-absent master."

With a cry of joy, his nurse lay at his feet, grasping his outstretched hand, and carrying it frantically to her heart and lips.

"Oh bress de Lor', for he tole me dat you was a comin'; but till I heard yer voice I couldn't tell yer was my own heart-child. Oh bress de Lor' for all his mercies."

With voiceless emotion, Fontaine raised the old woman, and gave a hand to each of the faithful pair. After a few moments given to the memories of the past, he turned to the door, and gave directions to the driver of the carriage in which he had come, for making his horses comfortable for the night. Cæsar went with the man to the stables, while Fontaine closed the door, and walked forward to the usual family sitting-room, clasping the hand of his little companion in his own. As he opened the door, he said:

"We shall find it cold in here, I suppose, but we can keep on our wrappings till a fire is made. Come, Isola, I will hold you in my arms till we see its cheerful blaze."

The child clung to him with something like affright, for the black faces of the negroes were unfamiliar to her, and she shrank from them with fear. Aggy chuckled, and enjoyed the evident surprise of Fontaine when he opened the door of the richly-carpeted and curtained room, and felt the genial warmth left by a large hickory fire, the glowing embers of which still lay upon the hearth. She gleefully said:

"Hi! haint I been 'spectin' you back all dese years, an' hasn't I bin 'tarmined not to be like de foolish vargins dat hadn't dere lamps filled when de Marster came? De fire's bin built every blessed day when 'twas cole 'nuff to want it, an' *my* lamp's been kept trimmed for dis 'spicious hour. O Lor'! my pore ole heart will burst wid gladness."

While she was speaking, she lifted the shade from a large centre-table lamp, and in another moment its brilliant glare illuminated every corner of the apartment. Fontaine glanced around, sighed heavily, and lifting the child, placed her in the recess of a large, cushioned chair, which he drew in front of the fire.

Aggy hurried out, brought in an armful of wood, and threw it on the andirons, while her master strode up and down the floor, still wearing his traveling habiliments.

When the fire blazed up cheerfully, the old woman turned to him and respectfully said, though there was a trembling in her voice that touched the listener:

"Won't my baby show his ole mammer the face she's pined to see for so many long years? Oh, my heart has wearied for dis blessed hour, an' now it's come, de heav'nly Marster may call me as soon as he will."

Fontaine paused in his rapid walk, and stood before her with his hand lifted to his cap, as he said, with mournful emphasis:

"You will be shocked, Aggy—in the worn and prematurely aged man before you; you will see few traces of the bright youth that left you in the hey-day of life and happiness."

With a sudden motion he threw aside his cloak, dashed his cap upon the floor, and drew up his tall form in the full glare of the light. The woman uttered a shrill cry, and threw up her hands as if to screen her eyes from contemplating the wreck of the noble youth she so well remembered.

His form was still strong and elastic, but upon the face the lines of suffering were deeply and indelibly traced; and the hair that fell over his massive brow was white as drifted snow. A blinding mist came over his eyes, and for a moment he could not steady his voice sufficiently to speak. At length, in deep, ringing tones, he said:

"I warned you, yet you are shocked. Can you see any trace of what I once was, mammer?"

"I see de stately form o' de old marster, as he was when he married my young mistis. I see de flashin' eyes o' de Fontaines, an' I hear de voice dat would waken me out'n de sleep o' death if 'twas sounded in my ears; but, oh! you's old afore yer time. In de prime o' yer days, ye stan's in de hall o' yer fathers wi' de snows o' seventy winters upon yer head. Oh! why is dis, my own boy? Why is dis?"

Fontaine turned away with a choking sensation in his throat, and took several turns across the floor before he gained sufficient self-command to reply. At length he said, in sombre tones:

"I have sinned, and I have suffered. I bear upon me the signs and tokens of the fiery furnace through which I have passed."

"De blessed Lor' tries his own, an' you is purified from de sin 'cordin' to de promise," said the woman devoutly.

He raised his clenched hands above his head, and cried out in tones that Aggy never forgot to her dying day.

"Blessed assurance! coming from lips that are true to me! If I could only believe it! If I could only find balm in Gilead for my wounded spirit, God knows that I would grovel in the dust before Him; do such penance as was never known to the most ascetic anchorite—but it may not be—it may not be."

In his passionate anguish he seemed to forget to whom he was speaking; the old woman drew near him, trembling, and touched his hand with her cold palm; in tremulous tones, she said:

"Tho' yer sins be as scarlet—ye knows de res', Marse Claude; an' ye knows dat de good Lor' never makes a promise dat he doesn't keep. Pray to Him, an He'll sen' de comforter to ye. I *knows* he will."

"Yes, yes," he muttered, dropping his hands; "it was here my father promised he should meet me. Here I have come to seek him. It is my last hope—my last hope to save me from——"

He paused abruptly—wring the hand that still rested on his arm, and turning to the child, spoke in a changed voice:

"My little girl has had nothing to eat since noon, and she must be almost perishing of hunger. Set before us what ye have in the house, and see that the driver who brought me hither is properly cared for."

Thus dismissed, the housekeeper left the room after one keen glance toward the child, who sat motionless upon the seat on which the master of the house had placed her; but when he drew near and looked down upon her, he saw that tears were slowly stealing over her face.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET BOX.

BENDING over her, Fontaine spoke in tender tones

"Isola, darling, what is it? Are you sorry to reach the end of your journey?"

"Oh, no—so glad—so glad to be here with you; to stay with you always—always, as you promised me. But you are not happy—you do not feel glad to be in your own home again," and she looked up to him with a wistful expression in her large dark eyes.

Fontaine's brow cleared, a smile full of sweet meaning came to his well-formed lips, and he gently said:

"I shall grow better and happier here with you to prattle to me, my little Isola. But there is much that you cannot understand, to stir bitter memories in coming back to my old home after so many years of absence. I left my father here; a grand and noble man, and he is no longer here to welcome me. Wipe your tears away, my pet, and let me help you to get rid of these cumbersome wrappings."

He placed her on the floor, removed the furs from her slender childish form, and threw back the crimson hood from her dark, lustrous hair, which hung in short curls around her brow. Her complexion was a pale olive, with little color, but her features were cast in a most refined and aristocratic mould. Her eyes were large, dark and chang-

ing in their hue—sometimes of a deep bluish gray, at others almost black. Isola was a striking-looking child, but not beautiful. There was a deep pathos in the expression of her young face; a lovely soul seemed to look out from those dark orbs, and that expression first drew to her the affections of her protector.

Alone, alone rang in his spirit from the hour of his brother's death, till he found this little waif upon his path, and drew her to his heart, for by some magnetic power Isola could soothe him into peace when the most turbulent memories swayed his restless soul.

Fontaine seated himself, took the child upon his knee, and tenderly said:

"I welcome you to your future home, Isola; here you will be happy, I trust, and here you shall have every advantage that my own daughter would enjoy. In fact, my child, I have adopted you as such, and I shall present you to my friends in that character."

"Then you will send me from you no more?" she eagerly said. "You will keep me always near you?"

"As much as I can consistently with your own interests. Your education must be attended to, for *my* daughter must become an accomplished woman, and there may be few advantages of that kind in this secluded valley. But if I am compelled to send you from me, you shall see me oftener than when you were at school in England. I promise you that."

She raised her yearning eyes to his and pertinaciously said:

"I had rather stay with you always—always; you will be so lonely without me; you can teach me all you know, and that will be enough for me."

He pressed her tenderly to his heart, and vaguely said:

"Yes—yes, you speak truly. I need you, my little companion, for you came to me in the darkest hour of my life,

sent to me, I firmly believe, by Heaven itself; and the consciousness that I have saved one human soul from the sin and suffering that might have been hers, if I had not found and rescued her, gives me the hope that I am not quite God-forsaken."

The child threw her arms around his neck, and tenderly kissed him. She was not often demonstrative, for she was quiet and shy, though her mind was developed far beyond her years. She then laid her head against his broad breast, and softly said:

"If I am your consolation, my true place is here. God has sent me to you, therefore, He has not forgotten you. You are good—you are kind, then wherefore shall God forsake you?"

A convulsion passed over his face, and even his lips grew white at this question. He suddenly placed her on the floor, and resumed his rapid walk through the room. The child regarded him mournfully a moment, and then sinking upon her knees before the large chair from which he had risen, said with perfect simplicity:

"I will pray for you, sir. Christ said, 'suffer little children to come unto me,' and he will hear me."

She clasped her hands, bowed her head, and her lips moved, though no sound issued from them.

Fontaine arrested his steps, and gazed upon the suppliant figure with moistened eyes. When she again looked up, he raised her in his arms, and said with emotion:

"I thank you, my strange little spirit. You have done me good. Do you know, Isola, that you are different from any other child I ever have seen? You act out your own impulses without ever dreaming of what others may think of you."

"Is it wrong to do so?" she earnestly asked, "If it is I will try and do better."

"Oh no, my precious pet. In your case, it is not wrong,

for all your impulses are good, and noble. Do not try to be anything but your own sweet self, and I shall always think you the most charming of children."

Her expressive face brightened, but the reply that arose to her lips, was prevented by the entrance of Aggy, bringing a waiter filled with the tea service.

The centre-table was wheeled toward the fire, a snowy cloth spread over it, and the fine china, so long disused, placed upon it. Very soon Cæsar followed his wife, bearing the silver coffee urn and a covered dish filled with toast. Delicious broiled birds completed the impromptu repast, at which Fontaine looked with some surprise. He said with a smile:

"Truly, Aggy, you must be a sort of magician in your own line, for the time has scarcely sufficed to prepare such a supper as this."

Cæsar spoke before his wife could express her gratification at this compliment. He pompously said:

"De fac' am, Marse Claude, dat my ole 'oman and we was a gittin' up a little private festil on our own 'count. We libs sich a sollencholy life dese long winter nights, dat we 'soles ourselves wid' havin' a nice supper, when de birds is easily cotched. I has a trap, an' to-day I had a fine haul. Dey was cookin' when yer blessed rap came 'pon de do'. De bread is Aggy's own makin', an' we toasted it in a jiffy."

"Many thanks for giving us your supper. I shall enjoy it very much, and so will my little friend here."

He drew the child forward, from whose face the eyes of the housekeeper had scarcely wandered, and when they did it was to that of her master, as if she was endeavoring to trace some resemblance between them. She shook her head dubiously, and muttered:

"'Taint no use. I can't find out dat way, an' he aint offered to tell me nothin' 'bout dis here chile. Ef 'twas all fair an' 'bove board, he'd a spoke out to onct."

Fontaine's glance fell upon her puzzled face, and he seemed to comprehend what was passing in her mind, for he suddenly said:

"I have forgotten to introduce you to my adopted daughter; her name is Isola, and I desire that she shall be treated in every respect as if she were my own child."

"Den she aint dat?" the woman quickly asked.

"No—I wish she was. She is only mine in affection, and I hope, Mammer, that you will be as kind to her as you were to me and my——"

He paused suddenly, seemed to choke at some recollection, and presently added:

"Be as tender to her as you once were to me, and Isola will love you. She is not accustomed to colored people, but she will soon learn that as warm hearts are found among them as among her own race."

"God bress you for sayin' dat, Marse Claude. Yes—de warm heart is in de darkey's bosom ef de bright brain isn't in his woolly head. Little Mistis, won't you shake han's wi' de ole Mammer?"

Isola repressed the feeling of repulsion that crept over her, and frankly extended her small hand. Aggy took it in her own, and her eyes dilated as they scanned its statuesque proportions. She searchingly regarded Fontaine, as she impressively asked:

"Marse Claude, are you *sho* dis chile aint o' yer own blood? See here now—" and she held the hand before him.

His clear eyes met hers, though there was some sternness in their expression as he replied:

The child is not of my race. Have I not told you that Isola is my *adopted* daughter? Then why should you presume to doubt my word?"

"I doesn't—I don't do *dat*—for the word o' de Fontaines is as good as gold all de worl' ober; but I thought you

mought be tryin' to play off on de ole 'oman, jes' to see ef I'd know de ole stock. I thought I could see the 'ceptions, for dis chile's han' is de bery moral o' dat o' my mistis. It's 'zackly like it, and de heiress o' de Berkelys was said to have de mos' beautesome han's dat ever was seen in dese parts."

Fontaine took the rosy palm within his own, and pressing it to his lips, said:

"I have often noticed the resemblance you were so quick to detect; but that is the only point of similarity. Isola has a perfectly formed hand as my mother had; but that is nothing uncommon among people of gentle blood. That she is of good family I have no doubt; though I have not the slightest clue to whom she belongs. She is mine now, and I could scarcely love her more tenderly if she were really my child."

Cæsar nudged his wife and whispered:

"I hopes you'm satisfied now. You jest hishe yer gib gab, an' 'ten' to yer own business. Can't yer see de ole flash in his eye, an' take warnin'? De Fontaines is hard to raise; but onct up, dere's no knowin' what dey may do."

"Hishe yerself. I aint 'fraid," was the brief response; and Aggy stood in state behind her master's chair, leaving the duties of the table to be performed by her husband.

During the progress of the meal, Fontaine conversed freely with the old servitor, asking questions about the neighborhood and the condition of the slaves on his place. He gathered from Cæsar's replies that the latter were pretty much as he had left them, but some changes had taken place in the neighborhood. The Berkelys of the Vale still flourished in peace and plenty, but the Eppes of Dunlora had broken up—the family scattered and removed to the West, and the estate had been purchased by a gentleman from Southern Virginia of the name of Vane.

"A clever, fair-spoken gentleman," added Cæsar, "who keeps open house in de style o' de ole gentry o' the country."

"I am sorry to hear that any of the old families are broken up; but if the new man is clever as you say, the loss to the neighborhood will not be so great," said Fontaine, as he pushed his plate back and arose from the table. He presently said:

"Prepare my father's room for me—I do not wish to return to my old quarters. Put a couch for Isola in the library near me, for she will feel too lonely in a strange house if she is far from me. To-morrow I will select a maid for her from the young girls on the plantation, who can hereafter sleep in the room with her."

"De fire's already made in de marster's room, caze I somehow thought you'd like dat better'n de one dat you an' Marse Hen——"

Fontaine raised his hand and sternly said:

"Do not recall the past. Remember the injunction I now lay on you *never* to utter that name in my hearing. It gives a pang to my heart that nothing else can bring. 'Let the dead past bury its dead'—it can no longer be cancelled or recalled."

Again he resumed his moody walk, and after removing the tea service, the two old servants went together to the room which had been so long disused; for, in truth, each one was afraid to enter it at that hour of the night alone.

A glowing fire burned upon the hearth, spreading its cheerful brightness throughout the apartment, lighting up the heavy curtains that fell around the tall bedstead, and throwing its ruddy gleams upon the crimson carpet. Aggy took up the lamp and went into the library—this was in one of the towers which we have referred to; in the time of Mrs. Fontaine it had been used as a dressing-room, but after her death her husband had his books and a few favorite pic-

tures removed to it. Its shape was an octagon, and the alternate pannels were filled with book cases and windows opening to the floor.

Above the latter hung family portraits—the father, mother and the two sons; the latter having been taken in Baltimore just before the young men set out on the tour which had so disastrously ended.

A circular table with a reading lamp occupied the centre of the floor, beside which stood a cushioned chair. Across one of the angles a wide sofa was drawn, and on this Aggy proceeded to arrange the bed clothing she had brought with her.

Cæsar looked on approvingly, and agreed that the sofa was quite wide enough for the slender child for whom the couch was designed, but Aggy repelled all attempt at conversation with freezing dignity, for his reproof in the presence of her master had deeply offended her. The bed was soon prepared, and they were turning away, when the eyes of the woman fell upon the picture of Henry Fontaine, and her self-imposed reserve broke down.

"Oh, Lor'! what shall I do now? Ef Marse Claude comes in here an' fines his brother's face a starin' at him from de wall, mebbe he'll do suffin dreffle. De ole Ginerall was as good as pie as long as he was in good humor, but when de lightnin' flashed from his eyes, den de folks knew dey must stan' from under; an' dis chile o' his'n is de very moral o' him. Arter what Marse Claude said 'bout his brother, I can't leave dat face lookin' down here nohow."

"Den kiver it over," suggested Cæsar, in the spirit of Mr. Dick. "I don't see nothin' else to do, an' it mought be done without so much palaver."

His wife tossed her head contemptuously as she retorted:

"I aint a gwine to trouble you wid much o' my git-gat an' palaver for some time to come, nohow, you ole parrot. You's no idees o' yer own, an' you'll soon come to a stan' still ef I don't give you none to help you."

"I don't care for idees," said Cæsar, sturdily. "I 'ten's to my own business to suit my marster, an' dat's' nuff for a ole darkey like me."

Aggy would have retorted, but she remembered that she must cross the hall to a linen closet, and she was afraid that Cæsar might refuse to accompany her; but she need have had no misgivings on that score, for both husband and wife believed that the spirit of their former master still walked those apartments, and Cæsar would never have consented to be left alone in them at night.

The closet was visited, and a suit of crimson brocade curtains, which had been laid away since the death of General Fontaine, was brought forth. As they swept to the floor Aggy calculated that they could be placed above the frame of Henry Fontaine's portrait, and still fall below the window sash. She would put up but one that night and leave the others till the morning.

There was a pair of library steps in the room, and with their aid the drapery was soon arranged; then the two servants went to usher their master and his ward into their sleeping-rooms.

The little girl, overcome with fatigue, was sleeping in the large chair, and Fontaine was reading from a small pocket Bible, which seemed worn by constant use.

That night, with a strange feeling of superstition which sometimes assails us all, at least all of imaginative temperament, he had sought for some assurance that the burden which oppressed him might be lifted in the quiet of his native home; he opened his Bible at random, and read the first sentence that presented itself. It blanched his cheek and curdled his heart, for it was:

"Vengeance is mine, and I will repay."

The book dropped from his nerveless hand, and many moments elapsed before he regained sufficient self-control to read his usual nightly chapter.

At the entrance of his nurse he laid aside his book, raised the child carefully in his arms, and followed Aggy to his apartment. He placed the little girl on the couch prepared for her, and without looking around, left her to the care of the old woman.

The baggage had already been brought in, and Aggy disrobed Isola so carefully that the sleepy child was not aroused. In a few moments the two servants bade their master a cordial good night; he arose, shook hands with them, and said:

"Accept my thanks for the care you have taken of everything here during my absence. Your faithful services shall be remembered, and rewarded."

The door closed on them, and Cæsar said:

"Dat was spoke like de gemplin he is; but oh Aggy, woman, he has a sore heart in his buzzim, ef eber a man had."

"Mebbe yes—mebbe no," said Aggy, oracularly. "You is 'tarmined to make me 'spicious o' my boy, ef you kin; but I shan't believe any o' yer 'sinivations—thar!" and the old woman stalked on with increased dignity, though in her heart she began to feel some strange misgivings herself.

This man, so young in years, so old in appearance, must bear within him some terrible consciousness which had destroyed his youth, and withered his life.

What was it? What fearful secret weighed upon his heart and brain, sapping the springs of life, and blighting every hope of happiness? Who shall look into the depths of a human heart, and lay bare its bitterness? Whatever the record was, it was known alone to God and himself, for Claude Fontaine was a man who believed that he could suffice unto himself, and held clutched to his heart the vulture that consumed it.

For many hours after the departure of the servants, Fontaine paced the floor of his room, struggling with the sad

memories that were evoked by his return to the home of his youth. At length he bowed his stately head in prayer, and then turned to the passage of scripture which his old nurse had quoted, and read with some gleam of hope, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow." He accepted the assurance, and calmer and more hopeful, he went into the room of his young protégée to see that she was quite comfortable. The light of the lamp fell upon the delicate, spiritual face, on which he fixed his gaze with the yearning tenderness that might have been felt by a woman. He leaned over her and softly kissed her brow; the child moved slightly, and murmured:

"Dear father!" for by that name he had taught her to call him; and with a silent blessing Fontaine was turning away, when his eyes fell upon the portrait of his mother. He started and glanced rapidly toward the other panels, for when he left his home those pictures had hung in another room. He saw the benign face of his father, his own boyish one, so full of life and hope, and then, with an effort, he turned to look for that of his brother.

The shrouding curtain concealed it, but an impulse he could not control compelled him to advance and draw it aside. The light fell on the face of a youth of twenty-one, around whose brow clustered soft rings of brown hair—from whose deep blue eyes shone the gentle and refined nature of the original.

Fontaine's face had been pale before, but now it assumed the white and locked rigidity of the dead. His clasped hands were raised, and a wordless prayer arose from his heart. Many moments he stood thus, and then muttered:

"Oh! fatal chance that tore you from life, my martyred Henry. Oh! Father of the penitent, send healing to the bruised heart of the survivor. I have walked in the shadow of that fatal event so long—so long, that expiation is surely accomplished. My brother, ask that the angel of consolation may come to me here upon my own hearthstone."

His eyes were fixed on those of the portrait, and in his excitement the hallucination came to him that they changed their expression—that they beamed upon him more softly, more tenderly than before, and a light that had not been seen upon his face for years now flashed over it. Fontaine turned and left the room, and when he retired sleep fell as a blessing upon his tired frame and weary spirit.

While he sleeps we will relate how Isola fell under his protection. After the death of his brother, Claude Fontaine found it impossible to remain long stationary in one place; in constant change of scene he sought to divert his mind from the bitter regrets and remorse that filled it. After writing the fatal news to his father, he sent orders to his Parisian banker to forward his letters to St. Petersburg, and set out for Russia. He travelled through the most interesting portions of that empire, and reached the capital about the time his letters should have arrived there.

He found none, and after waiting several weeks, he again set out, leaving directions with the American Embassy to forward his letters to a commercial house in Berlin. At that time he was scarcely in a sane condition; in a small town in Germany he was seized with violent illness, which reduced him to the helplessness of infancy. He was many months convalescing, and when he recovered he had lost all memory of the point to which he had directed his letters to be forwarded. Money he could still draw through the Parisian house, and he travelled slowly through Germany, stopping at Baden for the benefit of the waters.

Nearly two years had passed away since any authentic intelligence from his home had reached him, but the apathy that had settled over him seemed to render him indifferent to it. As cold weather approached he left the watering-place, and in a few days was comfortably established in Berlin.

On calling and making himself known at the American

Embassy, a package of letters was delivered to him which had lain there unclaimed more than a year. Among them was the last one written by his father, and the news of his death seemed to fill his cup of bitterness to overflowing.

A second attack of illness prostrated him, from which he arose with the whitened hair of venerable years. Of the wanderings of the subsequent months he retained but a vague memory: to escape from himself—from the wearing grief that mocked at consolation—he hurried from place to place, careless of everything but motion, anxious for change which never brought relief to the dead blank weight of misery that had fallen on him.

He undertook a pedestrian tour in the Tyrol. One day he sat down to rest in a picturesque mountain pass. A terrible storm had passed over the country a few days before, and the road before him, winding over a precipice that overlooked a rapid river, bore many evidences of its violence. While he sat looking over the landscape with listless eyes, a carriage appeared on the crest of the hill, beginning slowly to descend. The road was very steep, and the impetus given to the vehicle brought it with a rapid lurch against some obstruction—a tree had fallen in the most dangerous spot, where a curve concealed it from the driver; the horses reared, became unmanageable, and, to the horror of the spectator, the carriage lost its balance and plunged over the side of the precipice! Something white was thrown from the window as the fatal descent was made, and with breathless haste the solitary traveller hastened to the spot.

The faint wail of a child greeted his ears, and, peering around, he discovered the white bundle he had seen thrown from the carriage; it had caught on the friendly branches of some low shrubs, and Fontaine took into his arms the little creature so wonderfully rescued by the presence of mind of her he felt must have been her mother.

The carriage had fallen into the rushing stream below, which was swollen by the recent rains, and he saw it borne away to swift and certain destruction, together with its hapless inmates. He could not aid them, for he was alone, and miles must be traversed before he could hope to find a human habitation.

Deep compassion filled the heart of Fontaine as he looked upon the helpless little outcast thus thrown upon his care. She hushed her cries as his eyes met hers, and putting out her tiny hands to him, lisped the first words her infant lips had been taught to utter, "Father," and to his surprise she spoke it in English.

The appeal touched his heart, and at the moment the resolution was formed to retain the helpless being so providentially thrown upon his path. The charge of a young infant was an embarrassing one for a single man; but this child appealed so powerfully to his affections that he could not bear the thought of giving her up; so after a few days he determined to make no effort to discover to whom she belonged. He carried her in his arms to the nearest village, where a nurse and a supply of clothing were procured, and day by day he felt himself more strongly attracted toward her. She would leave her nurse when he came in, and cling to him with such loving fondness that he felt as if his life was no longer so desolate as it had lately been.

As Fontaine resolved to adopt her as his own, he wished his own language to be the one first learned by her infant lips; so he removed her to England, established her there in a healthy village under the care of a competent woman, and resumed his wanderings. Twice every year he visited her, and when the child was old enough she was placed in a boarding school.

The isolated position of his charge suggested to Fontaine the name he had given her, and the little Isola returned him a rich reward for the tender cares he lavished on her.

Through her artless wiles, the apathetic feeling of despair which had so long hung as an incubus upon him was partially chased away. Again he had something to love; this creature so dependent—so affectionate—was all his own. For him no other domestic tie could ever exist, for he would ask no woman to share his dreary life; and the two so strangely thrown together soon became all in all to each other.

After many years of wandering, Fontaine suddenly determined to return to his native land. A lady who came over in the same ship took charge of Isola during the voyage, and, after landing in New York, he came on as rapidly as possible to La Fontaine.

There was no clue to the parentage of Isola, and her protector most fervently desired that none might ever be found. She had wound herself so deeply into his heart that he could not bear to think that another possessed the power to take her from him.

The following morning arose clear and brilliant; the clouds had passed away, and Fontaine hailed the sunshine that bathed the landscape as a promise of brighter days. When he came from his chamber he found the table set for two, and a cheerful fire burning on the hearth. Aggy greeted him with a smiling face, and went up to assist Isola to dress. The little girl's toilette was soon completed; but during its progress the negress could not repress her desire to learn something of herself from her own lips. She adroitly questioned her, and although Isola had not quite overcome her shyness toward her, she answered with simplicity and clearness.

"I call Mr. Fontaine father, because he wishes it—but I am not related to him—my mamma was drowned—there was no one to take care of me, for he could not find out who I belonged to. But for his kindness, I would have been without a home."

"Blessed marster! you don' say dat you don' know yer own name, little mistiss?"

"I do not know the name my mamma gave me, but I love the one Mr. Fontaine calls me by. I am his child now, and I shall never love any one half as well as I love him."

"Dat's right chile. Marse Claude will be yer father, an' I'll be yer mammer, as I was his'n. I nussed him when he was a blessed baby, an' I means to do de bes' I can by you, for you looks like a little queen, an' you's sweet, and dainty enough to be one o' de ole blood sure enough."

A grave smile flitted over the lips of the child, and she held out her hand—

"Thank you mammer, if I may indeed call you so. I shall be very grateful for your kindness."

"Bress de chile, jes' hear how she talks! Sho' you may call de ole 'oman mammer, an' proud she'll be to hear you call her by dat name, you blessed little angel. You aint usen to dark faces like mine, but you'll soon find out dat we's got feelin's under de black skin."

"Yes, I am sure of that. Father told me about you and your husband before we came here; how faithful you had been to his family, and how kind you were to him when he was a little boy with no mother of his own to take care of him."

"Did Marse Claude say dat? I 'clar' I am proud as a peacock wid his fan tail spread, to hear dat he 'membered me, en' talked o' me to his 'dopted darter. My ole man is uncle Cæsar, young mistis, an' he'll be might'ly pleased to hear you call him so."

"Will he? then I shall remember to give him his title. I am quite ready now—shall I go to father?"

When they entered the wide hall, Isola was a little frightened to find it crowded with the blacks, who had heard of the arrival of their master, and came to the great house, as they called it, to welcome him to his home. Bright and

eager faces pressed toward the door of the sitting room in which Fontaine stood, grasping in turn the toil-hardened hands that were offered to him, but on the lips of the elder negroes, the words of welcome almost died away when they saw the change that had come over him during his ten years of absence.

They had last beheld him in the glory of his young manhood; they now looked on the ruin of what he then was, but he was still a grand, and noble ruin.

The young negroes, who had grown out of his remembrance, were presented to the master by their relatives, and Cæsar brought forward his grand-daughter with much pride, a girl of fifteen, with an expression of intelligence not often found among her race.

"Dis is Cely, Marse Claude; Sinai's darter; an' you may 'member her when she was a little picaninny. *She's* got some gumption, an' I thought p'raps you'd 'cept her for de waitin maid for de young mistis."

Celia giggled hysterically, and with his grave smile, Fontaine said:

"You have always been faithful to me and mine, Cæsar, and I choose your grandchild as the personal attendant of my daughter. Here she comes now."

Aggy opened a way through the dark crowd which filled the hall, and many curious and interested glances were cast on the delicate figure that moved after her. Stepping forward, Fontaine took Isola by the hand, and lifting her in his arms, placed her on a table that stood near the door. Then turning toward the negroes, he said:

"This little girl is my adopted daughter, and your future mistress. As I shall never marry, she will be the heiress to my name and fortune."

A suppressed murmur arose among the people, which was ended by the voice of their master again speaking.

"Retire, now, to your homes, my friends, and take holi-

day till Monday morning. I have already seen the overseer, and issued my orders to that effect. When my boxes arrive from New York, you will receive presents from Isola, which she has brought from Europe for you. Celia, you will remain, and commence your duties here as my daughter's maid."

Thanks, mingled with murmurs of "God bress de chile, she looks like a picter," were heard, and in a few moments the sable crowd had departed, rejoicing in the prospect of three days of saturnalia. Celia, looking much elated, took up her station behind the chair of her new mistress, and assiduously waited on her during the morning meal.

When it was ended, Fontaine said to the child:

"Here are your keys, my dear; Celia will unpack your wardrobe, and you can go with her through the house, and select the chamber you may prefer. The two we occupied last night I shall appropriate to my own use; the others you may do with as you like."

"I shall take the one nearest to yours," she replied, with a smile; "for even in sleep I do not like to be separated far from you."

He passed his hand caressingly over her shining hair, and dismissed her for the present. He then gave orders to Cæsar to send a messenger to the Vale with a note to Mr. Berkely, informing him that he had returned, and wished to see him at his earliest convenience.

The old man went out to execute the order, but presently returned with a most important expression upon his face. He bore in his hand a silver waiter on which a small curiously formed key was laid. With a low bow he placed this before his master, and said, with some huskiness in his voice:

"I 'livers up de trus' dat my ole marster 'fided to me, Marse Claude. He put a paper in de private box, an' tole me to keep de key tell you come back to yer own. Ef you nebber come back, I war to 'stroy it."

"A paper addressed to me by my father, concealed with such care!" exclaimed Fontaine, in surprise, though his voice betrayed deep emotion. "Give me the key, Cæsar, and leave me alone."

He put out his hand, but a sudden blindness smote him, and for a few seconds he could see nothing clearly before him. The old man placed the key in his outstretched hand, and, bowing profoundly, left the room, closing the door softly behind himself.

Fontaine stood many moments leaning upon the mantel, his broad breast heaving, his face growing paler and paler, and unconsciously he muttered:

"Will he accuse me? Will he denounce me as a—oh God! let not that fatal word pass my lips! Let me bury the past deep in its bloody grave and forget its harrowing memories. Oh! would that I could! but it is impossible; the vulture of remorse gnaws at my heart forever, and it will yet make me mad—mad—mad!"

He shuddered in every fibre of his frame, but steeling his nerves to the task before him, he moved rapidly toward a closet in the niche made by the chimney; unclosing the door, he thrust his arm under a shelf, and touching a small brass knob concealed beneath it, a door flew open, revealing a recess in which the box was placed.

He drew it forth, placed it on the table, and then locked the door to prevent intrusion.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD FRIENDS.

WITH cold and tremulous hands, Fontaine unlocked the box, and threw back the lid. Packages of old letters, yel-

lowed by time—tied up with faded ribbons, and labeled with the names of the writers, met his sight—on one of these was placed an envelope addressed to himself. He snatched it up, tore it open, and read the few lines it contained. His face cleared, the iron hand that seemed to clutch his heart, released its suffocating grasp, and an expression of thankfulness, almost of joy, illumined his expressive face. He exclaimed with deep emotion:

"Noble—noble father! oh, would that I had proved worthy of thee! yet he loved me—he trusted me to the last."

The paper was reverently folded, and replaced. A further examination of the contents of the box showed him that it was only a private receptacle for the correspondence between General Fontaine and his wife before their marriage, with a few other letters from his most intimate friends.

Fontaine read a few of his mother's letters, and he was touched by the reticence, and delicacy with which the most devoted affection was expressed. He could not remember the writer, but these mute evidences of her tenderness of heart, and grace of expression charmed him. He thought:

"I will train Isola to be like her; she already betrays many traits in harmony with the sentiments in these charming letters, and she will grow up to be my pride and darling."

The examination over, he tied up the letters exactly as he had found them, and replaced the box.

This was scarcely accomplished, when the bustle of an arrival was heard, and Fontaine unlocked the door to welcome Mr. Berkely, who had lost no time in coming over to La Fontaine after hearing of the arrival of its master.

A hale, cheerful looking man of sixty stood in the hall, with a florid complexion, and the robust form of a Hercules. His hair and beard were thickly sprinkled with grey, but

his whitening locks seemed to harmonize with the hearty, whole-souled expression of his face. He was dressed in a full suit of grey, made loose, and comfortable, for Mr. Berkely detested fashion, and used the privilege of his age and station to dress as he pleased. He was rapidly approaching the door when Fontaine opened it, and stood before him. The hand he was about to stretch forth was suddenly withdrawn, and he said:

"Excuse me sir, but I wish to see Mr. Claude Fontaine. Where shall I find him?"

A melancholy smile wreathed the lip of Fontaine, and he grasped the hand of his old friend with warmth as he said—

"You do not know me, cousin Tom, yet how should you, changed as I am?"

The old man recoiled, and gazed incredulously upon his face.

"You—you Claude Fontaine! with that hair whiter than my own?—that worn face! Good God, boy, what can have changed you so?"

"Time, and suffering, for I have endured much since we last met. After—after the event of which you know, I was ill for many months—I arose from my couch of sickness with hair partially whitened—the news of my father's death changed it as you see. Come in, cousin Tom, and let us talk over old times. Let me thank you for your faithful care of my interests during my long absence."

Mr. Berkely followed him into the room and sat down with moistened eyes, and heightened color. He had borne sorrow himself in the early years of his life, but he would not comprehend why that should make a man old before his time. He had wrestled with, and conquered the evils of his lot, and the morn and evening of his life had been the brighter for that early discipline; but here was a man still young in years, younger than his own son—one of an

enduring and energetic race, who had succumbed beneath the calamities that assailed him, and stood before him blighted in his vigorous manhood.

Fontaine, with his inimitable grace of manner, talked with him of his own family; inquired individually of each one, and in a few moments his visitor lost his stupefied look, and answered cheerfully.

"Lady Betty," as he always called his wife, "is a perennial flower. She is almost as handsome now as she was the day I married her; George was already married when you left, as you should have been long ago, you idle wanderer. He has two children, who are the pets of my old age, for he lives with me, and helps me to take care of the place. His son is thirteen years old, and his daughter, three years younger, is one of the most enchanting little sprites you ever saw."

"And who did my friend Fanny marry?"

"Tom Stuart, who graduated in the same class with you and Henry. You surely remember him; he is a lawyer, and has a fine practice in Lynchburg. God bless my soul! What ails you, Claude? Your face frightens me. Have you disease of the heart, that you place your hand on your left side in that convulsive manner?"

"Not yet," he replied with an effort, "but at times I fear that it is slowly developing itself. The sudden mention of that name gave me a pang that pierced me like a dagger. I beg that in the future you will not speak it. I would gladly bury the memory of those days in oblivion's most fathomless deep."

"Pardon me, my dear boy; I was thoughtless. I should have remembered that such allusions must be painful to you. I promise to be more careful in the future; and now let us talk of yourself. I hope you have come back to settle down on the old place and choose a wife, as every sensible man should do."

"I shall never marry," said Fontaine, gravely.

"What! do you intend to live in this grand old place all alone? That will be too selfish, and must not be permitted. I shall set all the pretty girls in the county to pulling their caps for you. The heir of the Fontaines must leave a successor behind him (to claim the old acres, and to take care of his people."

"I have already found one worthy to succeed me. I have an adopted daughter, who will become the heiress of my property. That is, all that I can justly call my own. The portion that should have fallen to him who is gone I shall dedicate to some noble charity in his name."

"Why should you do that, Claude? You are the legal heir; but, even if you should divide it, there will be enough left to make a fine inheritance. The boy that came over for me said something about a child you had brought with you and introduced to the negroes as their future mistress, but I thought he was romancing."

"No—he spoke the simple truth. Isola is the child of my affections, and to her I shall devise all that I possess. As I do not wish to have any mystery or misunderstanding about her, I will tell you at once how I came to have her under my protection, and you may relate it for the benefit of all the gossips in the neighborhood, as doubtless there are such to be found even in this happy valley."

Fontaine then concisely gave the history which has been already related, and at its conclusion Mr. Berkely said:

"It was a lucky chance for her, poor thing, that you happened to be near at the time of the accident. But it strikes me, Claude, that this picking up of a stray child and making her the representative of one of the oldest families in the county is not exactly the right thing. I have great respect for good blood, you know, and your protégée may belong to a low, or a vicious race."

Fontaine smiled faintly. He knew the prejudices of his

old friend, and had expected some such remonstrance from him. He said:

"The stamp of the divinity is seldom mistaken. Isola is a child of rare refinement of person and mind. When you see her, you will agree with me that gentle blood and high-toned feeling must have been inherited from her progenitors. If she had proved a coarse or common child, I should merely have educated and provided for her; but I feel that she will be worthy to rule the home of my fathers as its presumptive heiress. She is dearer to me than I can express, and I am thankful that I can place her in the position she was designed by nature to fill."

"Well, well—every man to his whim, and you can afford to indulge yours. Let me see this infant phenomenon, for I have some curiosity to see how much is due to your imagination in describing your protégée."

"You shall see her and judge for yourself."

Fontaine rang the bell, which was promptly replied to by the appearance of Caesar.

"Tell my daughter to come hither, that I may present her to an old friend."

In a few moments Isola entered the room with a shy grace that interested Mr. Berkely. She wore a crimson merino dress, elaborately braided with black, which covered her neck and arms, with narrow white frills edged with lace at the throat and wrists. A tiny black silk apron, with ornamented pockets, was fastened around her slender waist, and her dark abundant hair fell in short curls around her well-poised head. White pantalettes, finished with dainty embroidery, fell over her small feet, which were cased in black morocco boots.

She had been exploring every nook upon the place, and the exercise had brought an unusual flush to her delicate cheeks. Her eyes were bright with animation, and at that moment she was a most attractive looking child. Fontaine

held out his hand, and she came forward with a self-possession that surprised his guest.

"Isola, I sent for you to present you to my oldest and best friend, Mr. Berkely. Shake hands with him, my love, and tell him that you are happy to see him at La Fontaine."

With childish confidence she placed her hand in that of the old gentleman, and said:

"I am glad to see you, sir, and I hope you will come often to make my father feel like old times."

Mr. Berkely drew her to him, and kissing her brow, replied:

"I shall certainly do that, my dear, and we will have you both at the Vale, where you will find companions of your own age to romp with."

"I never romp," said the little girl, gravely. "My governess forbade it; but I shall be glad to know your children. What are their names?"

"My grandchildren, Missy, not my children. Don't you see my white hair and venerable face? One of them is called George, and the other Fanny—how do you like their names?"

"I like Fanny, but George is not so pretty a name as my papa's, and there was a little boy on the ship that was called Eugene. I like that best."

"Because you admired the bearer, perhaps. But George can make his way in spite of his name, and you will like him as well as his sister, for he is a handsome fellow."

"Perhaps I shall," she replied, with simplicity; "for I love everything that is beautiful. Will you bring them to see me soon?"

"Yes—very soon; and when spring opens you must have a pony, and learn how to scamper over the hills with my young people. The roses will then come and settle permanently in your cheeks, my little lady."

Her eyes sparkled, and she clapped her hands.

"That will be grand! I have been looking at the hills this morning, and I wished that I could make a drawing of them. But the picture is here," touching her forehead, "and I shall never forget it; after all, I could never paint the sunlight as God has made it."

"A poet, by Jove!" said Mr. Berkely, slapping his knee, which he always did when he was pleased. "You were right, Claude, this is a child of no common mould. She will be an honor and a comfort to you."

Fontaine drew the little girl toward himself, held her hand a moment, and looked down into her expressive eyes.

"I believe so," he said; "and now, Isola, you may return to your explorations. Mr. Berkely and myself have business to settle."

She bowed quietly to her new acquaintance and glided from the room with noiseless steps. When the door closed on her, Fontaine said:

"I knew you would be struck with her appearance. Isola is not beautiful, but she is the most interesting child I have ever seen. She possesses sensibility and judgment far beyond her years, and I cannot tell you what a consolation she has been to my lonely and desolate life."

"I am glad you have found her such, and you must be right as to her origin; such a being as that cannot have sprung from an ignoble stock. We must have you both at the Vale during Christmas holidays, for we keep up the old times at that merry season."

"Perhaps I will join you then; but Isola certainly shall. I wish her to live familiarly with those who will probably be the friends and associates of her life, for her destiny is now fixed in the valley. I wish her to be thrown with other children, for social contact alone develops the happy and true nature in its fairest form. To make her a good and noble woman, conscious of the high responsibility that will devolve on her as the owner of others, will be my aim, and I am sure that I have good materials to work on."

"So you are fixed in your resolution never to marry?"

"Fixed as fate itself," was the firm reply.

"Then Lady Betty may lay aside her schemes for you. She has been concocting a romance for you, of which her pretty cousin is the heroine. You remember Carrie Carleton of course, for you once had a flirtation with her, and we thought something would come of it. She has never married, and some have thought that she was waiting for you to return. She is twenty-six, but she is still a lovely woman, and worthy to mate with the best."

An expression of pain passed over the face of Fontaine, and he turned away as he replied with some constraint:

"Miss Carleton cannot have cherished a tender recollection of one so long a wanderer as I have been. We were once good friends, but that was all. I beg that it shall be understood at once, that I am not a marrying man; that my plans of life are settled, and not to be changed by any temptations."

"Certainly—I begin to comprehend that you are deep in earnest, but I think you are wrong. You could give your life new interest by gathering domestic ties around you, Claude."

Fontaine sighed heavily.

"I could not make any woman happy, now, so say no more on that subject. Let us look over the accounts of the last year, and tell me all that has happened on the place in that time that you consider necessary for me to know. Thanks to your kindness, I have kept up with home affairs during all the previous years of my absence."

"I am at your service."

An hour was spent in this way, and then Mr. Berkely departed with the assurance that his family would call at La Fontaine the following day.

CHAPTER V.

SCHEMES AND COUNTER SCHEMES.

MR. BERKELY returned to the Vale in a thoughtful mood; a little chagrined it must be admitted, that a favorite plan of his own was thwarted by the unexpected presence of this strange child under the roof of Fontaine. He had been interested by the appearance of Isola, and was not insincere in his expressions of praise, but he deeply regretted the chance that had thrown her on the path of his friend.

With that fondness for managing other people's affairs which many good men, and women possess, he and his wife had long ago decided that Claude Fontaine should return from Europe, and marry a beautiful cousin of Mrs. Berkely, who, since the death of her parents, made the Vale her home.

Long ago, Miss Carleton and Fontaine had met, and had been mutually pleased with each other, but he left Virginia without asking her to await his return as his plighted bride; if the young lady was disappointed, she bravely concealed it, and the incense she received for years as a reigning belle, might have consoled her for Fontaine's indifference; but she refused all offers of marriage, and Mrs. Berkely, with a woman's shrewdness, came to the conclusion that as long as Claude Fontaine remained single, Miss Carleton would never accept any other man.

The Vale was four miles from La Fontaine, and, as its name indicated, the house lay nestled under the shelter of the hills. It was a long, low, wooden structure, with piazzas in the front and rear, and the lawn was shaded in summer by fine trees. Everything upon the place bore the impress of wealth and comfort, without any attempt at display.

A black boy, with a shining face, and great display of ivories, came out to take his master's horse.

"Has any one called to see me since I left, Pompey?" asked Mr. Berkely.

"Not as I knows on, sar, an' I reckon I'd a knowd it ef anybody had come, seein' as I allers takes de hosses. Miss Carrie have gone ober to Dunlora, wid young marster."

"So much the better," he muttered; "yet I hardly thought she would go off just as I could bring back news of Claude."

When he entered the house, he found his wife awaiting him, and she had purposely sent off the different members of the family, under various pretexts, that she might learn all he had to tell without reservation. His chair was already placed in front of the blazing fire, and Mrs. Berkely came forward to meet him with an expression of eager interest upon her face.

She was indeed a handsome and well-preserved woman for a grandmother. The tall and stately figure had lost little of its early elasticity, and her clear, well-cut features, soft, peach-like complexion, and bright blue eyes, formed a very attractive *ensemble*. The hair, of a bright, golden brown, was slightly threaded with gray, but it was still soft and silky. Over it she wore a matronly cap, and her dress was of some dark, rich material. She quickly asked:

"Is this story true about a strange child that Claude has picked up on his travels, and is going to make his heiress? Tiny brought me this news from the kitchen after you left, but I could not believe it."

"Yet it is true enough, Lady Betty. I have seen the child, and she is a very attractive little thing; quite a lady, I must say."

"Do you believe her to be only an *adopted* daughter? Claude's course has been so singular since the death of his brother, that strange thoughts are aroused. He has proba-

bly made a low marriage, and this child is his own. Does she look at all like the Fontaines?"

"No—she has dark eyes and olive complexion as they have, but there is no other resemblance. In fact, Claude makes no mystery about her, and he wishes that none shall be made. He rescued her from imminent peril—her friends perished by a terrible accident, and he could find no clue to her parentage. Fontaine was touched with compassion by her forlorn condition, took her under his protection, and finally adopted her as his own. Now he is so infatuated about her that he declares he will never marry."

"Nonsense! a man in the prime of life, and the owner of immense wealth, is not going to devote his life to a little stray, and on her account refuse to give a legitimate mistress to his home. I have made up my mind that he shall marry Carrie, and I mean to bring it about. I am certain that she has looked forward to his return with an interest that no other man has ever inspired. Is Claude as handsome as ever? though, of course, he has matured into a magnificent man."

Mr. Berkely gravely shook his head:

"He is more changed than I believed possible. I did not know him when we met."

"Changed, of course. He was little more than a boy when he went away. He has developed into perfect manhood by this time."

"No, my dear; Claude has not changed for the better. He has grown old at a fearful rate, for his hair is whiter than mine, and his face is saddened beyond anything I could have conceived. It is not the Claude of other days who has returned to us, but a grave, sorrow-stricken man, who seems to have no joy in life save that of doing his duty."

Mrs. Berkely listened in dismay:

"Why, what on earth can so have changed him? He is younger than our son."

"I cannot understand it; for, although the Fontaines are people of strong passions and impetuous feelings, they have been a hardy and enduring race; and from the Berkely blood Claude derives no melancholy taint. Yet I firmly believe that but for the influence of that child he would become a misanthrope."

His wife laid her hand upon his shoulder and impressively said:

"Then there has been wrong and evil doing on his part, be sure of that. Did he speak of poor Henry?—make any allusion to his tragic fate? I have never yet understood the circumstances of that affair."

"Nor ever will, I fancy, for he desires that all reference to his brother shall cease. When I called his name, he looked as if he would drop. I learned from the General on his death bed that Claude blamed himself for not taking better care of his brother; but Fontaine destroyed or concealed the letter Claude had written to him, and no one was permitted to read it but himself. It all seems very strange; but Claude is a man above suspicion; when you meet him, when you hear him speak, you will see that he is incapable of crime or meanness. I have rarely seen a man who impressed me as a grander specimen of human nature."

"When shall I see him? I must judge for myself, for you are too benevolent to be suspicious. I have my own thoughts about this terrible mystery, and if Claude is what you describe him, I am afraid that in my heart I must accuse him of that which will indeed sever him from human sympathy. But if he repents, I will never be the one to throw the first stone at him; no, 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay,' has not been vainly said, and if he has——"

"Betty! stop! do not, even in thought, accuse an honor-

able man of so unpardonable a crime. Claude may have been unfortunate, but guilty I will never believe him. See him, and you will think with me that it is impossible. Remember, too, that he is of my blood, and the honor of the family must be held sacred; neither will I believe that he has tainted it."

Mrs. Berkely drew a long breath, and she slightly changed color as she replied:

"I will withhold my judgment till I have seen him. Then, if I find cause to change my sentiments, I shall be glad. Poor Carrie—this change in Claude will touch her very nearly."

"I think she will live through it with her usual philosophy. I, Carrie has really cherished a romantic prepossession in favor of Fontaine, I advise her to get rid of it as speedily as possible, for he has declared his unalterable resolution never to marry."

"Did he give any reason for this determination?"

"Yes—he said that he could now never make any woman happy."

"Perhaps he might have said that he dared not involve any woman in his possible disgrace," she significantly replied.

"My dear," said Mr. Berkely, speaking very gravely, "is this withholding your judgment? 'Judge not lest ye be judged,' is good advice, and I strenuously advise you to act upon it. I have promised that we shall all go over to La Fontaine to-morrow, and Claude has half pledged himself to spend the Christmas holidays with us."

"I will try and be charitable, and you know that I can be silent. Only to you would I have spoken on this subject at all. But I think I must give up my pet plan of making a match between Carrie and Claude. I know that she remembers him with great interest, and I have foolishly endeavored to keep alive her early preference for him. But

Carrie has sense and principle, and she will marry no man in whom she has not implicit confidence."

"I scarcely expected her to leave home when I had gone to La Fontaine to meet its master. She is more indifferent to him than you thought, or she would have been on the *qui vive* to hear my report of him."

"That only proves that you know very little about women. She would die sooner than betray the secret of that little nook in her heart in which he is enshrined. Carrie is a very proud woman, and she has too long been bowed before as a queen of beauty to veil her head to an indifferent conqueror now. Yet I firmly believe that if she does not marry Claude Fontaine no other man will ever claim her as his wife."

"Then we are likely to keep her with us, Lady Betty; and I shall not be sorry to do so, for hers is a bright spirit, unspoiled by flattery, though it has been lavished on her in no stinted measure."

"But Carrie would make so good and noble a wife to the man that could appreciate her. My own married life has been so happy that I wish one I love so truly to find as good a husband as you have been to me, my dear old veteran."

The cheerful smile with which she regarded him elicited a corresponding one from Mr. Berkely, and he said:

"Yes, we have been very happy, Lady Betty, and we can sing John Anderson my Jo John as we go down the vale of life together, with our hands as firmly linked as our hearts. You have but one fault, my love; you are too hasty in your judgments."

"And yours is the opposite one, sir, to be too lenient in yours; but, after all, yours is the better part. But here comes Mary and the children to interrupt our mutual compliments."

The door opened, and a fair, fresh-looking woman of graceful appearance came in, followed by a handsome boy

and a little girl, both of whom strongly resembled their stately grandmother.

Fanny ran toward Mr. Berkely, and, springing upon his lap, asked:

"Grandpa, are you Santa Claus? George says that there is no such person at all; that the little punchy man with the frost on his beard and his wagon load of toys is only a story. He says that you'll buy my pretty things, and ma and grandma will put them in my stocking. I wish that I had one as big—as big as a barrel."

"Master George is a naughty boy to slander Santa Claus, and maybe he'll pass him over, at Christmas to pay him for his mischief. But what do you want, my pet, that you desire such a mammoth stocking?"

"I want a pair of white rabbits—some guinea pigs, and a parrot, besides lots of goodies, and a new dress for Mammy Sue."

"Mercy! how shall Santa Claus bring all those things in one wagon? I am afraid the parrot would pick out the eyes of the poor rabbits. Won't you have an elephant added to the stock? Not a big one, mind you, but one of the new kind you discovered for yourself."

George laughed aloud at this allusion, and Fanny pouted.

"You are always teasing me about that, but the bug *did* look like the picture of the elephant in my natural history."

Mrs. Berkely smiled, and said—

"So it did, my dear, and I think the discovery of the resemblance did credit to your observation."

They referred to an incident which had occurred when the little girl was but five years old. She had a passionate love for animals, and before she could read, she was familiar with the pictures in a book filled with engravings of them. One summer evening, a large beetle attracted by the light,

fluttered around the lamp, and, at her request, when it fell upon the floor, her father placed it under a tumbler for her inspection. She danced, and clapped her hands, exclaiming—"I have caught an elephant—I have caught an elephant!"

Finding herself the object of ridicule, Fanny indignantly produced the book, and declared that the two were of the *same size*, and exactly alike. There really was sufficient resemblance between the picture and the insect to justify the mistake of so young a child, and she was not satisfied that she was not right till a visit to a wandering menagerie showed her the difference between the insignificant beetle and the unwieldy lord of the forest.

George drew near his grandmother, and leaned his head against her shoulder. She asked—

"What does the young gentleman, who is so prematurely wise, expect for his Christmas offering?"

"I want a big history of the United States, and Plutarch's lives. I've got a pony, and a dog, and plenty of playthings, so I believe I would rather have books, grandma."

"Are not those books in the library already, George?"

"There is Bancroft's history, and I have a small one that I use in school, but I want a big book in one volume, that I can read over and over. I'll read Bancroft when I am a man, you know—but I have found out so much about the old Romans in my Latin studies, that I want to know more of them."

"Well—I will see about it, my studious little lad. But what do you and Fanny say to a new playmate as a Christmas offering?"

"I hope it aint a boy," said Fanny, "for George teazes me enough now, and two boys will be more than I can stand."

"No—it's a pretty little lady near your own age."

"A girl! hurrah!" exclaimed George, starting up; "then I'll have two to wait on me, and coax me into good humor when I'm cross. Who is she, grandma? Where did she come from? Is she coming here?"

"Be quiet, George, and don't ask so many questions. Mr. Fontaine has returned from Europe, bringing with him an adopted daughter. Your grandfather has seen her, and to-morrow we are going over to La Fontaine to ask them to spend Christmas week with us. You must both be very kind to the little stranger."

"Is she pretty?" asked George. "I don't like ugly girls."

"You conceited monkey, don't begin to put on airs because you think yourself good looking. Pretty, or ugly, remember one thing; if you wish to stand well with your cousin Claude, you will be very kind and polite to the child he has adopted as his own. She will be thrown much with you and Fanny, and she has no mother to love her. My pets must not forget that."

"What is her name?"

"Isola."

"What a funny name!" said Fanny. "I never heard it before."

"It is a very sad one, my child, for it means lonely. She has no relation in the world that is known to her, and if Mr. Fontaine had not taken her under his protection, she might have perished of want."

"Dear me—was she so very poor?"

"No—she was only friendless," said Mr. Berkely.

"The clothing she had on when Claude found her, and her refined appearance, contradict the supposition that she belonged to an inferior caste. She is a little lady, and she will be the heiress to the great Fontaine estate."

"I mean to marry her when we are old enough," said George, decisively. "I always thought I should like to

live up at La Fontaine better than down in the valley, and now a girl is to get the place, why sha'n't I have it some day?"

"Upon my word, young gentleman, I think you are rather presumptuous in your decisions. You are a most precocious youngster."

Nothing daunted, George replied:

"Everybody tells me that I am like my grandma, and she is as handsome as a duchess. I have brains in my head, and I intend to use 'em to some purpose; but I don't intend to marry for money, grandpa. If the little girl don't suit my taste, I won't have her, even with La Fontaine in the bargain. I can make me a home of my own, though I can hardly find one that has so grand a view as the upper plantation."

The two ladies listened to him in amused silence, his mother called the boy to her side, and gently said:

"You are talking too much like a man, my son; such boasting sounds absurd from childish lips. I hope you will be self-dependent, and make your own way in life, but do not speak now as if you could have everything your own way. You have many a hard lesson to learn, many buffets to endure, before the husk is shed, and the true fruit comes to perfection. I would not have my boy become a vain, boasting man."

George bent his glowing face and kissed her cheek.

"I was only talking, mother; do not heed my nonsense. I only like to make grandpa stare; it amuses him to hear me run on so."

Mr. Berkely rose and said:

"If you are very good, children, you may go with us tomorrow to call on Miss Fontaine; but I warn you to say nothing to her of her peculiar position."

He left the room, delegating to his wife the task of replying to the questions asked about the newly-arrived mas-

ter of La Fontaine. The younger lady had known him in the early years of her married life, and she listened with much interest to the particulars Mrs. Berkely chose to reveal, but she was very careful to make no allusion to the suspicion that lay darkly cradled in her own heart.

That her daughter might be prepared to meet Fontaine without manifesting surprise at the change in his appearance, she told her that he had suffered greatly from ill-health—so much that he looked many years older than he really was. The conversation was interrupted by the return of Miss Carleton, who came in holding up her riding-skirt, her face glowing beneath a becoming riding-hat, decorated with long, floating plumes.

Carrie Carleton was slightly above the medium height, with a perfectly rounded figure, and a face that was more piquante than beautiful. Her features were not perfectly regular, but the expression was charming; and the gay and brilliant woman of the world could soften into the most tender and thoughtful of companions in the serene quiet of her own home. Her complexion was of that soft, creamy tint, which is sometimes found combined with hair of a paly brown, contrasted with dark, hazel eyes, fringed, and arched with black.

For many successive winters she had reigned a belle in Richmond, but so unspoiled was her true womanly nature that she returned to the simple pleasures of a country life with renewed zest, after wearying of the fashionable round of city dissipation. She came forward with a bright smile and said:

"We have had a charming ride, and Philip Vane came back with us to hear something of our newly arrived friend at La Fontaine. He stopped in the yard with cousin George, but they will both be in directly."

Mrs. Berkely looked slightly annoyed.

"Claude Fontaine is a stranger to the Vanes; then why

should Philip be so anxious to hear about him? Mr. Vane has cast an envious eye on his plantation, and he even asked Mr. Berkely if there would be no chance to buy it of its absent master; as if a Virginia gentleman would sell the inheritance of his fathers, unless compelled by misfortune to do so."

"Philip has nothing to do with his father's plans, and I fancy it was boyish curiosity that brought him here more than any thing else," said Miss Carleton, quietly. "I saw cousin Tom as we rode through the place; I hope he brings a good report of our long absent friend."

"Claude is well, I believe, and he has returned to remain among us," was the brief response.

Miss Carleton regarded her with a slight expression of surprise, for there was nothing cordial in her tone, and she knew that Mrs. Berkely had looked forward to the return of her former favorite with nearly as much interest as if he had been her own son. Fanny here seized her hand and exclaimed:

"Oh, cousin Carrie, we are to have Mr. Fontaine's little girl here for the holidays, and we are going to see her tomorrow. Won't that be fine?"

The bright glow faded suddenly from her face, and her lips slightly trembled, but she spoke in a clear unfaltering voice:

"Is Mr. Fontaine married?"

"Oh, no—he is not married; the child is but an adopted one; but he declares his fixed intention never to give her a step-mother," said Mrs. Berkely, gravely.

The blood rushed back to the paling cheek in a burning torrent, and a brilliant smile flushed over her mobile lips as she said:

"I hope he will find happiness in single blessedness, as I have done, and as I expect yet to do."

"You may be blessed, Carrie, for you bear within your-

self a well-spring of kindness and tenderness that renders you dear to all around you; but poor Claude seems to have found little joy upon his path, if Mr. Berkely's report is correct."

"Is he so greatly changed, then? He left us in the bloom of youth; I supposed he would return in the maturity of manhood, with all the graces and accomplishments of a polished traveler. I am sorry to hear that he has become a *blazé* man of the world. I thought his nature too deep and true to degenerate into that."

"Ah, well, my dear, we won't discuss him; but you must prepare yourself for a great change in your old friend. He is no longer the gay and impulsive Claude we once loved."

With an uncomfortable feeling Miss Carleton turned away and repaired to her own room to remove her riding habiliments. When this was accomplished, she took from her work-box a small miniature case containing a daguerreotype of Claude Fontaine, and earnestly regarded it. The miniature was one of half a dozen taken of the two brothers and sent back to be distributed among their intimate friends just before their departure for Europe.

General Fontaine, with whom Miss Carleton was a great favorite, had offered her one of each of his sons. They were gladly accepted, but Claude's lay always at hand, while that of Henry was laid away and seldom sought for. His sad fate filled her with regret, and she persuaded herself that that was the reason she so seldom cared to look upon it.

She now gazed with moistening eyes upon the bright youthful face she so faithfully remembered, and faintly muttered:

"Changed! changed! Oh, why is it that blight and sorrow must fall on all earthly creatures? Oh, Claude Fontaine, your noble heart, your true nature, must be still the same, and they will yet assert themselves. God did not create such a man to be a mere cumberer of the earth."

The voice of the younger Mrs. Berkely calling to her, aroused her from the reverie into which she had fallen, and putting away the case, she descended to join the family group as they went in to dinner.

George Berkely, a fine-looking man of thirty-six, was now with them, and beside him stood Philip Vane, a youth of sixteen, as beautiful as Antinous. Every movement was grace; every inflexion of his voice was music; and in full development, his person promised to be the perfection of manly elegance. His small Grecian head was crowned with clustering curls of blonde hair, and his large almond shaped eyes, of a bright flashing blue, were full of life and animation, though at moments they wore the soft sleepy look of the feline species when watching for the unwary prey on which they are ready to spring.

His manners were full of boyish vivacity, tempered by the good breeding which had been sedulously inculcated in him, as the surest means of success in the world; and in spite of some distaste toward his parents, Philip was a great favorite at the Vale. His studies were pursued with George under a private tutor employed by Mr. Berkely—but Mr. Landon had now gone home to spend the approaching holidays with his own friends.

The Vanes were new settlers in the neighborhood, and little was known of their antecedents, except that they were people of good family from the southern part of the state. When Dunlora was offered for sale by its former proprietor, Mr. Vane purchased and refitted the place in magnificent taste. The family kept up its ancient prestige by maintaining a liberal style of hospitality, and they were considered as an acquisition to the county.

Philip was an only child, and the darling and pride of his parents; the friendly intercourse of neighbors was kept up between the family at the Vale, and that at Dunlora, although the gentlemen were often annoyed at the pompous

manners of Mr. Vane, and the ladies wearied by the superficial fine ladyism of his wife. But Philip was intelligent, and precocious—he was as fascinating as he was handsome, and he was always welcome to every member of the family from Mr. Berkely down to the ebony lad who took his horse when he arrived.

The meal was not as merry as usual, for the Berkelys did not gather around the table merely to satisfy their hunger; gay, and cheerful conversation was usually exchanged, but to-day a cloud was on the brow of the genial elders of the family, and they both seemed annoyed at the eager inquiries of Philip Vane, concerning Claude Fontaine.

But with his usual tact, Philip gained every particular known to them concerning the child Fontaine had brought home with him. Then he fell into a reverie, which was broken by Fanny's whispered words, that George meant to marry Isola Fontaine some day; he had said so.

There was a bright flash of the eye, and a sudden compression of the lip, and if Philip's thoughts had been audibly spoken, he would have said:

"We shall see who is to be the winner, if she is to have that grand old place. If she does not get it, George may take her and welcome;" but he only smiled on the little girl, and said; "I hope she will prove a pleasant companion for you, Fanny. I wonder if she won't come to school to Mr. Landon."

"I'll ask cousin Claude to send her as soon as I see him; that is, if I like her. Then she'll be here every day; and when Santa Claus brings my parrot we shall have nice times."

"So you're going to have a parrot? I thought you could talk enough yourself, Miss Fan, without having a bird to help you."

"I have always wanted a talking bird, like the princess in the fairy tale; and now if I could only get the enchanted

carpet, that took people wherever they had a mind to go, I should be quite made up."

"I suppose you would," replied Philip, with his gay laugh; "but, in our day, the railroad is almost as good. It is like flying over the solid earth, in place of sailing over people's heads, at the risk of falling on them."

"Do you really think that being shut up in a long box with little windows in it, is as good as to sit down on a magnificent carpet and float over the beautiful world? Oh! Philip, I thought you loved grand scenery."

"But suppose a storm with thunder and lightning should come on while one is among the clouds?" and he made a comical face, which caused the little girl to laugh so loud that her mother held up her hand warningly.

Soon afterward the party left the table, and having learned all he could glean that day, Philip Vane took his leave, after assuring Mrs. Berkely that the family from Dunlora would accept the invitation for Christmas week which Miss Carleton had rode over that morning to give them.

CHAPTER VI.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THE following day arose clear and bright, and by ten o'clock the carriage was at the door to convey the ladies to La Fontaine. Mrs. Berkely and her daughter-in-law took their places in it, accompanied by the two children, for Miss Carleton had declined going with them. The elder lady was well pleased with her refusal: she had decided in her own mind that her long cherished scheme of making a match between Claude Fontaine and her cousin must be

given up, and the feminine efforts she had made to keep alive Miss Carleton's interest in him must be neutralized as soon as possible.

Mr. Berkely and his son had already set out on horseback, and the carriage was slowly driven over the romantic mountain road that wound steadily upward till they came in sight of La Fontaine and the grand panorama which it overlooked.

"Oh, mamma," said George, "what a proud feeling the owner of that place must have when he looks from his windows upon this beautiful valley, and feels that he is 'monarch of all he surveys,' as Alexander Selkirk did in his desert island."

"Not if his heart is lonely, his life as desolate as that of the poor shipwrecked sailor, my child," said his grandmother.

"No—but Mr. Fontaine has everything that can make a man happy."

"Except a heart at peace with itself," thought the lady, but she did not speak again, and in a few moments the carriage drew up in front of the house.

The three gentlemen were on the piazza, and Fontaine descended the steps to welcome his guests and assist them to alight. He looked bright and animated, and in spite of his silvered hair, Mrs. Berkely thought him almost as handsome as in his earlier days. All her old affection for him rushed back upon her heart, and she impulsively grasped the hand he extended to her as she said:

"Welcome back to your native hills, my dear Claude, and I hope you will never desert them again."

With his rare smile, Fontaine replied:

"It is not my purpose to do so, cousin Betty. I have come home to remain, and fulfil the duties I have too long delegated to others. This is Mary, with her children; I should have known her anywhere, for she has scarcely

altered in all these long years," and with graceful gallantry he kissed the cheek of each lady as she alighted.

Then assisting the children from the carriage, he added:

"I knew you, Master George, in your baby days; but this little sprite I have never seen before. I have brought with me a nice companion for you, and I bespeak for her a kind welcome and a place in your affections."

George flushed, but in the presence of this noble-looking stranger his usual fluency deserted him, and Fanny spoke in reply:

"We have come to see her, cousin Claude, and I mean to like her very much."

"That is right, my dear; I will soon present her to you."

The whole party entered the house; the parlor was open, a large room filled with heavily carved furniture of the Louis Quatorze style, covered with blue damask. Curtains of the same material were held back by branches of sculptured water lilies, and the medallion carpet had wreaths of lilies and roses running in wild profusion over its azure ground.

A cheerful fire burned upon the hearth, and in the absence of a mistress, Aggy appeared to receive the ladies and remove their wrappings. They would have declined this service, but Fontaine insisted that they should remain to lunch, and they finally took off bonnets and shawls and made themselves comfortable beside the fire.

During this time a constant chatter was kept up, for all were excited, and all glad to be at La Fontaine once more in the presence of its owner. Fontaine expressed his regrets that Miss Carleton had not accompanied them, as he remembered with interest, and would take much pleasure in renewing his early acquaintance with her.

Mrs. Berkely replied with slight reserve "that Carrie was indisposed," though she did not add the mental reservation, "to come with them," for she believed Miss Carle-

ton's pretext of a slight headache to be a mere sham. She presently asked:

"Where is the new claimant on our regard which Mr. Berkely tells me you have brought with you? If she were your *own* daughter, my dear Claude, I should take her to my heart at once. As a stranger, I must see her and form my own opinion as to her merits."

"I have no fears as to the result, my dear madam. Isola is the child of my affections, if not of my blood, and I can safely leave her to make her own way with so good a judge of human nature as I know you to be. I will bring her in at once."

He left the room, and presently returned leading Isola by the hand, dressed very much as she had been on the preceding day; but the roses had faded from her cheeks, for she was frightened at the ordeal before her, and the innate shyness of her nature caused her to shrink from contact with strangers. But she struggled with her perturbation, and came steadily forward, though her nervous clasp on the fingers of her protector gave him a clue to what she was suffering.

He led her to Mrs. Berkely and said:

"Let my orphaned little one find a place in your heart, cousin Betty. I assure you she is a gentle and truthful child, who has become a pearl of great price to me."

The large melancholy eyes of the little girl were raised appealingly to the benevolent face before her, and Mrs. Berkely's heart responded to their touching expression. She drew the slight form of Isola to her breast, and kissing her softly on brow and cheek, said:

"I will be a friend to her, Claude—I can promise you that; and you know of old that I never half way fulfil a pledge I have given."

"Thank you—thank you," he replied, with all his old heartiness of manner; and Mrs. Berkely transferred the

agitated child to her daughter, who caressed her and presented her own children to her. With that freemasonry familiar among children, the three were soon chattering with each other as freely as if they had been acquainted for years, and Isola soon invited George and Fanny to explore with her some delightful nooks she had discovered in the grounds around the house.

They were no sooner gone than Fontaine approached the ladies and asked of Mrs. Berkely:

"Well, what do you think of my protégée?"

"She is a remarkable-looking child, and one whose instincts are evidently pure and refined. No one can doubt that she is of good blood."

He faintly smiled.

"I hope so; I believe so, for I confess to some prejudices on that score myself; but if I learned to-morrow that Isola is the offspring of the meanest peasant, it would make no change in my feelings toward her, nor alter my intentions with regard to her future. From her infancy she has been the one link that bound me to life, and I trust that the kindness you bestowed on my own orphan boyhood will be also extended to the daughter of my adoption."

In spite of the latent feeling of mistrust that had sprung up in the heart of Mrs. Berkely, she felt herself drawn toward the speaker with all her old affection for him, and she cordially replied:

"Rest assured, my dear Claude, that I will do all that is in my power to serve and make happy a creature that is so important to you. Isola must come to the Vale and join our young people in their studies. We have an excellent tutor, who will resume his duties on New Year, and I shall be glad to have her with George and Fanny."

The eloquent look of gratitude that beamed on Fontaine's face thanked her even more than his words, for this was even more than he had dared to hope in the first interview

with the stately dame, with whose pride of family he was well acquainted.

"A thousand thanks for this kind offer, Cousin Betty. My lonely home would soon become oppressive to a young child who needs the companionship of those of her own age. I can spare Isola during the day; but in the afternoon she must return hither to brighten me up with her prattle."

So it was soon settled that the unknown child was to be received on a footing of equality in one of the most exclusive houses in the valley. Fontaine became animated, and something like his former gaiety brightened the party that soon collected around the lunch table. The weight he had so long borne seemed lifted from his heart in the presence of old friends by whom he knew he had once been loved and highly appreciated.

The children came in, apparently on the best terms with each other, and when the visitors departed, they carried with them the promise from Fontaine that he would bring Isola to join the Christmas festivities at the Vale.

When Mr. Berkely and his wife were again alone, he asked:

"What is your opinion of Claude now that you have seen him, Lady Betty?"

"He is more changed in appearance than I could have believed possible; but it is impossible to talk with him, to feel the charm of his manner, without the conviction that such a man can never have committed an inexpressible crime. There—don't scold me if I have mentally accused him, and to you I may speak out. But I take back my suspicions. I can trust Claude Fontaine as I did in his youth, when he was the soul of honor and truth."

"That is right, my lady. You are a good judge of human nature, though you are sometimes too ready to suspect evil. I would as soon think myself capable of a villainy as believe that Claude has been guilty of what you hinted at. He is

too sensitive—too ready to accuse himself; and you may remember how strongly the two brothers were attached to each other. There might occasionally have been a cloud of jealousy aggravated by the idle talk of others; but at heart they were devoted to each other. Poor Claude; the death of his father and brother left him alone in the world, and he has doubtless permitted himself to think that the fate of the former was caused by the shock he received at the news of Henry's death."

"Have you not thought the same?"

"I did, till Dr. Withers assured me that the General must have died even without that. He had been under medical treatment many months, hoping that he might prolong his life till the return of his sons. But he refused to recall them, although Withers warned him of his approaching fate."

"You never told me of that before, and I am afraid that I have mentally placed that burden on poor Claude. I am glad that he is freed from that sin."

She remained silent several moments wrapped in deep thought. Mr. Berkely slyly said:

"What of your plans for Carrie now, Lady Betty?"

With some stateliness she replied:

"I shall leave them to settle their own destiny. I never did make a match in my life; but I thought this one would be so suitable that I would try my hand at it. I have changed my mind, for I think no outsider should presume to meddle in so sacred a thing as marrying or giving in marriage. If Claude asks Carrie to marry him, and she consents, I shall say nothing to oppose them; but I do not think that either of them will ever marry."

"I do not know about that. They are the very persons to attract each other, and if Carrie ever liked him, her tender heart will be touched and interested by him more deeply as he is than if he had returned the brilliant and youthful-looking man we expected to see."

"Carrie is accustomed to homage, and that Claude Fontaine will not offer, so she will not be in much danger from his fascinations."

There the conversation ended; the days rolled on, bringing Christmas week. In the interval, Fontaine had once visited the Vale; but Miss Carleton was not at home, and they did not meet till a throng of guests filled the large house.

Mr. Stuart, with his wife and four children, came from Lynchburg; cousins of every degree were invited to the annual family gathering, and every nook was filled with the merry crowd.

The only persons invited who were not related to the family, were the Vanes, from Dunlora.

On his arrival, Fontaine was heartily greeted by old friends and connections, and Isola found herself caressed and made much of by the warm-hearted people among whom her future lot was cast. Her reserve gradually wore away, and to her own surprise she found herself taking an active part in the merriment of the children, and actually romping with all her heart in the large school-room which was given up to them.

Fontaine was presented to Mr. Vane—a fat, florid looking man, dressed in the extreme of fashion, who carried an eye-glass stuck in his eye. He pompously said:

"Glad to see you on your own soil again, Mr. Fontaine; I am always happy to make the acquaintance of a traveled man. I have been a traveler myself in my younger days, and I think with sadness of my European experience. It is hard to leave the home of the arts, where life is made so pleasant, for a mere land of plenty like this. We have no ideality, sir; as a people, we are contented to eat, drink and be merry, after a homely fashion, without caring for the more spiritual portions of our nature."

Fontaine looked at the rosy face of the speaker, and

thought that the spirituous portion at least was not neglected by him; but he courteously said:

"I am happy to be at home again, Mr. Vane; but I cannot agree with your assertion that the more cultivated portion of our people are 'of the earth, earthy.' For so young a nation we have accomplished much, both in literature and art."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so. As you say, we are young yet—very young. But we will do something to be remembered by and by, no doubt of that. But now we think too much of dollars and cents. We are too mercenary to become a great people."

"I have sometimes feared the same myself; but when I look at our English brethren I am consoled, for they largely share in the same proclivities; and to emulate our grand old mother, will be to rise to as great a height as humanity has yet attained."

"You think so? Well, I cannot say that I appreciate the English so highly, and I thought *you* would give precedence to the French, since your forefathers came from that country."

"But my foremothers were of Saxon blood, and in spite of my olive complexion and dark eyes, I am more of a Saxon than a Celt."

"You believe in the influence of race, then," said the little man, mounting a favorite hobby. "Now I disagree with you in toto about this theory of blood, concerning which we Virginians make ourselves so ridiculous. I have read Nott's book, and—"

Luckily the discussion was nipped in the bud by the approach of a tall, faded-looking woman, who possessed the remains of great beauty. She was magnificently dressed, was slightly rouged, and wore her blonde hair in long ringlets. She spoke in a drawling tone:

"Mr. Vane, present me to Mr. Fontaine, and for heav-

en's sake let the races alone. I am so tired of hearing about them, that I am sure I wish everybody in the world had been either white, black, or copper-colored."

The ruby tint on her husband's face deepened, and he bit his lips with vexation; but he performed the ceremony of introduction in his most grandiloquent style. Perfectly aware that his wife would afford him no opportunity to renew the discussion into which he was about to plunge, Mr. Vane glided away to seek another auditor.

The lady, with easy grace, placed her arm within that of Fontaine, and said, with her faded smile:

"I believe that you and Miss Carleton have not yet met. I left her in the library just now; perhaps we had better join her there."

"Certainly, Madam. I have been looking around for my former friend; but she was such a mere girl when I left Virginia, that I can hardly expect to recognize her now;" and he followed the lead of the lady, who had her own reasons for wishing to witness the first meeting between the belle and her former admirer. As they proceeded, she prattled on:

"It is so charming to have you back among your old friends, Mr. Fontaine. I have often looked, almost with a sigh of envy, at your beautiful place, and wished the master would return to give us a glimpse of the interior. Now you are here, I suppose you intend to support the ancient state of your family, by giving entertainments in the European style."

"It is not my purpose to live like a hermit, Mrs. Vane. My doors will be open to my friends; but until my daughter is grown, La Fontaine will have no mistress to do the honors of my house."

"Oh, you selfish, naughty man! to speak of living in single blessedness in that grand old place! I declare, it will be a sin to do so."

"It is an enormity of which I shall certainly be guilty," he smilingly replied, though there was a faint inflexion of pain in his voice.

The light blue eyes of Mrs. Vane were lifted to his face, which she keenly surveyed; and from that moment she decided that Claude Fontaine was perfectly in earnest in his avowed resolution never to marry. She gaily said:

"So much the worse for you; but here is the library, and within it is the Queen of Hearts."

A door unclosed, revealing an oblong room, with two deeply embayed windows, shaded by green blinds. A lady stood beside a centre table, engaged in looking over a book filled with highly colored plates of fancy costumes, from which she was selecting such as were suitable for tableaux.

Fontaine saw a graceful figure, wearing a dress of dark, blue silk, with a fall of rich black lace around the bust and arms. The hair was rolled back a la Pompadour, exposing the contour of her oval face; and with her pointed bodice, and small hoop, she might have represented a *dame d'honneur* of the court of Louis XV.

She raised her head, flushed slightly, and quietly advanced, as Mrs. Vane said:

"Dear Carrie, I have brought your old friend, Mr. Fontaine, to renew his acquaintance with you"

With graceful cordiality Miss Carleton offered him her hand, and in well chosen words expressed congratulations on his return to his native land. They soon glided into conversation, and Fontaine's taste was appealed to, to assist in selecting costumes for the tableaux which were in course of preparation. Mrs. Vane said little, but she furtively watched the two, and in her scheming mind arose the conviction that they were not likely ever to become more to each other than they now were. She had heard vague rumors of their former flirtation, but the grave man and mature woman before her were superior to that now, and if

any preference lingered on Miss Carleton's side, the decided declaration of Fontaine that he was not a marrying man must effectually repress every exhibition of interest from her.

Having settled this to her own satisfaction, Mrs. Vane loitered around the room, pretending to examine the books, and when others came in and joined the two beside the table, she went out and eagerly sought for her son.

She found Philip in what he called the "Bachelor's Den," a large room at the top of the house, with dormer windows, which was appropriated, on such occasions as the present, to the use of the unmarried male guests. It was neatly furnished and perfectly comfortable, but in a state of fearful confusion, in spite of the efforts of the boy whose duty it was to attend to its occupants; for Cato declared, "dat dem gemplin in de attic was more onreg'lar, an' harder to wait on, den all de house besides."

Philip was the last one left, and he gave the finishing touches to his elaborate toilette while his mother looked with pride upon his handsome person.

"I declare, Phil, young as you are, you are even more *distingué* than Claude Fontaine himself, with all the advantages he has had."

"You have then seen him, mother? Some of the boys said he looks as ancient as Methusalah himself, so your compliment isn't so great after all, ma'am."

"Ancient as he may be considered by a parcel of lads, he would be no contemptible rival, I can tell you. He is a magnificent man, if his hair is prematurely gray, and if he could be persuaded to dye it, he would not look to be over thirty."

"Well, what of that, mother? and how can a boy of sixteen come in collision with a man of that age? You speak as if we might become rivals."

Mrs. Vane looked full at him as she asked:

"Have you not a boyish passion for Miss Carleton?"

Philip blushed, tossed his head, and with a forced laugh, said:

"Miss Carrie has been very kind to me, and I could kneel before her, and kiss the hem of her garment; but it is the homage one might offer to a goddess; for I have never dared, even in thought, to aspire to win a place in her affections. If this grand seigneur makes up his mind to throw his handkerchief, I shall not make myself miserable about it; oh no, indeed!"

Mrs. Vane drew a deep breath.

"So much the better, Phil; but Miss Carleton has a fine fortune in her own right, and if she were only a few years younger, she would make a suitable match for you."

"Oh, as to her age, she is handsome enough to make one forget that; and as she is grandma Berkley's cousin, her beauty will probably prove as perennial as that of that grand-looking woman. But really, mother, if I presumed to talk of love to Miss Carrie, she would laugh at me at first; if I persisted, she would freeze me by a look, and I couldn't stand that. If she will have a fine fortune, I know of one who will have a better one, and I'm going to save myself for her."

Mrs. Vane smiled that crafty smile that sits so ill upon the lips of a woman.

"Our thoughts run in the same channel, I perceive. Have you seen this adopted daughter? What do you think of her?"

Philip laughed gaily.

"I have been in the school-room with the children all the morning, and that is why I am so late at my toilette. At first, I thought Isola stupid, for she only looked on as if startled by the uproarious mirth of the youngsters; but she came out splendidly after awhile, and I left her in a mad-cap dance with Arthur Stuart. The color came into her

pale face, her magnificent eyes lighted up, and she no longer seemed plain as I had first thought her. She dances like a sylph, mother, and you know how I adore graceful dancing."

"You are too extravagant in your language, Philip; but in this case I am glad that you were impressed by the attractions of this little girl, for I am sure she will be the heiress to the great Fontaine estate. You know that I am acute in my judgments, and I am certain that Mr. Fontaine will never marry. I spoke of his becoming a rival with Carrie, merely to try you. He will ask neither her nor any other woman to become his wife."

"I do not know how you can so soon have arrived at such a conclusion, mother, but I only hope it will prove correct. You and my father are always telling me that I must have money with the woman I marry; this child will have a magnificent fortune if Mr. Fontaine carries out his declared intentions towards her, so I mean to make it a matter of duty to render myself agreeable to her now, that she may grow up to think me the most charming of creatures. Eh! mother, isn't that the best course?"

"At least you can lose nothing by it, and if her prospects should change, you will be committed to nothing, you know. Before either she or you are old enough to think seriously of marriage, the course of her guardian will be defined. If he does not marry within the next eight years, Claude Fontaine will never become a Benedict. Are you quite ready now? The first dinner-bell has rung."

The young exquisite's neck-tie received its last touch, and a few moments later Mrs. Vane, leaning proudly on the arm of her handsome son, entered the crowded drawing-room. Philip received friendly greetings on every side, to which he replied with his winning smile and ready tongue. Miss Carleton nodded to him, and called him to her side, to present him to Mr. Fontaine, who had entered with her from

the library. In a few moments the youth had made his usual favorable impression on that gentleman, for Fontaine had a partiality for well-bred, manly youth; and Philip's remarkable beauty was attractive to one of his cultivated taste.

When dinner was announced, Fontaine offered his arm to Miss Carleton, and with a bow and smile, Philip said:

"When the sun appears, the satellite hides its diminished splendors. Miss Carrie, I relinquish my late privileges with regret; but it is done in favor of one more worthy than I, so I am consoled."

Miss Carleton smiled sweetly upon him, and by a motion indicated a young girl without an escort, who seemed frightened at finding herself among so many strangers. With a slight grimace, Philip turned towards her, but his face was smiling brilliantly when he offered his arm, which was gratefully accepted.

The dinner was elegantly served, and exquisite in quality, for like most Virginia housekeepers, Mrs. Berkely prided herself on the perfection of her *cuisine*. The table was decorated with flowers from the conservatory, which contrasted strangely with the glistening snow that lay upon the landscape without; but the roaring fires, the heavy curtains and carpets, made a spring-like atmosphere within, and the Christmas banquet went off with all the genial enjoyment of the season.

In the evening there was dancing and Christmas games, in which the children were permitted to take part, and Fontaine was surprised to see the zest with which his shy Isola entered into both amusements. Unconscious that any one was particularly observing her, she danced with fairy-like lightness, her heart keeping time with the motions of her twinkling feet, her expressive face filled with light and happiness.

Luckily for her, Isola was not aware that the strange

child Fontaine had adopted was an object of universal attention and comment. Many declared her lovely, while others pronounced her commonplace enough, and wondered what could have induced her protector to burden himself with such a charge.

The universal opinion seemed to be that Fontaine would yet tire of his whim, and seek a wife to reign over his home; or, it was suggested, perhaps he meant to train Isola up to suit himself, and then elevate her to that position.

On the following day the tableaux were arranged under the superintendence of Fontaine and Miss Carleton; in the evening they were exhibited, and Isola appeared in one as Little Red Riding Hood, while Philip Vane, wrapped in a great bear skin, assumed the character of the wolf.

The children were charmed with this, and to flatter Fontaine, several of the ladies expressed a desire to have a photograph of the little girl in that costume. Afterwards there was a lottery in which Christmas gifts were distributed to the children, and it was pleasant to witness the surprise and delight with which each one received the very thing the little heart had most earnestly desired. Fanny did not get her parrot then, but the next morning, when she awoke, there was a green cage hanging opposite her bed, in which the parti-colored bird perched with grave majesty.

But when she sprang up and attempted to caress him, to her great horror, he saluted her with a volley of oaths which caused the little lady to thrust her fingers in her ears to shut out the dreadful sounds.

"He is a rude, ill-bred bird, and not a bit like the talking-bird of the fairy Princess," she exclaimed. "I wonder at grandpa for bringing me such a pet as that."

When her chagrin was expressed to Mr. Berkely, he laughed and said:

"I sent all the way to Norfolk for one, Fanny. This had just been brought over, and I suppose the sailors on the

ship taught him to swear. You must polish his manners, and make him a presentable bird."

But Poll refused to be trained, and after a few weeks he was ignominiously banished to the kitchen, where the cook took him under her protection. To console Fanny for her disappointment, the Christmas presents for the plantation hands were given over to her distribution, and she had the satisfaction of giving out numberless gorgeously colored calicoes and wonderfully striped handkerchiefs to the sable crowd that loaded her with flatteries and blessings, predicting every measure of good fortune for little Missy in the future.

On the following day there was a grand sleigh-ride, followed by dancing at night, and through the entire week the merriment was kept up without flagging.

Fontaine had not expected to remain more than one day and night at the Vale, but the unaffected kindness with which he was everywhere greeted found a warm response in his heart, and he hourly felt the ice of misanthropy melting away from it. To his surprise, he found that he could still enjoy himself, and he regretted that he had not earlier sought the balm to the wounds of the mind which social intercourse with old friends afforded.

During those days he and Miss Carleton were thrown much together, and more than once he caught himself sighing over the lonely lot to which he had doomed himself. She treated him with the friendly ease of old acquaintance, and freely called on him for assistance in carrying out her plans for the amusement of the guests; but there was no coquetry in her manner—no attempt to allure him to her side. Natural, graceful and charming she always was, for she thought more of others than of herself; and her exquisite tact spread an atmosphere of enjoyment wherever she moved.

More than once Fontaine asked himself why he had not

irrevocably given her his heart before that fatal tour, the events of which had turned his life to dust and ashes. Alas! it was now too late, though he felt that she could fill his ideal and still make his life beautiful, if not radiantly happy; but he dared not look on what might have been but for the blighting memories that must cling to him forever.

But all things must come to an end, and the hour of parting arrived all too soon. Fontaine was overwhelmed with invitations to visit his friends, and it was insisted that he should always come accompanied by his adopted daughter. Thus Isola took the position he desired her to fill, and he felt grateful and almost happy in contemplating the bright future that opened before her.

Mr. Vane had found means to bore him about his theory of the races, and Mrs. Vane had lavished on him her sweetest smiles and most stereotyped flatteries. He promised to visit them at Dunlora, for he really liked Philip, who had shewn to him only the most attractive side of his character, as he did to every one away from his own home.

As the carriage drove back to La Fontaine, Isola nestled to his side and pressed her small hand in his. He looked down on her and asked:

"Have you been very happy, my dear? You seemed to enjoy yourself so much that I was sorry to take you away."

"Oh, yes; I have been as happy as the children in the fairy tale when the good godmother gives them all they could ask. But I am not sorry to be with you again as we used to be. I like playing with those merry, good-tempered children, but I *love* being with you above all."

He drew her closer to his heart and asked:

"Would you like to go to school at the Vale? Mrs. Berkely has kindly offered to receive you, and Miss Carleton has proffered to continue your musical instruction till a competent teacher can be found. It was very kind in her, and she plays and sings beautifully."

"I shall like it above all things if I can come back to you every evening. I could not be happy to leave you alone all the week. I will try and not give that lovely Miss Carleton more trouble than I can help; I promise to practice faithfully and do my best to improve."

"Then it is settled. I have already arranged that you are to return to La Fontaine every evening. I will send a trusty servant with you, who will also bring you home after school is dismissed. So a week hence you will resume your studies under Mr. Landon."

Isola heard this announcement with delight, for the children at the Vale had completely won her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE FOREBODINGS.

SEVEN uneventful years have rolled away since the close of the last chapter. The children there introduced have grown to maturity, and Claude Fontaine is still a bachelor.

A strong and lasting friendship grew up between him and Miss Carleton, who, still radiant in her matured beauty, and genial as ever, refused to accept the suitors which her fame as a belle and heiress continued to attract around her. It was the current belief in the valley that the stubborn Benedict would yet bow before the charming Carrie; but she quietly declared that Mr. Fontaine and herself were only the best of friends, and never expected to be more to each other.

The mountain air had brought the roses permanently to the cheeks of Isola; her complexion cleared, and, as she grew older, every one remarked that she would yet make a beautiful woman.

At seventeen the prediction was realized, and the pride and affection of her adopted father were gratified by the refined loveliness of his protégée. To Miss Carleton's influence the young girl owed much, for Isola cherished a tender veneration for the dear friend who had done so much for her, and her character and principles were sedulously modelled on those of one she so revered and loved. To be gentle, tender, true and useful as Miss Carleton was, became her highest ambition, and she bade fair to attain the beauty of character she so highly appreciated in another.

To thorough mental culture, by the judicious advice of Mrs. Berkely, a system of domestic training was added, and Isola could sew beautifully, and she was already familiar with the details of plantation life. She was taught to visit the negroes in their cabins, and take an active interest in their welfare; and she habitually visited the sick and infirm, and read aloud to them from her pocket Bible.

Philip Vane and George Berkely went together to the Virginia University, and they had just returned home finished collegians. George was a handsome, brown-haired young man, in whose honest blue eyes his soul was mirrored. He was a fluent and graceful talker, and, away from Philip, he might have been considered a brilliant and elegant man.

But who could compare with the unrivalled Philip? At college he was known as the Adonis, and a more perfect type of manly beauty it would have been impossible to find. He was nearly six feet high, but so symmetrically formed that his free and buoyant step seemed almost to tread on air, and his manners had the easy grace of one accustomed to success in society. He had a clear, vibrant voice, which could soften with feeling, or ring out in mirthful cadence among his friends.

During his absence at college, the intercourse between Dunlora and La Fontaine had not been regularly kept up;

for Mr. Vane proved a dull bore to Fontaine, and the silly prattle of his wife wearied him. But when his favorite Philip came back again he was willing to be more social, and, after the return of the young men, a series of dinner-parties were given in the neighborhood in their honor.

At all these Fontaine appeared, accompanied by his lovely heiress, and it soon became apparent to observers that both Berkely and Vane were falling desperately in love with her. Isola treated both with the friendly freedom of their early days, but gave no decided encouragement to either, for she considered herself yet too young to think seriously of marriage.

Fanny Berkely had grown into a piquante little fairy, whose laughing eyes and blonde curls made her appear almost yet a child. She and Isola were the best of friends, and few days passed on which they did not meet either at La Fontaine or the Vale.

During the lapse of these years, Fontaine had recovered his outward tranquillity: but a strange and morbid passion for studies, which led him to contemplate the night side of nature, had developed itself in the many solitary hours he spent shut up in his library, the books that lined its walls his only companions.

Among them he found a curious collection of works made by his father, embodying all the supernatural appearances that have been well authenticated from the earliest ages of literature. Spiritualism had already made much progress in this country, and during a summer tour through the Northern States, Fontaine sought out its high priestess, Miss Fox, and endeavored to penetrate into its mysteries.

As so many others have been, he was baffled in attempting to account for the strange manifestations he witnessed; and in spite of his unwillingness to believe in their supernatural origin, he was forced to confess that they were inexplicable. He purchased every work that professed to

elucidate them, and subscribed to several spiritual newspapers, that he might keep up with the progress of what he wished to believe an illusion, yet which deeply and powerfully interested his imagination.

In a private interview with this Seeress, she revealed to him what he believed known only to himself, and he left her, pale and chilled to the heart.

With ideality, marvellousness and imagination largely developed, it was not surprising that this glimpse into the weird realm of shadows possessed a powerful fascination for this lonely, grief-stricken man; for in spite of his outward calmness, the fearful memories that lay cradled in his breast at times asserted their power, and for days he buried himself in solitude, and refused even the ministrations of Isola.

When the dark hour passed, he came among his friends again, eager for any diversion to his dreary introspection; for Claude Fontaine dreaded above all things that his mind might yet succumb beneath the weight that rested on it and the fear of ultimate madness loomed ever as a spectre before him. His sufferings were confined to his own breast; his brighter hours were for the friends he drew around him, for when the shadow lifted he sought society as a refuge from thought.

One evening he had been reading a strange story of *diablerie*, in which "black spirits and white, blue spirits and gray," had played their fantastic parts. It was told with great power, and he laid the book down as twilight gathered around him, and leaned back in his large library chair to think over its contents.

It was summer; the windows were all open, and in a vague dreamy state he continued to recline, watching the fading shadows without as evening deepened into night. Suddenly a voice, the tones of which curdled his very blood, seemed to steal in low, soft murmurs to his ear.

He started—listened eagerly, but the sounds still continued in faint, reproachful accents that thrilled to his inmost being, for it seemed to be the voice of his lost brother that spoke to him. With hair bristling upon his head, and large beads of sweat rolling from his brow, Fontaine arose, and examined every nook in the room, for the voice seemed to issue from the corner nearest to himself. In an agony of feeling he exclaimed:

“Henry—is it indeed you? Have you at last been permitted to communicate with me?”

The reply came with fearful distinctness:

“I have been permitted to do so. My prayers have at length won this grace from the powers of the air.”

“And what is it you wish of me?” fell mechanically from the lips of Fontaine.

“Expiation—justice. You have usurped my inheritance, while my child lives in indigence. Seek her—take her to your heart in place of the stranger you have welcomed to your home.”

“Your child, Henry? I did not know that such a being was in existence!”

“Savella Savelli was my wife. I married her privately. After my death, a daughter was born whom the mother did not live to see. Seek her—bring her back to her own, and I forgive you all.”

“Where shall I find her?”

“She is on her way to you now. Receive her, I command you, as you hope for forgiveness for your deadly sin, and God will accept your repentance.”

The voice scarcely arose above a whisper, but the words were distinctly articulated, and Fontaine almost imagined that he felt the breath of the speaker playing among his hair, and he could have sworn that his brother uttered them.

He sunk back completely unnerved, and muttered:

“Good heavens! am I the victim of a delusion, or can this, indeed, be real?”

The response came almost in his ear:

“Claude, I am here beside you, although your grosser senses render you incapable of seeing me. My child—my Savella—is on her way to you, accompanied by her aunt and a holy father in the church. My daughter is of the old Fontaine race; take her to your heart of hearts, and I forgive you all the past.”

“Let her come,” gasped the excited listener. “I will do justice to her; does that promise satisfy you, Henry?”

“It does—it does. My mission is accomplished. Farewell for the present—but I shall visit you again.”

The tones seemed to recede in the distance; but as they faded away, Fontaine recovered himself, and peered into the darkening twilight to see if no one was near the windows who could have played a trick upon him, though he scarcely believed that any one would dare to attempt such a thing. He strode to each window in succession, but he detected no one beneath them; the lawn was shaded by trees, but no shrubbery grew near the walls which could conceal a living form; and with a feeling of inexpressible horror, Fontaine came to the conclusion that the dead had actually spoken with him.

He bowed his head upon the table, and his strong frame was shaken even to agony by the thronging phantoms that came up from the past, accusing, jeering at him; and Claude Fontaine began to fear that the long dreaded spectre had at last clutched him in its fatal grasp.

Was the voice real? or only a delusion of his wandering senses? He at length drew a box of matches toward himself, and lighted the lamp, a service he did not permit any one to perform for him in that apartment. Its glare flashed upon a face as rigid, and colorless as stone, and with faltering steps he went to a book-shelf and took down an abstruse mathematical work. He muttered:

“I will test my sanity by this. If I can comprehend it, I am still safe, for no madman could solve its problems.”

For many moments he was thus occupied, and the hue of life gradually returned to his features. As he closed the book, he again spoke aloud :

"I am not yet mad; but I certainly heard that voice—I surely heard, and answered it. My niece—my brother's child, on her way to me! I will wait—if she comes then I shall know it was no hallucination, and my promise shall be performed. Oh, God! forgive the sin that has been so bitterly repented of, and help me to atone for it."

At that moment gay voices were heard without, and a party of young equestrians dismounted in front of the piazza. Isola had returned from her evening ride accompanied by Fanny Berkely, escorted by George and Philip. A bright moon was still shining, and he heard the visitors agree to take supper at La Fontaine, and return afterwards to the Vale.

They entered the house, and a few moments afterwards Isola, brilliant with animation, came in, and gave him an account of her meeting with them. A pang struck to his heart as he looked on her. This child of his heart was to have a rival in the home he had taught her to look on as her own. If the voice had spoken truly, one was coming whose claims on the inheritance he had fondly destined for her were superior to hers. Fontaine drew her toward himself, and held her in his silent clasp so long that she became alarmed. She suddenly said :

"Father, you are ill. Has anything happened to agitate you? You look as pallid as the dead."

"I am not quite well I believe, but nothing is the matter with me that should alarm you; go to your young friends, Isola, and be as happy as you can. I shall not appear to-night, send me in some tea, and toast—that is all I require."

She regarded him with a wistful expression, her small hand passed caressingly through the whitened locks that shaded his brow.

"Come with me," she pleaded, "Philip is in one of his most amusing veins, and he and George have sparkled with wit during our ride; besides, Fanny has a message for you from cousin Carrie."

"No—no—" he drearily responded, the dark hour is again upon me, and I can see no one—no one—go back to your friends, and excuse me, my love."

He put her from him, but as she turned unwillingly away, he caught sight of a tear rolling over the cheek lately so bright with spirit and animation. He kissed her tenderly, and said :

"Do not mind me, darling. I shall soon assume my usual cheerfulness; by this time, you should be accustomed to my wayward moods. I have indulged them, till I can no longer control them, and you must exercise forbearance toward me."

"Oh father, do not speak thus! Forbearance from *me* to *you*! you, my best earthly friend, my only one, when I most needed protection, you wound my heart by such words. I am your child—your slave, if you command it, for no service is too great for love like mine to perform for you. Oh! if I *could* console you! If I could bring joy to your life I should be too—too happy."

"Isola," Fontaine replied, with grave tenderness, "you have been, you still are, the darling of my heart. No other claimant on my affections shall ever take from you your first place in them. But in my sad moods no earthly voice can bring peace to me. With God alone I must wrestle with the gloom that at times overpowers me; but I always emerge from it. Let not your young heart be saddened by my fits of misanthropy. They are apart from you, and your life shall have no part in them. Go now, be happy with those you love, and forget that I am near you."

"As if that were possible to any of us; least of all to me; but I will obey you."

As she turned away a sudden thought struck him, and he arrested her steps by inquiring:

"Isola, have either of these young men yet ventured on making a declaration to you? Have you permitted them to speak of what I am aware they both feel for you?"

She blushed vividly, and quickly said:

"No, sir, I have not permitted it. I like them both too well to allow them to become rivals for my preference. Besides, father, you have told me that until a woman is more mature than I am, she is incapable of choosing the companion of her future life."

"So I did, but the heart is not always amenable to reason. Yours may have spoken in favor of one of these young men, for both I believe to be noble and true. If such is the case, give me but a glimpse of the truth, and—yet no, why should I seek to control fate?"

He broke off abruptly, and Isola regarded him with extreme surprise. She asked:

"Is it your wish that I should marry one of them?"

"I believe it is your destiny to become the wife of one or the other," he gravely replied. "Both have loved you from childhood, and if the world were sought over, I do not think two nobler specimens of manhood could be found. George is honest and true as steel, with a sound head and an affectionate heart. Philip is brilliant, and at times erratic, but he has the true metal in him too. You are not a coquette, Isola, and in your heart there must be a preference for one over the other, though you will not betray it."

Again a burning flush passed over her face, tinging even her slender throat. In a low voice she said:

"It is true; but you probe my heart cruelly."

"Not cruelly, but kindly, my child, for I have reasons of vital importance for knowing the secret wishes of your soul. To which has my Pearl given her heart?"

"With my love of the beautiful, how can you ask me?"

To him who is peerless in person, as I believe him to be in mind."

A shade of disappointment passed over Fontaine's face, and he slowly said:

"I should have known as much. Philip is irresistible, yet I had mentally devoted him to Fanny, and given you to poor George. Oh, Isola, his noble heart is worth all the beauty of the other; but since your choice is made, I will say nothing against it. I have changed my mind concerning early marriages. Since Vane loves you, let him speak—I can make all right with his father and mother."

Isola laid her hand in his, and softly thanked him, though she was in a state of complete bewilderment as to what could have produced this sudden change in his sentiments. Hitherto she had scarcely dared to acknowledge her preference to her own heart, but the sudden sense of happiness that thrilled her being told her how much progress Philip had already made in winning her. Fontaine gently said:

"My precious Isola, your happiness shall be my first care, and, whatever happens, I will do all that is in my power to ensure it."

Something in his voice aroused her fears, and she anxiously asked:

"Is any calamity impending over us, father? You speak as if you apprehended something of the kind."

"No, no—do not suffer your dream of love to be clouded by fears that have no foundation. I can secure your future, and it is my unalterable purpose to do so. Go now, I wish to be alone."

He led her to the door, again pressed his lips upon her brow, and closed it on her. She heard the lock turn, and in a complete whirl of feeling rejoined her companions. Her expressive face was legible as an open book, and the three who were awaiting her return saw that something had strongly agitated her.

George Berkely anxiously inquired if Mr. Fontaine was indisposed, to which Isola briefly responded that he was too much so to make his appearance, and he had commissioned her to offer his apologies.

Philip Vane did not speak, but an eloquent flash from his expressive eyes was involuntarily responded to by those of Isola, and then the tell-tale flush arose even to her brow. George saw it, and a jealous pang convulsed his heart, but he was magnanimous enough to say to himself:

"If she loves Vane, and he will make her happy, I must bear my disappointment; but oh, Isola! my heart is better worth your acceptance than his, beautiful and brilliant as he certainly is."

"Is anything more than usual the matter with Mr. Fontaine?" asked Fanny. "I particularly wished to see him, for cousin Carrie commissioned me to tell him that she this morning received a letter from a friend in New York, in which he is particularly interested. She would have sent it to him, but a portion of it referred to the private affairs of Mrs. Elmsly herself, and she could not do so."

"Father has only one of his periodical attacks of gloom, and at such times he never appears. I think it will be best for you to write down cousin Carrie's message, and I will send it in to him with his tea. Here are writing materials."

Fanny had scarcely done so when supper was announced, and the party gathered around the table. George seemed unaccountably depressed, and the brilliant sallies of Philip met no response; he seemed scarcely to hear them, so deeply were his thoughts engaged; but the two girls laughed, and responded to Philip in the same vein till George felt almost oppressed by their mirth. Isola was radiant with the new happiness that had arisen on her life, and Vane thought:

"She is won! I have only to speak and this exquisite creature with her magnificent inheritance, will be mine! Eureka! Philip Vane, you were born under a lucky star!"

A note in reply to Fanny's was brought back by Caesar.

"Ask Miss Carleton to copy that portion of her letter in which I am interested, and I will send a servant over for it to-morrow morning. She will understand why I cannot come for it in person. C. F."

Soon afterwards the young guests departed, and Philip rode with his companions to the point from which their roads diverged. When he parted from them he galloped rapidly toward Dunlora to inform his mother that at last he had gained the hope, amounting almost to a certainty, that Isola would not refuse to become his wife.

The two he parted from rode on for more than a mile in utter silence, which was at last broken by Fanny.

"I never saw Isola look so lovely as she did to-night. Her eyes were filled with light, and her gayety seemed almost hysterical. Something must have moved her very deeply while she was with Mr. Fontaine; but, whatever it was, it made her very happy."

"Yes," replied her brother bitterly, "she was indeed radiant; yet has she never seemed so widely removed from me as within the last hour. Oh, Fanny, when I foolishly uttered my boyish boast that I would marry the heiress of La Fontaine, I had no thought that I should love her to that degree that even if she were friendless and homeless I would take her to my heart as the most precious treasure of my life. Yet she is lost to me—lost—lost—lost!"

Fanny listened in bewildered surprise:

"Why should you say that, George? Isola has not accepted any one else; you surely do not think Philip will be your successful rival?"

"I know it," he gloomily responded. "To-night, for the first time, Isola betrayed her preference for him. I shall go away from the Valley, Fanny; I cannot stay here and see my heart's love given to another. I shall accept the

offer which my father is now considering; I will go to Europe as an attaché to the Russian embassy, for now there is nothing to detain me here."

"Dear brother, what can I do without you? I have so long looked forward to your return from college, and now you will leave me again. Even if it is true that Philip and Isola are in love with each other, they will be so much taken up with their own affairs, that in your absence I shall be left quite alone."

"Not quite, I fancy, Miss Fanny. You forget that you are to make your début in society in Richmond this winter, under the auspices of aunt Stuart; and your pretty face, and glib tongue, will doubtless win you scores of admirers. You have a hereditary right to be a belle, and I expect you will queen it right royally over your vassals."

Fanny laughed merrily:

"I don't intend to hold the sceptre as long as cousin Carrie has. *She* will never illustrate the proverb of 'going through the cane-brake,' but *I* might chance to do so, for I am only a little nightingale, while she is a bird of Paradise."

"I am glad to see that you are not conceited, Fanny. Since you measure your own merits so accurately, I need not read you a lesson on humility. I have received mine to-night, so let us go on, for the hour is later than we are in the habit of being out."

Their spirited steeds were put in more rapid motion, and the two soon reached the Vale. The family had all retired except Miss Carleton, who sat up for them; Fontaine's note was given to her, and before she slept she complied with his request, wondering what changes would be brought about by the strange revelation she was about to make to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILIP VANE BROUGHT TO THE TRIAL.

CLAUDE FONTAINE slept little that night. When he retired at a late hour his broken slumbers were haunted by weird visions, and in fancy the scene of the library was acted over and over. He would start up with that familiar voice again ringing in his ears, and it required all the strength of his reason to convince himself that it was not the phantasy of a dream.

If it had actually come to him again in the silence of the night, in the state in which his mind then was, the consequences might have been fatal indeed; but in the dreary quiet of the sleeping household no sound was heard that he could not rationally account for.

He arose with the first light of dawn, and walked several miles before the usual breakfast hour, but that meal he ordered to be served in the seclusion of his library, and with it came the note from Miss Carleton which he had desired Cæsar to send for on the previous night.

He had no appetite, and after drinking a cup of coffee he dismissed the old servant, and broke the seal. He read the lines twice over with a strange doubt as to their reality, for the quick realization of the assurance he believed he had supernaturally received seemed to stun his mind and deprive him of his usual clear rapidity of judgment.

Miss Carleton had literally copied the paragraph from her friend's letter, making no comments of her own. It ran thus:

"I have something very singular to tell you, in which that distingué Mr. Fontaine, who called on us as a friend of yours when he was in New York, is deeply interested,

though the story is so romantic as to be almost improbable. You know that my husband is a shipping merchant, and lately three passengers from Italy arrived in one of his sailing vessels. They were a priest, a lady of middle age, and a girl apparently about seventeen. They all speak English well, though with a slight foreign accent. Mr. Summerton is an Englishman, who has spent many years in Italy. He brought with him a letter of introduction to Mr. Elmsly, in which the party were recommended to his kindness and hospitality: they were invited to our house, and have been with us since their arrival.

"Now comes the romance of the affair. They have come to the United States to establish the claims of the young girl, Savella Fontaine, to her father's fortune. The elder lady is the half sister of her mother, who it seems was married privately to the brother of Claude Fontaine while in Italy many years ago. He was murdered by a jealous rival, and the aunt has reared his posthumous child as her own. She has educated her niece carefully, and she seems a quiet, lady-like young person, though not particularly attractive.

"I naturally inquired why they had not before made known the claims of the heiress, and Senora Roselli stated that until very lately she had been unable to obtain authentic information as to the State from which the two brothers came, as they were only known to her family as young Americans of fortune, who came to Rome to attend the Easter festivals.

"On the assassination of the younger brother, Claude Fontaine left Rome almost in a state of distraction; her sister lay prostrated by illness, and it was many weeks before she was in a condition to confess her marriage to Henry and produce the certificate which proved its validity. The priest who accompanies them performed the ceremony, and he has brought with him the proof which authenticates it.

"I remember with interest the attractive child Mr. Fontaine had with him when he visited us in New York; he told me that she was his adopted daughter, and it was his purpose to endow her with his whole fortune. The claims of the new heiress will compel him to divide the inheritance; but from all I hear, it is large enough to bear that, and give a handsome fortune to each one. But Isola, with her promise of beauty and sweetness, must have developed into a far more worthy representative of his family than this girl ever can be; yet her shyness among strangers, who speak a language that is not perfectly familiar to her, probably prevents her from appearing to as great advantage as she might under other circumstances.

"Madame Roselli is still a handsome woman, who expresses herself well, and Mr. Summerton is a well-bred and agreeable man. A few days since he was called into the country to visit an old friend who was known to him in Italy, but on his return the whole party will set out for Virginia immediately."

The letter fell from Fontaine's hands: it was true then; the warning had only been a prelude to the actual arrival of those who came to invade the privacy of his home, and demand restitution of the rights of the niece of whose very existence he had not hitherto been aware.

As the child of his brother, she was welcome to the fortune that rightfully belonged to her, but of Senora Roselli, whom he well remembered, Fontaine thought with a shudder. To her counsels, to her perfidy, he owed the wretchedness of his life, and he felt as if the demon of his fate was swooping toward him in her person; yet he dared not attempt to evade her.

Senora Roselli must come—she would reign paramount in his house through the dire power she possessed over him, for to her alone was known the dark secret of his life, and he felt that she would yet abuse it to his own undoing.

The tranquillity he had so striven to attain was forever at an end; under the goading of that turbulent and uncontrollable spirit, he would be crushed till the end came—and what must that end be? He shrank back appalled, and pressed his cold hands upon his burning brow in irrepressible emotion.

Would this ominous trio come upon him without warning? Was it their purpose to take him by surprise, that they had not written to inform him of their arrival in the country, and the object they had in view in coming?

For hours he paced the floor, but his perturbed thoughts were at last interrupted by the appearance of Cæsar, bearing a waiter on which a letter was placed. It bore the New York post-mark, and was addressed in a strange hand.

Hastily dismissing the old man, Fontaine tore it open and read the following words:

“NEW YORK, June 20, 1852.

“MR. FONTAINE—*Sir*:—I address you in behalf of a young relative of your own, who has hitherto been prevented by circumstances from making known her existence to you.

“Till very lately the long-sought clue to the home and position of your deceased brother could not be gained, though it has been diligently sought for years. He left a daughter, who has been educated with the belief that she would yet be able to discover the abode of her father's family, and claim the inheritance he left behind him. The writer of this is an humble priest by whose aid the tie that bound together the parents of this young girl was cemented. The certificate of the marriage is in my possession, and I have never ceased to take a warm interest in the helpless child whose father perished by violence, whose mother survived her birth but a few hours.

“Your niece has been educated to fill a high station, and I myself have taught her the language of her father's kin-

dred. She will reflect no discredit on the blood of the Fontaines, proud as I am told it is.

“I write this letter to inform you that she is now in this city, accompanied by Senora Roselli, the widowed sister of her unfortunate mother, and a few days, perhaps a few hours after this reaches you, we shall be at La Fontaine.

“Hoping that we shall receive a hospitable welcome from its owner, I am yours respectfully,

THOMAS SUMMERTON.”

Though Fontaine had never before suspected the marriage of his brother with Savella Savelli, on reviewing the circumstances, nothing appeared to him more probable, and here was positive proof that it had taken place. The priest who officiated and the certificate were both forthcoming, and the young girl who was on her way to him was certainly Henry's legitimate heiress.

Then a new thought occurred to him, which caused his heart to tremble for the future of his adopted child. In his anxiety to offer such atonement as was possible, he had annually expended in charity the income arising from his brother's portion of the paternal inheritance; his beneficent donations were secretly given, but from the hour the property came into his possession, every dollar of its income had been devoted to some benevolent purpose. The aggregate now amounted to so large a sum, that if the arrears were demanded, his own estate must be almost absorbed by them, and little be left to portion his beloved Isola.

Would Philip Vane still seek the dowerless girl who had been won as the heiress of his wealth? He recalled her recent confession—remembered the worldly spirit of Vane's parents—and shuddered. If long life were granted him, he could still endow Isola with such a fortune as would make her a desirable match even to the heir of Dunlora; but with a constitution broken by mental suffering—a dread

weight crushing him into the fearful night of insanity—how could he pledge himself to do so much in the uncertain future?

He already felt the cold shadow of that woman's approaching presence beneath his roof, and he would have given much to be able to provide a safe shelter for his darling before she came to displace her, and enthrone another in the home she had been taught to look on as her own.

He must tell her—he must prepare her for the arrival of those who might now at any moment appear; and after a bitter struggle with himself, he rang, and ordered Cæsar to say to his young lady that he wished to speak with her in the library.

The old man returned almost immediately, and said:

"De young Mistis hab walked out an hour ago wid Mr. Philip, sar."

So, Isola had obeyed him, and Vane had availed himself of the first glimpse of encouragement to seek a confirmation of his newly awakened hopes. He waited in suspense till he heard them return, after telling Cæsar that if Mr. Vane wished to speak with him, he would receive him.

The old servant chuckled over this unexpected order, and privately informed Aggy:

"Dat Marse Claude was a comin' roun' agin; dat dis las' solencolly fit was gwine off a'ready, an' de time was comin' when he'd stop gittin' so highfalutin dat he wouldn't speak to nobody for days togedder."

Cæsar placed himself on the watch for the return of the young people, and when he saw the glowing face of Philip as he came forward with the arm of Isola resting in his own, her hand lying confidingly in his, he readily comprehended what had taken place; and after diving into his wife's dominions, to warn her of the probability of a wedding coming off soon in the old house, he respectfully presented himself before Philip, and inquired if he wished to see the master.

Isola had left him and he was walking to and fro on the piazza in a glow of triumphant happiness. He paused, and spoke in his clear, musical tones, which now vibrated with excited feeling:

"I am extremely anxious to speak with Mr. Fontaine, Cæsar, but I am afraid he will refuse to receive me. Go to him, you dear old fellow, and if you bring me back a favorable answer I will give you a dollar."

The old man drew himself up with an air of offended dignity:

"Thank you, Mr. Philip, but de people 'bout *my* Master's house don't 'cept o' rails. We gits 'nuff from him widout 'ceiven' presents from de gemplin we waits on."

Philip laughed, thrust back the coin he had drawn forth, and said:

"Well, well—only get me permission to speak with Mr. Fontaine, and I shall be much indebted to you."

Cæsar rapped on the door of the library, and when his master opened it, he oracularly said:

"Mr. Philip *does* want to see you, sar; an' I'spec' he has suffin' *berry* perticular to say to you."

"Tell him to come to me, then."

In a few moments Vane entered the room, and grasping the hand of Fontaine with nervous ardor, plunged at once into what he had to say:

"I have come to ask of you the happiness of my life, Mr. Fontaine. I adore Isola—I have ventured to tell her so, and she has referred me to you. Am I too presumptuous in hoping that our mutual affection will have your approval?"

Fontaine seriously replied:

"My dear Philip, but yesterday I would have responded yes with all my heart, but now I am compelled to regret that you have so precipitately spoken on this subject with my daughter. Sit down, and let me tell you what must be made known to you before we proceed a step further in this affair."

Philip thought that he alluded to the unknown origin of Isola, and he quickly said :

"Oh, sir, I love Isola with all my heart, and I can take her appearance and manners as guarantees of gentle birth. No one can look on her, and doubt that she is of good blood."

With slight stateliness Fontaine replied :

"Of course, *my* adopted child, with her noble nature, and graceful accomplishments, is the equal of the best ; but I did not refer to that, Philip. It is something that the worldly estimate far more highly than even family. You, like others have believed that Isola is the heiress of my fortune. Till very lately I thought so myself ; but a new claimant has arisen, of whose existence I was ignorant till within the few last hours."

Philip listened in breathless amazement, and the eager flush died out of his face as he faltered :

"I—I do not understand you, Mr. Fontaine. You have always spoken of Isola as your heiress, though of course that has not influenced my choice."

His evident perturbation did not please Fontaine, and he coldly said :

"I shall soon be able to judge as to that, Mr. Vane. Read this letter, which reached me only this morning, and see how materially the prospects of Isola must be affected by its contents."

Philip nervously grasped the paper, and ran his eyes over the lines it contained. He felt as if the floor was receding beneath his feet, and so stunning was the blow that for a few moments he was in such a whirl of feeling that he retained no power of thought or self-control.

Fontaine watched him keenly, and the bitter conviction came to him that his heart's darling had found no shelter from the approaching storm in this man's love. He sat quite silent, waiting for Vane to speak.

At last Philip slowly said :

"This is indeed strange and unexpected news. But is it not possible, sir, that these people may be impostors ? If this young girl is really your niece, why has not her existence been before made known to you ?"

"The reason is sufficiently explained in the letter you hold in your hand. Although I never before suspected the marriage of my brother, since that letter came I have recalled many circumstances that confirm its probability. The priest who accompanies my niece brings with him the proof of its legality, which, of course, I shall require him to exhibit. I am also well acquainted with Senora Roselli, who, it seems, adopted her sister's child, and reared her as her own. It is my purpose to receive this young lady as my brother's heiress, and at once transfer to her the inheritance of her father."

"That will be but just, since you believe in the genuineness of her claim. But your own fortune is yours to do with as you please ; Isola will have enough to render her acceptable to my parents ; for myself, I trust I need scarcely say that I would gladly make her my wife without a farthing ; but you know how worldly my father is, and—and——"

His voice died away in an inaudible murmur, and Fontaine pitilessly went on ; he was resolute to probe the depths of his soul, and see if real, pure love was the foundation of his desire to win his darling.

"I must, in honor, say to you, Mr. Vane, that I have used the income arising from my brother's property, it matters not how ; it is all expended, and I shall be liable for it to my niece. I have saved little from my own annual revenue, for I can see little use in hoarding money when there are so many good uses for it. Unless the term of my life is prolonged to a much later period than I dare hope for, I shall not be able to cancel this debt without giving La Fontaine

to my niece as an equivalent. A few thousand dollars are all I can reasonably hope to save for the child of my adoption."

The color faded from Philip's face as he listened to this exposé of Fontaine's actual position, and the letter fell from his nerveless grasp. Why had he been so precipitate as to commit himself irrevocably? A few days of delay, and he would have been forewarned of the precipice over which he hovered, and, without compromising his honor, could have receded from the position of a pretender to Isola's hand.

Then her image arose before him in her young beauty, in her guileless trust, and he felt that it would be bitter to give her up, though bereft of fortune. He spoke with genuine feeling:

"This is a cruel blow, Mr. Fontaine. I am afraid it will shatter the dream of my young manhood into fragments, for my parents will never consent that I shall marry without fortune. You know them—their way of life; their ideas of worldly prestige. I love Isola as I shall never love any other woman; but I fear—I sadly fear that—that all hope of—of our speedy union is at an end."

"Better speak the truth at once, Philip, and say that it is forever ended," said Fontaine, drearily. "If my child could have found a refuge in your disinterested affection, I would gladly have given her to you; but I plainly see that the heiress was as much sought as the woman, and when Isola comprehends this, she will estimate your devotion at its true value. What has this day passed need not go beyond ourselves, and I wish you to understand that for the future your attentions to Miss Fontaine can be dispensed with."

He arose, stern, cold and haughty; but Philip started up and impulsively grasped his hand.

"Oh, sir—oh, Mr. Fontaine, this is too hard! You judge me too harshly. I love Isola deeply, truly; if I

were independent of my parents, I would make her my own without delay; but they will never consent to receive for me a portionless wife. I am miserable enough at the destruction of the brightest dream that ever a human heart cherished, without having your displeasure added to the burden I must bear."

"Your regrets will soon pass away, for your nature is not one to cherish that which does not contribute to your happiness; but to *her* what consolation can I offer for the loss of both lover and fortune at one stroke?" said Fontaine, bitterly. "If you had not spoken of your love, the blow would not have fallen so heavily as it must now do; but I was to blame for that. I thought to save her from the mortifications, the possible unhappiness, that approach; I deemed that your devotion might avert their heaviest weight; but you have shown me your heart, and I pronounce it unworthy of her acceptance. It was better for her to know this before she gave you the control of her fate than to discover it when too late. Good morning, Mr. Vane; our interview is ended."

In an agony of feeling, which at the moment was sincere, Philip implored:

"Do not deprive me of all hope, Mr. Fontaine. Let me try what can be done with my father and mother. They both regard Isola with sincere respect and affection, and they may be wrought on to listen to my prayers. Oh, sir! I cannot—I cannot give up one I have loved so long and so dearly."

Fontaine was touched by the earnestness of this appeal, and the lofty dignity of his manner relaxed a little as he said:

"Make the effort if you desire it; but I hope nothing from the result. Your father is a man of the world, and although his resources seem to be ample, he evidently desires to increase them in every legitimate manner. For

that I cared not, so long as I believed you sincere in your own attachment to Isola; but, Philip, I cannot conceal from myself that you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. I can read your soul now, and after the first bitterness of this disappointment has passed away, you will even be capable of congratulating yourself on your escape from a marriage that cannot elevate your own interests. I believe that nature gave you many good impulses; but education and example have done much toward perverting them."

Philip listened to these words with varying color, and he haughtily replied:

"Since such is your opinion, sir, so freely expressed to me, perhaps it is best that we shall not be more intimately connected. I shall mourn over the rupture of the tie that binds me to Isola, but even that is better than the endurance of contempt from him with whom I should be so nearly connected through her, if she became my wife. Good morning, Mr. Fontaine; I came hither happy, and hopeful: I leave wretched, and broken-hearted."

Fontaine did not offer him his hand, and bowing profoundly, Philip Vane went out, looking so different from the radiant man that entered the library, that Cæsar hastened to inform his wife "dat no weddin' wus to come off arter all, for de marster had sent off de young gemplin lookin' as ef de world had come to a end for him."

Isola saw the face of Philip as he came from her father's apartment, and she was heart-struck by its expression. She had been pacing to and fro in the hall awaiting the termination of this momentous interview on which she fondly believed the happiness of his life depended, and when he came forward pale, despairing, she rushed impulsively toward him and exclaimed in breathless emotion:

"Oh Philip, what can have happened? Why—why do you wear such an expression as that?"

"Ask *him*," he hoarsely responded, pointing in the direction of the library. "He has crushed every hope out of my heart. Oh Isola, *you* will not believe me mercenary whatever may happen. I love you; I will *always* love you alone, believe that, if it will console you, though fate may forbid our union."

She shrank away from him bewildered.

"What can so have changed him? It was at his express command that I permitted you to address me."

"And yet he has—go to him, Isola, let him tell you himself what has happened. Yet, but for his hard and cruel words, I would never have resigned my claims on you—never!"

"Then you have resigned them?" and the words seemed rather to be breathed than spoken, though the flashing eyes, and curling lips, expressed more scorn than wounded affection.

"I have not given up all hope, Isola, though a union between us is just now impossible."

She spoke more firmly now.

"If such is my father's decision, Mr. Vane, he must have good reasons for it, and I recal the pledge I gave you on conditions which it seems, are not to be fulfilled."

She was turning away, anxious to conceal from him the expression of anguish which she felt her face must bear upon it, but Philip caught her hand and impetuously carried it to his lips.

"Your pride belies your true nature, Isola. If you have truly loved me, you cannot give me up at the command of your guardian. If *my* parents give their consent, I will yet bear you off in triumph."

She released her hand from his grasp, and the color slowly returned to her cheeks, as she firmly said:

"I am devoted to my father above all earthly beings. What he desires me to do I would attempt even if it broke

my heart. I shall give my hand to no lover who has not his full, and unconditional approval."

"And this you call love!" exclaimed Philip passionately. "You have never really cared for me. I see it plainly enough now, for if you loved me, you could not speak thus."

"Philip!" she gently replied, "with me there are things too sacred to be tampered with, and the chief one is my entire devotion to him who has stood to me in the place of a father; so implicit is my faith in his goodness and just judgment, that I can never find it in my heart to dispute his authority, to rebel against his absolute control over my earthly destiny. I do not deny the preference I have felt for you, but if he condemns it, 'tis not without good cause, and when I have heard his reasons, I shall feel bound to submit to them. Your heart will not break over this disappointment, and mine may suffer, but it knows how to endure. Good bye, Philip; forget the words that passed between us so short a time since, and be as happy as I fancied I might have made you."

She held out her trembling hand, which he grasped with such ardor as almost made her cry out, but she crushed back the emotion that threatened to suffocate her, and saw him depart without uttering the cry to return that arose to her lips, for heroic as was her submission to the will of her guardian, Isola felt that in that moment she resigned the first bright dream of her opening life.

Yet it was Philip's personal beauty that had fascinated her artist soul, more than the changeless love which endureth to the end. She had believed him devoted to her, and flattered by his graceful attentions, she had been won to return his affection, in the delusive belief that the outward perfection of his form was the symbol of the lofty and noble soul within.

When once convinced that there was little correspondence

between the physical and moral beauty, she would have strength to put aside her passing fancy, but now it was with deep anguish she saw him depart in anger, perhaps never to return. She threw herself on a sofa, and burying her face in the friendly pillow, a torrent of tears burst forth which somewhat relieved the tension around her heart.

CHAPTER IX.

GATHERING SHADOWS.

A HAND whose touch was familiar to her, was placed tenderly on Isola's head, and lifting it, she saw Fontaine regarding her with an expression of infinite sympathy and compassion. She started up, threw herself upon his breast, and exclaimed:

"Oh father! why—why have you done this? But yesterday you bade me encourage Philip, and to-day you have sent him forever from me."

"Come with me to the privacy of my library, and I will explain to you, Isola, what may appear inconsistent in my conduct."

Fontaine almost carried the agitated girl across the piazza, and placed her in a large chair near the open window. He poured out a glass of iced water, and insisted on her drinking a small portion of it.

When she seemed more composed, he gravely spoke:

"Pardon me, Isola, for I feel that I have been greatly to blame. Yesterday I acted under a strange presentiment that great changes are about to take place in this family; changes which must deeply influence your happiness. I *then* believed that Philip Vane was sincere in his attachment to you, that he would sacrifice much to gain you, and

I wished to secure your future from every chance ; therefore, I spoke to you as I did."

He paused, and after taking a few troubled turns across the floor, he returned to her side, and resumed in a tone of even deeper pathos than before.

"Isola, my presentiment has assumed a tangible shape, and Philip has himself receded from the proposal he made in the belief that you were to become the heiress of my fortune. I do him the justice to believe that he loves you, but when he learned that circumstances have occurred which render it impossible for me to endow you with my fortune, he showed me unmistakably that the *heiress* was as much sought as the beloved one. I asserted your dignity by dismissing his pretensions at once."

While he spoke many changes of feeling swept over the expressive face of the young girl. She wiped away her tears, and the glow of pride appeared upon her cheeks, as she replied :

"I believed Philip as noble and true as he is beautiful; but if he is what you assert, I will tear his image from my heart. Why should he have assumed that I should heir your wealth ? I—the creature of your bounty—the lonely waif that must have perished but for your kindness. Oh, sir, believe that I have never aspired to that—that I have never expected more of your generosity than the home you have given me beneath your roof—the education which has placed the means of independence within my reach."

"I have myself given rise to these expectations, Isola, for I have never concealed from my friends my intention to endow you with my fortune. Till this morning, I believed that I possessed the right to do so ; but a strange revelation has been this day made to me, which takes from me the power to control the disposition of my estate."

"I trust that no misfortune has happened to you, sir," she apprehensively asked. "For myself, I can labor to at-

tain independence, but you, so generous, so charitable to others, oh ! I hope that nothing has occurred to take from you the control of the people in this place."

"It is like your generous nature, my child, to be more thoughtful for others than for yourself," said Fontaine, with emotion. "No, Isola, so long as I live, my property will be held in my own hands, but at my death it must devolve on a new claimant, who comes hither to assume the position I have always designed for you. My brother's daughter has come from Italy to claim the inheritance, and the long arrears she is entitled to claim must task my utmost ability to pay. Read this fragment from Mrs. Elmsly's letter to Miss Carleton, and then the letter from the priest who accompanies my niece, and you will understand as much as I do myself."

Isola eagerly read them over, and with brightening eyes exclaimed :

"Oh, how happy you must be to hear of the existence of this young lady, your brother's daughter. Of course, she must be mistress here, but I shall still be your own child. I can still show you how tender and faithful is my gratitude for all your goodness to me. I have never aspired to the position of your heiress ; never have dreamed that you wished the poor unknown child your benevolence rescued from destitution to be considered as such. Thus you see that I have lost nothing but a heart that has proved faithless in the hour of trial ; I shall suffer from learning this, but it is better known now than later."

Fontaine was deeply affected. He drew her silently to his breast, while he muttered a mental prayer for the reward of her disinterested faithfulness to himself. When he released her, he said, in an agitated tone :

"The first place in my heart will always be yours, my sweet consolation, for what you have been to me God alone can know. Your home will still be with me—your privi-

leges those of a daughter of the house, even if my niece is installed as its future mistress. I shall still be able to provide for you as becomes the training you have received, so do not speak of gaining your own living, for no such thing will be necessary."

"Thank you, dear father; from your hand I am willing to receive everything as I have hitherto done; and the consciousness that I am important to you will suffice for my happiness. You shall see no shadow on my brow, no repining over the loss of a faithless heart. I will show you that I have strength to conquer an unworthy prepossession. Now let us speak of your niece. Tell me of those early days in Italy; of your lost brother."

An expression of intense pain swept over Fontaine's face, and he mournfully said:

"Ask me not to refer to that portion of my life, Isola. As its living memento, I dread beneath my roof the presence of the young girl who is coming. As the daughter of my unfortunate Henry, I will be strictly just to her, but I would have given much if she had remained in the land of her birth, and only called on me for the restitution of her fortune. But she is coming hither; she brings with her a woman of imperious temper, who will seek to sway all around her. But Senora Roselli shall have no power over you, my love. I will protect you from her at all hazards."

Isola listened in surprise.

"As a stranger here, this lady will scarcely attempt to interfere with the management of your family. I think I can protect myself from her encroachments if she attempts to make them. I have more spirit and independence than you give me credit for, father. I am sure that I shall love your niece, and I hope that I shall be able to win a place in her heart."

"If she is a worthy representative of her family, that will be an easy task, Isola. I must now go among my peo-

ple, and tell them of the young stranger, whose arrival I hourly anticipate. Since Savella will be their future mistress, they are even more deeply interested in her advent than I am. Think no more of Philip than you can help, my dear; for I declare to you on the faith of an honorable man, that I am convinced he is unworthy of a single regret."

Her lips slightly quivered, but she repressed the convulsive sigh that arose from her heart, and hurried to her own room to weep a few tears which were soon indignantly dashed away. Conscious that employment was the best remedy for the sadness that oppressed her, she set herself resolutely to work to prepare for the reception of the strangers, who might arrive at any moment.

The house was spacious, and every portion of it appropriately furnished. Isola walked through the bedrooms, and selected those she thought most suitable for the accommodation of the new guests. A chamber adjoining her own, which commanded a fine view from the windows, she destined for the heiress; and on the opposite side of the hall were two others, one of which she assigned to Senora Roselli, and the other to the priest. The latter she did not suppose would become a permanent resident at La Fontaine, as, after placing his protégée under the protection of her uncle, he would probably wish to return to his native land.

While Isola was thus employed, Aggy came up with a bewildered expression, and that ashen color overspreading her face which among her race indicates deep and painful emotion. When she saw her young lady she broke into a wailing cry, and said:

"Oh! dat ever I should live to see dis weary day. A new mistis—a furrin gal—is a comin' to de ole place! Marse Claude tole me an' my ole man; an' de joy o' my heart has to make way for dis stranger, who don' 'no nothin' 'bout our ways; who won't care for de poor darkies any more'n dey can

'tend an' wait on her. Oh! blessed Lor', I only wish pore ole Aggy had died afore this flustration come to her."

Isola softly said:

"This young lady is your master's niece, Mammer. She is of the old Fontaine blood of which you so often boast. Do not judge her harshly before you have seen her, and I am sure she will be untrue to her race if she is not kind in her nature."

"An' *you* can talk in praise o' her, you blessed angel! for you is one, ef de blessed Marster ever 'lowed one to come down to dis yeth. Young Mistis, you's bin raised wi' us, an' you un'stan's us, but dis new mistis is from furrin parts; dey ain't good for nothin', and I never seed any o' dose jabberin' people what knowed dat de darkey has souls as well as dereselves. She'll be hard on us—I know she will, for I feel it in my bones."

At another time, Isola could have smiled at this quaint expression, but now her heart was too full of its recent sorrow to indulge in even the semblance of mirth. She said everything to the old woman that could reconcile her to the course affairs had taken, and Aggy gradually took a more cheerful view of the future. With that resignation to the will of Heaven which is a prominent characteristic of the negroes, she said:

"Mebbe it'll be all for de bes', Missy, an' de Good Man knows what to sen' to us all. I aint bin a church member all dese years widout findin' out dat I's no right to set up my will agin His'n. He'll do the bes' for us all, little as we disarve it. But the new gal needn't 'spec' me to think as much o' her as I do o' you, an' ef dat lady what's comin' long o' her tries to ex'cise 'thority over *me*, I shall jes' let her know dat one mistis 'bout de house is nuff, an' you has been dat since you was a leetle creetur'."

"My dear Mammer," remonstrated Isola; "you have too much respect for yourself to step out of your place to be

rude to a stranger. Leave me to take care of myself; I am sure that I can get along smoothly with these strangers, if I am left to pursue my own course."

"I b'lieves you, honey; an' de ole 'oman is a born natural to talk so fool-like. Nobody can be cross to sich a sweet-spoken angel as you is. I promise you dat I'll do my bes' to please 'em, an' try an hole my onruly tongue; but dey musn't try me too fur, for ef de sperrit is willin' de flesh is weak. Come now, what was you arter in dese here rooms?"

"I was making a selection for our new friends, and looking around to see that everything is in order."

"I can answer for dat, young Mistis, for I looks after Cely myself every day to see dat she puts things to rights as she oughter. Young gals is mighty onsartin creeturs, but my granddarter is 'bout as good as de bes', at least on dis plantation."

"Yes—Celia makes me an excellent waiting maid. I have no fault to find with her."

"An' you wouldn't speak it, ef you had. I does hope dat marse Claude will at leas' give de chile to you, for 'twould break her heart to leave you for any one else."

At the suggestion of such a possibility, the heart of Isola painfully contracted, for she had formed a strong attachment to the young girl who had been her constant attendant since she came to La Fontaine. She quickly said:

"Have no apprehensions on that score, Mammer. My father will do all that is right, you may be sure."

"I hopes so, honey; but my 'sperience o' white folks is, dat dey're mighty onsartin; not but Marse Claude is a 'ception to de common rule. I knows he's a good man, but he looked mighty strange when he come to tell me 'bout dese here new people; an' I sometimes think dat suffin's workin' *here*," placing her hand on her forehead, "dat aint quite right. None o' de Fontaines was ever out'n dere

mines, as I knows on, but if such a thing is ever to happen at all, dere must be a beginnin' somewhere in de family, you know."

Isola felt as if a sudden blow had been dealt upon her heart; the strange melancholy of her guardian, his periodical seclusion from all society, had sometimes awakened the same fear. She remembered overhearing two ladies talking of him, and one inquired of the other if there was any hereditary tendency to insanity in the Fontaine family, at the same time expressing her opinion that Fontaine's peculiarities would some day assume the form of mania.

She knew that Aggy was an acute observer, and she asked with a faltering voice:

"Why should you suppose that such a calamity will ever fall on so good a man as my father? He has had much to sadden his life that I do not understand, but he is a true Christian, Mammer, and I trust that God will continue to bless him with health both of body and mind."

"I prays for de same, Missy, an' I hopes dat our pra'rs will be answered; dat's all *we* can do, an' now dat I've brought de tears in yer pretty eyes wi' my gabblin' talk, I'd better git back to my work an' make de house ready for de 'spection o' dese strangers."

When she was again left alone, Isola sat down and fell into a painful reverie. She had never indulged the expectation of becoming Mr. Fontaine's heiress, and in truth she was too young and too ignorant of the value of wealth to understand the change made in her own position by the advent of his niece. But she instinctively dreaded the changes about to be made on account of her protector. His will was law to the whole household, and there were times she knew when company or loud voices were oppressive to him. She had accustomed herself to watch his moods, and at such seasons to remove from him everything that could annoy him, but in the new order of things about to arise how could she hope to accomplish this?

Isola began dimly to realize that she must submit to become a cipher in the house which belonged by inheritance to Savella Fontaine, and possibly she might even be regarded as an interloper. She endeavored to drive these unwelcome thoughts away, but they would intrude again and again, and Philip mingled painfully in the drama her fancy was picturing forth.

If Fontaine judged him accurately—if the wealth with which he had supposed she would be endowed, had been his chief attraction toward her, would he not readily transfer his allegiance to the one who came to claim it?

In vain did Isola repeat to herself that in that contingency she should despise Philip too much to regret his loss; she knew that it would be bitter pain to her to see him as devoted to another as he had lately been to her, and if Vane could have seen her pale face, her languid eyes, from which she would not permit the tears to fall, that were recoiling on her severely tried heart, he would have believed his own assertion—that he should yet bear her off in spite of Fontaine's opposition.

Isola did not again see her guardian on that day. When he came from the quarter, whither he went to inform the negroes that the hereditary heiress of his family was about to take up her abode in the home of her fathers, Fontaine retired at once to his apartment and remained strictly secluded through the remainder of the day.

Isola was glad of this, for her head and her heart ached in unison, and when Fanny Berkely rode over to La Fontaine late in the evening, she was half tempted to refuse to receive her. But as Fanny was a privileged person in that house, Isola could not well evade the interview to which she scarcely felt equal."

On hearing of the indisposition of her friend, Fanny sprang up stairs and burst into the room in a glow of excitement.

"I have but a moment to stay, Isola, for I came over under the escort of Pompey, and grandpa told me to be sure to come back before dark. What is the matter with you? Your face is flushed, and I do believe you have a fever."

"Oh, no, nothing so serious as that. My head only aches badly; I shall be quite well to-morrow; in fact, I must be well to do the honors to the strangers we are expecting."

"That is news to me, indeed. Who are coming, and where do they come from?"

"You have not heard then? I thought perhaps cousin Carrie had told you. Father has received a letter informing him that a niece, who was born in Italy, is now on her way to him, accompanied by her aunt and the priest who married her parents. We shall look for them every hour till they arrive."

Fanny looked wild; she dropped into a chair beside the bed on which Isola reclined, and asked:

"Why, where on earth has she kept herself all this time that her uncle knew nothing about her? for if he had, he would have brought her here before now."

"It seems that her father was privately married to her mother, who died a few days after her birth—Henry Fontaine, you know, was murdered, but I cannot explain how it occurred."

"And you? Oh! Isola, this will be a severe trial for you, I am afraid."

"No, my dear Fanny. I have never calculated on inheriting Mr. Fontaine's fortune, and I shall be glad to have a companion of my own age who, I hope, will permit me to love her."

Fanny impulsively grasped her hand.

"You dear Isola! you are the best and most disinterested girl I ever saw. But there's one good thing: Mr. Fontaine won't permit any one to impose on you, for he loves you too much for that."

"I am not afraid of that, Fanny. My headache was not caused by apprehension for my future, I assure you. Blessed with the affection of my dear father, I can always be happy."

Fanny bent over and kissed her forehead; then, after a few moments silence, she asked:

"What will Philip say to this change?"

She saw the pale shadow that crept over Isola's face, and was quick to interpret it; but she was too delicate to speak further on the subject.

Isola rallied all her strength and firmly said.

"Mr. Vane is already aware of it. He saw my father this morning, and—and he will never be more to me than he now is."

Fanny burst forth indignantly:

"What! did Philip Vane dare to show that his late devotion to you was instigated by mercenary motives? He evidently wished to marry you, Isola, and last evening I thought you showed that you like him better than one who is worth a dozen such men. Oh, me! what am I saying! I could bite my tongue for letting out poor George's disappointment."

"There is no harm done, my dear Fanny. Your brother has made no secret of his attachment to me. He knows that I have a great regard for him; but, now, I think I shall never marry at all. I will devote my life to my dear father, who may need me in the future. Let us not speak further of this; but do not judge poor Philip too harshly, for I believe that he really loves me."

"Love!" repeated Fanny, in a tone of intense scorn. "No, Isola, Philip's feelings do not deserve that sacred name. He cares more for his own precious self than for all the rest of the human family, yourself included. Doubtless he spoke of the opposition of his parents now you are no longer an heiress; but fond of money as Mr. and Mrs.

Vane are, they are not one iota behind their son in that respect. There! I have spoken my honest thoughts, Isola, and if Phil's fascinations and beauty have touched your heart, I advise you to rid yourself of their glamour as soon as possible. You see that I am wise enough in my own conceit to offer counsel to you, madcap as I am considered."

Isola faintly smiled.

"And very good counsel it is, Fanny. I shall implicitly follow it, since it coincides with my own judgment."

"That is lucky, for I have remarked that people never take advice that does not tally with their own feelings."

Fanny then asked innumerable questions concerning the strangers who were coming, and after learning all that could be told, she said:

"I came over to bring you a piece of news; but the catastrophe about to happen drove it all out of my head, important as it is to me. George is going away almost immediately. He has accepted the position of attaché to the new embassy to Russia, and he will go to Washington in a few days. To console me for parting from him, he promises to write back everything that can interest me, and to bring over to me any quantity of foreign wares. But I do hate to see him go, and now I shall regret it more than ever."

"I cannot see why, Fanny," said Isola, with awakened interest. "It will be a great advantage to your brother to visit foreign countries, and have admittance into a brilliant and polished court like that of the Czar. Congratulate George for me, and tell him I think he has acted wisely."

"Well, yes—perhaps he has, according to the wisdom of this world; but I should like to know what is to become of me in his absence? Here am I, a young lady without a single beau, and my only legitimate slave about to run off to the wilds of Russia. I thought when George left college I should have him to wait on and escort me everywhere. Heigho! I am afraid I shall be reduced to flirt with Philip

now you have thrown him off; only I am afraid he will desert me for the new heiress."

The expression of pain that flitted over the expressive face of Isola warned the giddy girl that she had wounded her friend, and she tenderly said:

"Forgive me, Isola. I was thoughtless; but the possibility may prove a reality, and 'forewarned is forearmed,' you know. I must go now; the sun is getting very low, and I shall have to scamper back at the top of Dashaway's speed, to be home in time to escape a reproof. I shall come to see the Italian girl as soon as I hear she has made her appearance. My! won't this be news to carry home!"

Bidding her friend a hurried adieu, Fanny flashed out, mounted her spirited steed, and rode rapidly in the direction of the Vale, followed by her sable groom.

As the shadows of night gathered around the old house, Fontaine vaguely thought of the strange incident of the previous night, and wondered if it would again be repeated. His nervous system had received a shock which still vibrated painfully, and the gathering darkness became oppressive to him. He stood beside the open window and in his heart adored the stars that gleamed from the deep blue concave above, for he was one to whom nature in all her aspects is beautiful, and full of beneficent power.

After a piercing glance over the silent lawn, Fontaine turned toward the table, and lighting the lamp, took up a book in the hope, that in its pages, he could bury the unquiet thoughts that filled his breast. He had just begun to comprehend the words his eyes ran over, when a musical clock which stood upon the mantel struck the hour, and then played a vesper chime whose solemn chords had often soothed him in his hour of melancholy. He listened to the sounds as they faded away upon the evening air, and forgot the volume he held.

Silence only broken by the singing of the myriads of

summer insects without, fell upon the room; this was startlingly interrupted by a sigh which seemed to be breathed into his very ear, and the voice that had addressed him on the previous evening again spoke:

"Claude, my brother, you now know that I was near you last night; that I spoke the truth, for you have received its confirmation."

Fontaine started forward, clutched at the empty air, and in an agony of doubt and anguish exclaimed:

"Henry! if it is indeed yourself, give me some palpable evidence of your presence. Let me see, let me touch you, that I may know that I am not the victim of a delusion."

"I am here beside you, Claude, but the power is not mine to reveal myself to you in a more tangible manner. The time may come when I shall be permitted to become visible to you. Watch and wait! for now my child is coming hither, I shall often linger near her, and watch over both her and you."

The listener shuddered, and wildly exclaimed:

"Oh God! what have I done to merit such a visitation as this! Henry! if you are indeed near me, I implore you to spare me. I shall go mad if you persecute me thus. Go back to the abode of spirits, and leave me to breathe out my wretched life in such peace as I may yet find. I swear to be a father to your child, to regard her as one of my own—will not that suffice to give peace to your wandering spirit?"

There was a long pause, and then the answer to his appeal came in a voice which seemed to be receding in the distance.

"I am going, Claude; but look to it that you keep your plighted word. My daughter shall be undisputed mistress here; she must have all—*all*, as the price of my blood. See that you fulfil my behests, or I will not answer for the consequences."

The voice seemed lost in infinity, and for hours Claude Fontaine sat gazing on vacancy, conscious of a terrible weight pressing on heart and brain, yet incapable of shaking it off. Henceforth he was to become the slave of a phantom! his acts to be watched, his conduct controlled by its dictates! Better far to die at once, and the fearful thought of self-destruction came to him. He had already borne as much as he believed humanity could endure, then why should he continue to drag out an existence that was henceforth to be made even more intolerable to him that it had hitherto been?

He arose, took out a case of pistols, and curiously examined the locks, one flash, and he was free! *free*? How could the suicide know that? Into what demon hands might not his enfranchised spirit fall after escaping from its earthly tenement?

Fontaine believed in the immortality of the soul, and he knew that his was stained with a crime which he feared was inextinguishable.

What then would he gain by rushing into the presence of his awful Judge to be cast into outer darkness as the punishment for his own death and that which weighed so heavily upon his conscience.

Then Isola arose before him alone, helpless, possibly homeless, and he thrust the dire temptation from him. He replaced the weapons, locked the drawer in which they were kept, and falling on his knees prayed for pardon with a penitent heart.

CHAPTER X.

PHILIP REPORTS TO HIS MOTHER.

PHILIP VANE rode away from La Fontaine in a state of mind it would be difficult to describe. Sorrow and resentment at the loss of Isola, mingled with joy that he had not been irrevocably committed to marry her. With fortune, he would have preferred Isola to any other woman in the world; but without it, he could never consent to accept happiness as an equivalent for the brilliant future he was resolved to achieve.

The opposition of his parents afforded him a safe excuse, but without that his course would still have been the same. He estimated his exquisite self far too highly to think for a moment of taking to his heart of hearts a girl whose family and even name were unknown, unless the dazzle of great wealth cast into the shade the obscurity of her origin.

Yet Philip had some feeling, and so far as he was capable of loving, he loved Isola. He rode like the wind till he came in sight of Dunlora, and then checked his panting steed that he might recover his usual equanimity before he appeared in the presence of his mother to announce the signal downfall of all the air castles they had mutually erected.

Dunlora stood upon a level plateau, from which the ground swept away in verdant undulations, shaded by groups of forest trees. The house was a beautiful modern villa, with a portico in front supported by Corinthian columns. The place was kept in perfect order, and a more attractive looking residence for a man of means could not be found in the valley.

Philip passed through the ornamented gate, and avoiding the carriage sweep, dismounted at a side entrance and

threw his bridle to the lad that came out to take his horse. He asked:

"Is my father at home, Pete?"

"No, sar; he have gone to Ginral Berkely's, I b'lieves."

"So much the better," muttered the young man. "It is best to see my mother alone, and leave her to tell the governor what a fall I have had. Good Heavens! to think that, worldly-wise as we all are, we never thought of such a contingency as loss of fortune to Isola. A few weeks later, and I should have been compromised beyond all escape."

He walked directly toward the morning room usually occupied by his mother, and entered without ceremony. It was a spacious boudoir, crowded with luxurious furniture and the elegant trifles which such a woman as Mrs. Vane delights to accumulate around her. She sat near a table on which several jewel cases lay, and the pleased smile upon her faded features showed that she little anticipated the shock she was about to receive.

Her white morning dress was finished with costly lace, and trimmed with knots of rose-colored ribbon, and the transparent cap which shaded the hair that had once been her pride and boast was adorned with flowers of the same color.

When her son entered she turned her eyes on him with an expression of surprise, but spoke in her usual languid, fine lady tone:

"I scarcely expected to see you back so soon, Phil. I thought Mr. Fontaine might detain you for the day, and I knew that you would be only too willing to remain. What has brought you back at this early hour?"

Philip threw himself upon a sofa, and taking up a feather fan, wielded it with great energy for a few moments. His mother offered him a glass of iced water, and fretfully said:

"I really think you might speak to me. What has

happened to you? Your face does not look like that of a happy lover who has just been accepted."

"Nor have I been, madam," was the abrupt reply. "Our plans are all exploded, blown to the winds by the most infernal chance that ever happened to a fellow. I shall never marry Isola now."

"What—you—*you*, Philip Vane, rejected by that little flirt! Put a beggar on horseback indeed! and *she* seeks to illustrate the old proverb! It is incredible, for I have watched Isola when you have been together, and in spite of her demure artifices I could see that she likes you. What does the little upstart expect, I should like to know, if she refuses such a man as you?"

"She did not refuse me; all would have been fair and smooth enough but for a most unexpected piece of news that damped my own ardor so much that I am afraid I showed my feelings too plainly to Mr. Fontaine, for he became very stately, and finally refused to permit Isola to receive further attention from me. I have made a wretched mistake, mother, which I shall scarcely know how to remedy when the true heiress makes her appearance."

"I do wish you would talk sense, Philip. How can I understand all this stuff unless you explain to me clearly what has really happened," said Mrs. Vane, in an irritated tone. "What heiress are you talking of? Who is she, and where does she come from, for I have never heard of any relation of Mr. Fontaine who could dispute his right to dispose of his own property."

"But one has arisen, nevertheless. His brother's daughter has come over from Italy, and as Mr. Fontaine assures me that he has expended the whole income from her portion of the estate, it will take everything he owns to make good the deficiency. Isola will have nothing, or next to nothing, though he spoke of trying to save a pittance for her from the property."

Mrs. Vane listened in breathless astonishment. She exclaimed:

"I hope you did not commit yourself! for you can never marry her now—never!"

"Have no fears on that score," replied Philip, with a curling lip. "I have been dismissed by both Mr. Fontaine and his ward; for Isola had only to learn that her guardian objected to receive me as her lover, and she acquiesced in his decision."

"So much the better for you; for without fortune this girl is no match for son of mine. Tell me all about this strange affair, for I never before heard of anything like it. Where has this young girl concealed herself through all these long years?"

In a moody tone Philip related to her all that was known to himself concerning Savella Fontaine. At the close of his narration his mother drew a long breath, and said:

"I tremble to think what a narrow escape you have made, Phil. Suppose you had married Isola before all this became known! It would have ruined your future prospects."

"I don't see why. The heir of Dunlora, with a comfortable income, might afford to take the girl of his heart even if she is destitute of fortune. If Mr. Fontaine had not been so high, I do not know but I might have been fool enough to do so, for Isola is the sweetest and most attractive girl I have ever seen."

"If you had, I should have refused my consent and your father would have opposed you even more decidedly than myself. It is *necessary* for you to gain fortune with your future wife, Philip."

"So you have always told me; but I have been unable to comprehend the necessity. We have everything we want; our style of living is even more elegant than that of the wealthiest landholders around us; and I should not apprehend poverty even with a portionless bride."

"Because you are ignorant of our real position," Mrs. Vane gravely replied. "You are old enough and prudent enough now to be enlightened; and at this crisis it becomes my duty to tell you what your father and I wished to conceal from you as long as possible."

Philip uneasily asked:

"What, then, have you to tell me? Not that our apparent prosperity has a baseless foundation, I hope."

"Something very like it. This property, which is by no means productive, was purchased with a legacy left me by an uncle. It is settled on me, and fortunately cannot be alienated for your father's liabilities. The income from which all our luxuries are derived, comes from the rent of houses in Richmond, in which your father invested his means. The title, it seems, was defective, and a suit has been once decided against him; but Mr. Vane appealed, threw the affair in chancery, and thus prolonged the contest. But I am much afraid that the decision will ultimately be against us."

Philip listened in consternation:

"I considered my father a man of too much acuteness to be overreached in such a manner. He has surely some recourse on the person who sold those houses to him."

"The original owner died insolvent; and his heirs, discovering the flaw in the title, have sued to recover them."

"But that is not honest. If a fair price was paid for them, justice will give the houses to my father."

"But law isn't always justice, I am afraid; and, to tell you the whole truth, the property was sold for a tithe of its value; that is why your father was tempted to purchase it without too critically examining the title."

"That means that he took them on speculation, and now intends to keep them if the lawyers are not too sharp for him," said Philip, contemptuously. "If there was a chance of ultimately losing them, why has he not saved enough

from the rents to reimburse himself? From your words I infer that the money has been spent as it came in."

"That is certainly true; but you have had your full share; nothing has been spared to you; and you know that you may justly be accused of extravagance during your stay at college. Besides, what was the use of hoarding money that might eventually be demanded as arrears due to the heirs? We seem to be exactly in the position of Mr. Fontaine in that respect."

Philip had not implicit confidence in his father's financial ability; and, however obtained, he felt confident that property was ultimately destined to slip from his grasp.

After a pause he said:

"This is the darkest day of my life. I arose this morning with the triumphant thought that I was about to bear off from all competitors the fairest and the best dowered bride in the State, and here I sit with my hopes broken, my father's fortune tottering in the balance, myself checkmated!"

"Yet you are still Philip Vane; handsome as a demigod; acute in intellect, and fascinating in manner. You hold a fine hand yet, my son; and when the true heiress of those broad lands and scores of slaves makes her debut among us, what is to prevent you from entering the lists, and winning her from every other pretender to her favor?"

"If I had not already made known my preference for Isola, my path would be plain enough before me; but if I presumed to aspire to his niece, Mr. Fontaine would annihilate me by a look; nor will he ever now consent to give me the hand of his heiress."

"I do not see that his consent is at all important. According to his own admissions, this young lady has claims that cannot be set aside. The half of his estate must become hers at once, and the remainder will devolve to her on his decease. Cast aside all thoughts of Isola, and pre-

pare to play the part of the irresistible to the young stranger. You will have many opportunities of seeing her without the knowledge of her uncle, for Mr. Fontaine does not attend evening parties, and many will be sure to be given in the neighborhood, in honor of her arrival among us."

The brow of the listener cleared, and he said:

"If she is only as attractive as Isola, I may take your advice; but it is deucedly unpleasant when all my plans are settled to have them overturned in this unceremonious manner. If Isola would consent to marry me without her guardian's consent, I don't know but I might play the fool after all, for she has taken a hold on my affections that no other woman ever will have."

"Stuff! don't talk sentimental nonsense to me, Philip; for I know in our case exactly how much it is worth. Marriage is but a partnership in which each party throws life and fortune, and the less of the latter there is, the greater the chances that the former will prove a dreary drudgery devoted only to the acquisition of the means of living. You have been educated to fill a brilliant position, Phil., and you must achieve it by your own efforts. I trust that I have said all that is necessary to enable you to judge of the course it is incumbent on you to pursue."

Her son sighed heavily, and rising, said:

"I believe I understand you, mother; and, as Isola is beyond my reach, I may as well make up my mind to sell the graces of mind and person you estimate so highly to the wealthiest bidder. If Miss Fontaine proves presentable I will think of your advice, and possibly act on it; though, in so doing, I shall be sure to gain the everlasting contempt of the woman I love."

"Her opinion will soon cease to be important to you. The successful man of the world can afford to overlook those who sit up in judgment upon him, and this young girl will have no right to condemn one lifted so far above her by the smiles of fortune."

Philip took a few rapid turns across the floor, and then, approaching the table, asked:

"What were you doing with these jewels? Selecting from them a marriage present for your anticipated daughter-in-law?"

"I brought them out for that purpose. This set of pearls was given to me when I married, and I have kept them so carefully that their lustre is unimpaired. I destined them for Isola; but if you will win the true heiress of the Fontaines, I will divide my diamonds with her. See how they flash in this light; I do not believe that another woman in the State has as handsome a *parure*."

"You are very generous, mother, to offer these bright little sparklers to my future wife, for I know how highly you prize them. She will be too young to wear diamonds, and, if I prove the lucky winner, the pearls will do as well for Savella as they would have done for Isola. I have no idea she will be half as worthy to wear them."

"Very well—she shall have the pearls, then; and it will be quite as well, for she will be able to afford diamonds for herself when she wishes to wear them. I won these in a raffle in Richmond, for I could never have spent so much money in ornaments as such stones as these would have cost if bought in a regular way. I gave a hundred dollars for the chance, and I think it was money well spent."

"Then they are not family jewels? But that need not hurt my pride, for such things are rare in so new a country as ours."

"They may become family jewels; for, now I think of it, I will leave them as an heirloom to my eldest granddaughter, to be given in turn to her eldest daughter. So in time the Vane diamonds may have a history attached to them."

Philip smiled faintly and turned toward the window. He saw his father crossing the lawn, and, rapidly retreating from the room, said:

"Tell the governor what has happened, mother. I am not equal to going over it all again. I am going to my own den to take out my fit of the sulks. I want my dinner sent up to me, and you can tell father that I have a headache."

Mrs. Vane nodded and gathered up her jewels, while her son sprang up stairs two steps at a time, kicked out of his way a favorite dog that came bounding toward him, and soon gained his room, where he wreaked his angry excitement on the unoffending chairs and tables that happened to stand in the way of the frantic promenade he kept up, till the heat of the day and his own exhaustion compelled him to throw himself upon a seat.

He cursed himself, his precipitation, the evil fate which had deprived Isola of her expectations, and in the depths of his own heart he wished the sea had swallowed up the young girl who came to displace her, not only in her home, but in the future of his important self.

Yes, he must win Savella Fontaine; there was no alternative between that and ruin; and what mattered it how to whom his hand was given? As well Savella as any other woman, since he must barter his freedom for gold. But amid all, Philip felt the deepest self-contempt for the part he had acted—for that he meant to play.

He did not attempt to practice any self-deception; he knew he was a fortune-hunter, and, like a lottery broker, he made an inventory of all the chances in his favor. He glanced at his faultless person in the mirror, twisted his amber colored moustache with returning complacency, and wondered how Isola could so readily have given up all hope of retaining such a conquest at the command of her guardian.

Philip was deeply piqued, and he felt that the only balm to his wounded vanity would be to woo and win her rival in so short a time that Isola could not cherish the belief that his heart had ever been deeply enthralled by her charms.

A delicious little dinner served exquisitely, with wine of a rare vintage, was sent up to him by his mother, and in spite of his disappointment and his alleged headache, Philip managed to make a hearty meal. He afterwards lounged in a luxurious chair, smoked his fragrant Havana, and arranged his new plan of action. He finally came down to tea looking as unconcerned as if nothing had happened. His parents regarded him with some solicitude; but his careless manner soon reassured them, and Mr. Vane exchanged a meaning smile with his wife. While they sat around the supper table, he gave Philip the unexpected news that his friend George had determined to go to Russia, and had that day written to the ambassador to accept the position of an attaché to his suite.

"It must have been a very sudden determination, sir, for George said nothing to me of such an intention when I saw him yesterday."

"He has been deliberating about it several days, but thought it best to say nothing of it till his decision was made. He will go to Washington without delay, for in a few weeks the ambassador will set sail for Europe. If it were not for other interests, I could wish that you were to be the companion of his voyage; but your mother has explained to you how detrimental your absence must be to your future prospects just at this crisis."

Philip muttered something in reply that was not very intelligible, and his father left him to drink his tea in silence. Mr. Vane saw that he was irritated and ready to explode in one of his frequent outbursts of temper, and he wisely suffered him to maintain his sullen silence as long as it suited him to do so. Philip was the pride and darling of his parents, but in many respects he was also their torment, and if the young autocrat had declared his unalterable determination to marry the choice of his heart, their opposition, vehement as it might at first have been, must ultimately have yielded to his imperious will.

When supper was over, the three went out on the portico to enjoy the soft evening air, and Mr. Vane quietly smoked his cigar, and awaited the moment in which Philip might choose to speak. The servants had all retired, and after making friends with his dog, who approached him with deprecating expression, as if afraid of another application of his boot, the young gentleman condescended to say:

"It's all up with Isola and myself, sir. Since I learned her true position, I have relinquished all thought of her as my wife. I am deucedly sorry that I went so far, but it can't be helped now, and I am well out of the scrape I was so near getting into."

"I am glad to find you so reasonable, Philip," said the paternal oracle. "I was afraid you might take some unaccountable freak in your head, and insist on marrying the girl at all hazards."

"I might possibly have done that, sir, but the truth is, she threw me off as soon as she understood that Mr. Fontaine was not satisfied with the match. I think Isola likes me well enough, but if her guardian told her to throw herself into a burning crater, I believe she would do it. I don't care particularly to have any future wife so completely under the influence of another man, so it's best, perhaps, that we have cried quits."

"Right, my boy; better be off with the old love, before you're on with the new, ha! Philip?"

His tone annoyed his son, and he curtly said:

"I have yet to find the new one, sir, and the less that is said on the subject the better, I shall not make a fool of myself a second time, you may be sure."

After this rebuff there was another silence which was broken by Mr. Vane.

"You are aware of our exact position, Philip, so far as fortune is concerned. I will frankly tell you that I have scarcely a hope that my suit will ultimately be decided in

my favor. I had a letter from my lawyer to-day, which is far from encouraging. I have staved off the conclusion of it as long as possible, chiefly on your account, for I hoped that your marriage with Isola would place you above caring for the curtailment of our income."

"I am sorry to hear such disastrous intelligence sir, for it may yet affect my prospects materially; how long will it be before the affair is definitely settled?"

"A few months at furthest; I have received in rents double the original cost of the property, but I have saved nothing from them as you already know. The heirs must be satisfied with getting back the houses, for they will wring nothing more out of me. This place, with the slaves that are on it, belongs to your mother, and on this we must content ourselves till brighter days arrive."

"A few months," repeated Philip, slowly—"that is so much time gained, sir. I promise to make the best use of it, and I think the result will prove satisfactory to you. With so much at stake, I can no longer hesitate in my course."

His father laughed gaily.

"My young Antinous will find it easy to repeat the words of Cæsar: 'I came, I saw, I conquered.' Forget your predilection for Isola and use all your arts to make a favorable impression on her who comes to take her place. If she proves less charming, her solid attractions will more than make up for the deficiency. I have always coveted the Fontaine property, and in a moment of prosperity, I once even aspired to become its purchaser; but the bubble I relied on to make me rich, suddenly burst, and I also ascertained that the absent owner of the place would not be induced to part with it. If it ever becomes yours, the summit of my ambition will be attained."

"I will do my best not to disappoint you, sir, and if the heart of the heiress is not already given to another, I see no reason why I should despair of success."

"Look in the glass, coxcomb, and you will see every reason to believe that you will prove irresistible," said the gratified father. "I confess that although I have few prejudices as to family, I shall prefer for my daughter the undoubted descendant of the Fontaines to a child picked up by chance, and brought up by charity. I hope Fontaine will be able to save something for the poor thing, for this must be a sad downfall for her."

"And I might have saved her—might have made her happy," was the thought that arose in Philip's mind, but he repressed it, and after a few more words were exchanged, he retired to his own apartment.

Thus was it settled that Philip was to woo, and if possible, win the expected heiress, and Mr. Vane and his wife congratulated each other that their son was so much more tractable than they had dared hope.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW HEIRESS.

THE days dragged slowly by, till two weeks passed away without bringing the expected strangers, nor was anything further heard from them.

Before his departure for Washington, George Berkely called to bid adieu to Mr. Fontaine and Isola; his gentle and thoughtful manner toward her assured her that he was aware of the change in her position, and wished her to understand that by him she was as tenderly valued now as she had been from her childhood.

Isola felt very grateful to him, and with a bitter sigh wished that Philip had proved as sterling gold as him she had tacitly rejected in his favor. Mr. Fontaine expressed

the warmest interest in his favorite, and exacted from him a promise to maintain a correspondence with him during his absence. With a quick glance at Isola, the young man said:

"I shall esteem it a privilege to write to you, sir. I should be very unhappy if—if I thought my friends at La Fontaine had grown indifferent to me."

"There is no danger of that, George, for you have a very warm place in our affections, and I feel a high respect for your manly self-independence. Come back to us, my dear boy, as noble and true in nature as you now are, for the graces of foreign travel can add but little to such sterling merit as I know you to possess."

Poor George was almost overcome by this praise, so sweet, and so unexpected from so reserved a man as Mr. Fontaine. He wrung his hand and said:

"Good-bye, and God bless you, sir. I promise to bring back all I take away with me, with such additions as may render me more acceptable to those I love. That hope sustains me now, and will enable me to bear absence from all I love with equanimity."

He turned to Isola, took her hand in his, and after one appealing look into her eyes, pressed it to his lips, mounted his horse, and galloped away.

"There goes as true and noble a man as nature ever fashioned," said Fontaine, as he watched his receding figure, but when he turned to look for her to whom the remark was addressed, Isola had disappeared.

During all those days nothing was seen or heard of Philip Vane, and sick at heart, Isola felt the sad certainty that he had taken her at her word; that his parting boast of bearing her away in defiance of her guardian, meant no more than his previous professions of adoring love. Pride arose to combat the affection she cherished for him, but the struggle paled her cheek, and saddened her heart.

Fontaine watched her with deep solicitude, and he was glad each day to welcome the bright face of Fanny Berkely when she rode over to visit her friend, and inquire if anything had yet been heard from the expected guests.

To Fontaine's great relief, his nocturnal visitations had ceased, and he began once more to breathe with freedom. At length a letter, bearing the Norfolk postmark was delivered to him, which on opening he found to be from his unknown niece. It was written in small, feminine characters, in good English, and ran thus :

"NORFOLK, July 19, 18—.

"MY DEAR UNCLE CLAUDE.—At my own solicitation I am permitted to write to you in the place of Mr. Summerton, to warn you of our speedy arrival at La Fontaine, or rather at Lynchburg, where we hope to find your carriage awaiting us.

"The cause of our delay arose in the first place from the absence of our escort, who made an excursion into the interior to visit an old friend. He was detained longer than he expected, and after his return, my own indisposition prevented me from leaving New York as early as we had proposed to do.

"As soon as I had sufficiently recovered, we embarked on a fine steamer and have been two days in this pleasant-looking town. We intend remaining as long in Petersburg, and then go on to my future home.

"My dear uncle, I tremble at the thought of meeting you, lest I may not come up to the ideal you may have formed of what my father's daughter should be. I am not beautiful—nor do I resemble the picture of him which my aunt has preserved for me, but you will see many traits of resemblance to my mother's family.

"I have been told that you were once *her* friend, and I hope that to her child you will give a small corner in your

heart, for it is my dearest wish to be a comfort and solace to you. Throughout all the years of my childhood, I have been taught to look to you as my ultimate protector and best friend, and no pains have been spared to give me an accurate knowledge of my father's tongue.

"Mr. Summerton, who has chiefly educated me, has been endeavoring for many years to obtain a clue to your place of abode, but in so wide-spread a land as this, its divisions so confusing to a foreigner, he has been baffled till very lately. But I have never relinquished the belief that I should yet be acknowledged by my father's family, and have my rights secured to me.

"My aunt has been a second mother to me, and she has often told me how good and noble a man my uncle Claude is. In that goodness I shall confide to excuse all deficiencies in your affectionate niece,

"SAVELLA FONTAINE."

When Fontaine first perused this letter he was pleased with it as the artless effusion of a young and warm-hearted girl; but on examining it critically, he thought he could detect traces of an older head than belonged to her whose hand had written it, and he felt confident that his niece was completely under the influence of the Nemesis who was approaching to enthrall him to her imperious will. He loathed the very thought of this woman, yet she was coming to take up her abode beneath his roof; and he could find no pretext for refusing its shelter to her who had reared his dead brother's child.

If he attempted to release himself from the incubus of her presence, he knew her too well to believe that she would refrain from branding him before the world with the indelible curse of Cain; writhe as he might, the serpent folds were tightening around him, and he felt that they would yet crush out the very life of life.

Orders were issued for the carriage to be sent at once to Lynchburg to await there for the arrival of the travellers, and Fontaine sought Isola to show her the letter of his niece; she was charmed with it, and exclaimed with something like her former animation;

"I am quite sure that I shall love her. We will live as sisters together, dear father, and in place of one child, you will have two to prattle to you, and cheer you up."

He faintly smiled, as he replied:

"If Savella proves half as necessary to me as you are, I shall esteem myself fortunate indeed. I trust that we shall find her lovable, and generous, for I am fully prepared to receive her into my heart. I shall soon be able to judge her by her conduct toward you, Isola, and on that I shall base my decision on her character. I have written a note in reply to her letter welcoming her to her home, and informing her that she here will find a sister in my adopted daughter."

Two more days passed away, and on a lovely summer evening the carriage returned from Lynchburg with the long expected strangers. A middle-aged man wearing the plain black dress of an English clergyman, first alighted and offered his hand to a lady in a dark traveling dress.

A young girl next sprang out, and stood an instant gazing upon the magnificent panorama of mountain and valley the view presented. She spoke in Italian to her companions, and the three ascended the steps of the piazza.

Cæsar was at his post, and he apologized for the non-appearance of his master by saying that he had gone to the quarter with the young mistress to visit a negro who had been injured that day by the falling of a tree.

Mr. Summerton and Senora Roselli exchanged significant glances as the old man spoke of the young mistress, and the latter scornfully said through half closed teeth:

"A pretty welcome, truly, to the young heiress on her

first arrival at her future home. Young mistress indeed! I will soon show her who is to be mistress here."

As this was spoken in what Cæsar called their "furrin lingo," it was of course incomprehensible to him, though he afterwards gleefully informed Aggy "dat he give de new woman to onstan' dat dere was somebody afore her in *dat* house what had rights she wasn't to interfere wid."

The guests were ushered into the sitting-room where the ladies laid aside their bonnets and dusters. Senora Roselli was a tall, thin woman, with a dark sallow complexion; her features were clearly and sharply cut, her eyes of that rayless black beneath which smoulders intense passions and uncontrollable temper. Her head was well set upon her shoulders, but its outline was defective, the organ of acquisitiveness being enormously developed, while those of conscientiousness and benevolence were remarkably depressed. Her mouth, that unerring index to character, was sarcastic, and haughty, and the thin lips looked as if they could unclothe to utter the most cutting personalities. In her youth, she might have had some pretensions to beauty, but time, and the indulgence of irritable feeling, had impressed a character of hardness upon her features which was far from prepossessing.

Summerton laid aside his broad-brimmed hat, exhibiting a head partially bald, and a high receding forehead, beneath which gleamed a pair of deep set grey eyes that flitted over everything and left nothing unnoticed. That he was a man of keen observation, and astute intellect, was obvious at a glance, though his meek demeanor was calculated to disarm distrust in those who were brought in casual contact with him.

As Savella Fontaine stood in front of the window, with the full light of the setting sun shining upon her, the striking resemblance she bore to her aunt was at once perceived. Her form was rounded into the symmetry of her years, and

her face had not yet acquired the harsh expression so repulsive in that of Senora Roselli, but the features were the same, and as time progressed, unless the different nature within modified the expression, her face must become as little attractive as that of her relative.

Savella had truly said that she was not beautiful; but with the aid of dress and animation she might pass in society for a dashing, elegant looking girl. Her profuse hair, black as midnight, was coiled around her head in a thick plait fastened with silver arrows; her olive complexion bore the rosy hue of health, and her lips unclosed to display a brilliant set of small white teeth. Her voice was agreeable in its tones, though it did not indicate much depth of feeling or intellect.

Such was the trio that had invaded La Fontaine with plans utterly at variance with the quiet tenor of its usual life. They spoke eagerly together in their own language, and at the close of the conversation, Summerton said to the young girl:

"Remember, Savella, that you are to curb your wilfulness of temper; that you must play the part of the dutiful and admiring niece until you have established a paramount influence over your uncle. If you do not find means to rival this adopted child, you may yet lose half the estate which should centre in you as the lawful representative of your father's family. Claude Fontaine's property is in his own power, and he may yet alienate it from you."

"I have little fear of that," said the elder lady, decisively; "but I agree with you that Savella must be very circumspect. Her uncle will sit up in judgment on her till she finds means to disarm his criticism by winning his love. Do you understand, Savella? Remember that, if you are the heiress to this noble home, it is to *me* you owe your elevation, and you must be submissive to my counsels."

A slight frown gathered on the brow of Miss Fontaine, and she petulantly replied:

"I think I have already been tutored enough to comprehend all that is required of me. I see little advantage in being independent in fortune, if I am to be dictated to and scolded at every turn. Between you and Mr. Summerton my life is a perfect worry."

The lips of Senora Roselli unclosed to retort, but she hastily said:

"There—there—no more of this, for yonder comes Mr. Fontaine, accompanied by the young girl he wrote about. Smooth your brow, Savella, and do not make an unfavorable impression on your kinsman in the first moment of meeting."

Savella glanced through the open window at the two who were approaching the house, and she said:

"What a magnificent looking man my uncle Claude is! and I declare the young girl beside him is as dainty as a princess, and as beautifully dressed as if she were the heiress of his fortune. I have nothing in my wardrobe half as becoming as that rose-colored robe is to her."

"Because she is more beautiful than you—can't you see that at a glance?" said the Senora, spitefully. "But you shall have finer things than she will dare to expect from this time out. I have Claude Fontaine under my thumb, and I will bend him to my will or——"

The remainder of the sentence remained unspoken, but the vindictive expression of her face legibly completed it—"or crush him."

"Go and meet your uncle," whispered Summerton in the ear of Savella; and casting aside the expression of envy which had lately darkened her face, she moved quickly toward the entrance.

Isola, in a flowing muslin robe, clasped over the bust with a delicately cut cameo, a single white rose in her dark, shining hair, looked as elegant and aristocratic as if "all the blood of all the Howards" flowed in her veins. Exercise

had flushed her lately pale cheeks, and with a feeling of bitter jealousy Savella saw that she was indeed far more lovely than she could ever hope to be even in her brightest moments.

When Isola saw the young stranger advancing, she lingered on the piazza, and permitted Fontaine to move forward alone, and offer her his first greeting. He opened his arms in voiceless emotion, and Savella sprang to his breast exclaiming:

"My dear, dear uncle Claude! I saw you approaching and hastened to receive your greeting. Let your own dear voice speak the assurance that I am welcome to your home and heart."

"Most welcome, my niece—the child of my only and dearly loved brother! In this first moment of meeting I pledge to you my honor as a man to seek to render you happy in your new abode."

Fontaine held her a moment in his strong clasp, and his lips moved as if in prayer; then releasing her, he drew Isola forward and said:

"Savella, let me present to you my daughter; be a sister to her, and I shall rejoice in having two affectionate and united children."

With a beaming smile Isola held out her hand. Savella took it in both her own, and bending forward, touched her brow with her lips. She said with animation:

"This is charming! Till very lately I did not know that I should find a companion of my own age at La Fontaine. I feel sure that I shall be very happy here, uncle, and I thank you for giving me so lovely a sister."

Her manner was perfectly natural, and the expression of her face had so completely changed from that it wore when with her late companions that it scarcely seemed the same face.

"I thank you," said Isola, in a low tone; "I trust that we shall love and appreciate each other."

"Ah! be sure of that, my charming sister. But we must tarry here no longer, uncle, for my aunt impatiently awaits you, and the good clergyman, to whom I owe so much, is with her."

Fontaine repressed the feeling of repulsion that thrilled through his frame, and making an effort to control himself, he followed Savella into the apartment, near the door of which stood his evil fate in the person of Senora Roselli.

Fully prepared for the meeting, she stood cool and dauntless, with a strange smile of triumph upon her thin lips. She advanced a step to meet him, and before he could speak she said:

"At last, Claude, we stand face to face again. For years I have sought to discover the place of your abode, that I might restore the orphan child of your poor brother to your protection. Now that duty is accomplished, I feel as if my work on earth is almost done."

The thoughts that arose in Fontaine's mind were little in accordance with her words. If they had been expressed he would have said:

"Devil! fiend! how dare you speak thus, when you know your crowning wickedness is but now commenced."

But he was a gentleman, and he courteously replied

"I owe you many thanks, senora, for the care you have taken of my niece, and you shall not find me ungrateful. Such requital as I can make will be fully yours."

"Many thanks—but you must not call me senora. Use no such ceremony with me, if you please; call me Bianca, as in those old happy days when you dwelt beneath my mother's roof in Rome. Ah! those were halcyon days indeed, and might have remained such had not the serpent of jealousy poisoned all our joys."

Fontaine shivered at this allusion, and in a tone of command he said:

"Forbear!—recall not the memory of that time to me in

the first moment of meeting. You have forgotten to present your friend to me, but there is no need of an introduction to him to whom I am indebted for the restoration of my niece."

With graceful courtesy he offered his hand to Summerton and welcomed him to his house; then turning in search of Isola, he drew her forward and presented her to the two as the daughter of his adoption.

The perfect ease and self-possession of her manner struck them both, and the mutual thought arose that, sustained by the affection of her protector, her pretensions would not be so summarily put down as they had hoped. But both smiled on her with that hypocrisy which had long become habitual to them, and with the tact of a man of the world, Summerton soon glided into conversation, which insensibly removed the stiffness of a first meeting among such discordant natures.

When supper was announced, Savella sprang up and seized on the left arm of her uncle, while she laughingly said to Isola:

"I will leave you the other, but I claim for myself the one that is nearest his heart."

Fontaine's rare smile gleamed tenderly upon her, and he was evidently pleased by this sally. He held out his other arm to Isola, and, followed by the senora and her companion, they crossed the hall to the supper room. The two latter exchanged a few brief words in subdued tones as they walked forward; the woman said:

"Savella has transcended my hopes. She enters fully into the part we have prepared for her."

"As if *my* pupil was likely to fail," was the sarcastic rejoinder. "Be as true to yours, and we are settled for life in this magnificent home, with nothing to do but to enjoy the goods the gods provide."

"You need have no fears for me; and I defy any one to

wrest from me the foothold I have this day gained in this house."

"Thar they ar' a talkin' their senseless gib-gab," muttered Cæsar. "Ef I war Marse Claude I wouldn't have any sich goin's on in *my* house—dat's what I wouldn't." But the old hypocrite bowed demurely to the two as he drew back their chairs for them, and prepared to do honor to the family by waiting upon them with the utmost assiduity.

The few days they had been in Virginia had not accustomed the strangers to black faces, and both of the elder guests betrayed to the observant Cæsar their repulsion toward his race, and Savella laughed aloud when he offered her tea; and she said in a low tone to Isola:

"What a funny-looking old creature; his white hair and black face form such a strange contrast. But I must learn to like them, I suppose, as I am told I am to be the mistress of at least a hundred."

The young girl colored and replied in the same guarded tone:

"Do not hurt his feelings by showing him that you think him so different from ourselves. Uncle Cæsar is a faithful family servant, who was born and reared in this place, and he has as much respect for himself in his sphere as either you or I."

Savella opened her large black eyes and repeated:

"Uncle Cæsar! surely you do not claim kindred with these creatures?"

"Only the kindred of affection," replied Isola, in a pained voice. "The elder negroes are usually addressed as aunt and uncle by the children of the family, and my father still calls his nurse mammer."

"Really!" thought Savella—"claiming my uncle as her father, and speaking of herself as a child of the family! this presumption is insufferable." But she only said:

"It is a custom I shall not follow. I look upon the

negroes as too far inferior to us to be placed on such an equality as that implies."

"Then I am afraid you will never become as popular and beloved among them as their future mistress should be."

"Their *present* mistress, you mean; for half of them already belong to me. I am not ambitious of reigning in their affections. I shall see that they are properly cared for, and there my duty will end."

Isola regretted the revelation of character her new acquaintance was making, and she began to fear that Savella would not quite come up to the ideal she had formed of her from her letter to her uncle.

While this conversation went on Fontaine was endeavoring to play the part of the courteous host to the elder guests. Summerton talked easily and well, but Senora Roselli scarcely opened her lips, and her glittering eyes were fixed at intervals on Isola with an expression that annoyed and almost alarmed her protector.

Isola, as usual, presided at the table as the mistress of the house, and the Nemesis was evidently offended that she had not been at once superseded by the heiress. She determined in her own mind that this state of affairs should not long continue; and she speculated on the chances of altogether ridding herself of one who was a dangerous rival to her niece, and might become a spy upon herself and her auxiliary in their schemes of plunder.

Supper was at last over, and the party went out on the piazza to enjoy the view of the valley bathed in the last rays of a gorgeous sunset. Summerton discoursed of his foreign travels, and Fontaine found that he had visited every European capital; he possessed a vast amount of curious information, and had evidently been familiar with every class in life. He exerted himself to make a favorable impression upon his host, and but for the weight that pressed upon his mind Fontaine would have keenly enjoyed his vivid

pictures of the scenes with which he had himself been familiar; but the presence of the Senora was an incubus from which there was no escape, and he dreaded the interview which he knew must take place between them before many hours had elapsed.

She sat near the two absorbed in thought, while Isola and her new friend promenaded through the piazza engaged in a conversation which never seemed to flag. Savella was flattering and caressing, and she said so many amiable things that Isola chided herself for mistrusting her sincerity. Much as she wished to love the niece of her guardian, she felt a faint fear at her heart, growing stronger with every passing moment, that there was really little congeniality between herself and the heiress. In her desire to impress Isola with her generosity, Savella rather overacted the part she had undertaken to perform, and a sense of her desolate position for the first time forced itself painfully upon Isola's heart.

Savella insisted on knowing her early history, and how Mr. Fontaine came to adopt her as his daughter. With perfect simplicity the story was told, and the listener expressed her sympathy in so natural a manner as to touch Isola at last. Savella thoughtfully said:

"It was a cruel fate to lose your mother in so dreadful a manner, and with her all clue to your family. But you must be of gentle blood, Isola. You are too lovely to have sprung from an ignoble race, and my uncle has done wisely to give you the education of a lady."

The close of the speech rather marred the effect of its commencement, and Isola replied:

"I owe everything to Mr. Fontaine. He has been both father and mother to me, and my life shall be devoted to him. If by chance my own father were to trace me now, I could not place his claims in competition with those of him who has so long filled his place."

"Savella vaguely said:

"My uncle is still a very handsome man in spite of his prematurely whitened hair. I wonder if he has never thought of making you something nearer than an adopted daughter."

"Miss Fontaine, how dare you insinuate such a thing!" indignantly exclaimed Isola, for she felt as if a sacrilegious hand had been laid on the very holy of holies. "My father is truly one to me, and such a thought as that has never occurred to either of us. I beg that you will never hint such a thing again, for he would be inexpiable offended."

"Excuse me—but the thought was a very natural one, I am sure, and I'll venture any money that it has been entertained by others. But I will be on my guard, for the frown of my stately uncle, I can fancy, would quite annihilate me."

Isola was repelled and wounded; she sunk into silence, and shortly afterward Senora Roselli arose and said she would retire to her chamber, as the day's travel had fatigued her.

Isola, preceded by Celia bearing lights, went up with the two ladies and showed them to their respective apartments. The Senora took a comprehensive survey of her own; but its luxurious appointments were so much superior to anything she had been accustomed to that she could find no fault. At the door of Savella's room Isola bade her good-night, and said:

"Our chambers communicate with each other, and if you are afraid to sleep alone, Celia can make her bed in your room."

"I should be more afraid of her than of the darkness," was the reply, heedless of the presence of the girl, who had never before in her life imagined that she could become an object of terror to anyone. "I am not fearful, and if anything occurs to alarm me I can easily gain access to you."

"It is not likely that you will be disturbed. We are a

quiet, sober family, who live and sleep in peace. Good-night; and may pleasant dreams visit you in this first night spent beneath your paternal roof."

"Thank you! You are very generous, Isola; for I know that my coming must make a great difference to you."

"My dear father's love you cannot alienate from me; the rest I have no claim on, and for its loss I have no right to feel a regret. Good night," and she escaped from the kiss she saw that Savella intended to give her. She had already wounded her in too many covert ways for her to be willing to receive it, and she slowly turned toward her own room, feeling a vague sense of dread and oppression, for which she could not account.

Celia remained to assist her new mistress in disrobing; but after asking her many questions, to which the girl replied as briefly as possible, for her feelings were wounded by the insult she had received, Savella dismissed her; and as the echo of her departing footsteps died away, she flitted across the wide hall, and entered the apartment of her aunt.

Closing the door after her, she threw herself on a chair close beside the one occupied by Senora Roselli, and triumphantly asked:

"Have I not done well? I am sure there could be no fault to find in my conduct *this* evening."

"Not much. You commenced well enough; but why did you desert your uncle to pay court to that interloper? I shall leave no means untried to get rid of her without delay."

"You had better be cautious how you attempt that. My uncle is evidently much attached to her, and that is why I tried to win her over. But somehow I do not feel as if I have perfectly succeeded. I am sure that I flattered her enough. If she had been a goddess, I could not have made her out more adorable than I did; but she took it all as coolly as if such speeches are made to her every day."

"Do you wish her to remain here as a rival not only with your uncle but with every lover who may present himself? You are but a commonplace girl beside her, for I cannot deny that she is very attractive. You will never really be mistress of La Fontaine till this girl is thrust away from it."

"But I cannot see how you are to accomplish that without risking everything. My uncle will never consent to give her up."

"*Wont he?* Wait and see—that is all. Your uncle is no hero to *me*. I know him. I can tell that of him which he would die sooner than have revealed. I can force him to give up his dearest wishes at my command, and I intend to use my power."

"What do you know of him, aunt Bianca? You are always hinting at something dreadful; but if I am to bear his name, I do not wish it stained with dishonor. Remember that, if you please."

"Have no fears of public disgrace, Savella. Much as Mr. Fontaine may merit it, *I* shall not be the person to bring it upon him. I shall only use my power to attain my own private ends, and my first effort will be to rid you of a dangerous rival."

"If you can do so quietly, I shall not object, for as you say, Isola is too handsome to be brought in continual contrast with myself. I am afraid we should not long continue friends; but be sure that you do not implicate me, for that would cause me to lose ground with my uncle which I could never recover."

Senora Roselli impressively replied:

"It is all important that you shall win the confidence and affection of Mr. Fontaine. Be sure that I shall do nothing to compromise you with him."

"After all, if half this fine estate belongs to me, I cannot see why you lay such stress on that. I have enough to be

independent of him, even if he should not love me very dearly."

"You are yet under age, Savella, and Mr. Fontaine will have the control of person and fortune for several years to come. If you will be guided by me, you will inherit the whole estate at his death, and a hundred thousand dollars are worth trying for."

"Is it as much as that? Then I must have as much in my own right?"

"Of course you have; you are a great heiress, and in Italy, with such a fortune as that, you might marry a nobleman. If it were not for the chance that you may ultimately gain the whole, I should be in favor of selling your share and going back to Europe without delay. At any rate, I do not anticipate a long sojourn in this cold mountain land, so different from our beautiful country. Claude Fontaine's doom is written on his brow—he will not live long."

Savella started and changed color.

"What can you mean? I never saw a healthier, stronger-looking man than my uncle. Though his hair is white, there are no other evidences of decay about him."

"Tush, child, you are no judge. That florid appearance of health is the surest symptom of apoplexy in persons of his temperament. He may drop dead any day, and the sooner that day comes the better for you and for me. You know that I am something of a seeress, and I have never foretold the death of any one that it did not soon happen."

Savella trembled and seemed to breathe with difficulty. After a pause she said:

"I only hope you will never foretell mine, Aunt Bianca; for somehow I almost think if you did so, you might try to bring about the fulfilment of the prophecy."

The woman laughed strangely. She said:

"You are silly, Savella; I am only a keen observer, and

see signs of approaching dissolution which are unnoticed by others. For years Mr. Fontaine has suffered both mentally and physically, and it would not surprise me if he yet ended his life by suicide; that is, if disease does not anticipate the necessity."

Savella suddenly drew away from her, and rising paced up and down the floor many moments in perturbed silence. At length she went toward the door, saying in a constrained tone: "Good night, Aunt; I hope you will sleep well in this strange house; but you have put such dismal thoughts in my head that I am afraid I shall not be able to do the same."

"Yes you will, for your nerves are strong enough to bear much more than the insinuation that a sudden death may some day occur which will make you rich, and independent of control."

The result proved that she spoke the truth, for after a few moments of desultory thought, Savella felt the influence of her late fatigue, and settling herself comfortably upon her luxurious couch she soon sank into a refreshing sleep; but Isola's wish that she might have pleasant dreams was not realized, for those that came to her were filled with phantoms from the weird realm of diablerie, and she was haunted with a vision of a strong man falling suddenly before her in the stone-like immobility of death.

CHAPTER XII.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

THE ill-assorted party met at the breakfast table in apparent good spirits, for each one made an effort to conceal the inward unrest that was shared by all.

The morning was deliciously calm and clear, and as Savella expressed a wish to explore the grounds, Isola proposed an early ramble to her. Throwing on wide-brimmed straw hats, they departed, and Fontaine saw them leave with regret; he wished to postpone as long as possible the inevitable interview between himself and Senora Roselli; but now he felt that he must resign himself to it. Savella, in spite of her resemblance to her aunt, had made a favorable impression upon him, and he thought that all that was objectionable in her manners must be speedily corrected by constant association with so refined and elegant a companion as Isola.

Summerton interrupted the reverie into which he had fallen as he looked after the two light figures flitting to and fro upon the lawn, by saying:

"Mr. Fontaine, you probably wish to hear all that I have to relate concerning the marriage of your brother. I am ready at any moment to prove to you its validity by producing the certificate I have brought with me."

"Come with me into my library," Fontaine wearily replied. "Painful as any allusion to those days must be to me, I must bear it, and the sooner we finish this business the better. Come, Madam, since I presume it is your wish to be present at the interview."

Senora Roselli nodded and promptly arose. The three were soon seated in the library, where Fontaine was the first to speak.

"Till I heard of your arrival in New York, and the errand on which you came, I never suspected that my brother had actually given his hand to Savella Savelli. Had I been aware of it, I should have sought out his child long since and brought her to my own home, that she might be among those among whom her future lot is to be cast. Tell me the particulars if you please, in as brief a manner as possible."

"Such is my purpose. I was at that time the chaplain in the family of an English nobleman residing in Rome, and tutor to his sons. I casually made the acquaintance of your brother, and he shortly afterward came to me and offered me a large sum to perform a clandestine ceremony of marriage between himself and a young Roman girl with whom he had fallen passionately in love. He stated that his brother, who was his traveling companion, would oppose his wishes, because he was himself deeply enamored of the intended bride; but Savella once his wife, he would become reconciled to it, and, he believed, would smooth the way to a reconciliation with his father.

"I need not repeat all the arguments he used to overcome my hesitation; I yielded at last to his ardent entreaties, and on the night of the twentieth of May, eighteen hundred and thirty-seven, I joined in marriage Henry Fontaine and Savella Savelli. Here is the proof, which I have brought with me for your inspection."

As Summerton ceased speaking, he drew forth a worn pocket-book and took from it a paper yellowed by time, which Fontaine mechanically took into his hand and glanced over. He saw that it was correct in every particular, and with an effort said:

"I am satisfied of the truth of your statements; yet it seems strange to me that a man of your knowledge of the world did not know that by applying to the American minister at some foreign court you could easily ascertain the residence of my family."

"Such application was made, but without success, as the senora can bear witness," replied Summerton. "There are several families bearing your name in this country. One in New England, two in New York, and another in South Carolina. It has taken years to trace the true man, and at last I only succeeded through the efforts of a friend who emigrated to New Jersey; he perseveringly followed up the

clue with which I furnished him, and at last ascertained that the brother of Henry Fontaine resided in Virginia."

"I do not remember that I made a mystery of my place of abode, and I thought that you, senora, were fully aware of the state from which I came."

Thus appealed to, the Nemesis spoke in a clear, distinct tone:

"I may have heard you speak of your native state, and doubtless did so, but the geography of this country was not familiar to me, and its numerous divisions puzzle me yet. I thought of you only as an American, and unfortunately when the time to act came, neither my poor Savella nor I could remember what state you came from. In your precipitate flight from Rome after the death of your brother, you took with you such letters and papers as might have enlightened us; and as Mr. Summerton says, till his friend traced you, we did not know where to seek you."

This explanation seemed satisfactory enough, and with a sigh Fontaine said:

"I could have wished it had been otherwise. I regret that my niece comes as a stranger to rule over those with whom she can have no sympathies in common. To understand the black race, and have patience with their peculiarities, one must be reared among them. I shall do my best to teach Savella the responsibility of caring for so many dependents, for that is all I can now do for my people."

A sneer flitted over the lip of the senora, though she spoke in a guarded tone:

"Savella will doubtless prove a tractable pupil, for she has a kind heart, and already thinks her Uncle Claude an oracle of wisdom."

"In which opinion you are far from concurring," replied Fontaine, gravely, almost haughtily. "If my niece were under my influence alone, I should not despair of moulding her opinions and guiding her feelings on every important subject, for she is yet very young."

"Is that intended as a hint that my presence in your house is not welcome?" asked the senora, in a constrained tone, and she made a rapid sign to Summerton, which was responded to by his rising abruptly and saying:

"I will no longer intrude on an interview which you both probably prefer should be strictly private," and without any attempt on the part of Fontaine to detain him, he left the room.

Senora Roselli kept her eyes fixed on Fontaine's face, as if anxiously awaiting his response, and after a painful pause he said:

"It is not my wish to be rude to you beneath my own roof; but you best know whether your presence here can be welcome to me; or that I, knowing you so well in other days, can have confidence that the influence your near relation to my niece gives you over her, will be used to her advantage or my own happiness."

Her eyes flashed, and a red glow came into her sallow cheek, as she defiantly said:

"Yet it is my purpose to remain here whether welcome to you or not. As to *happiness*, I do not know how you dare expect it."

"I do not," he sadly replied. "God is just, and I bear too heavy a load of sin to hope anything from Him but pardon for the past. I have tried to expiate the evil by doing all the good that lay in my power; but if *I* acted on that fatal night, *you* instigated the crime; *you* practised the deception that plunged me in a sea of anguish whose surging waves have at times almost overwhelmed me. Oh, Bianca! you have been the evil genius of my life!"

His voice arose until its piercing tones touched even the callous heart of the listener. She said in a subdued tone:

"It was a fatal mistake I myself made which caused the lamentable catastrophe of that night. After all, Savella was the most to blame. It was her coquetry that led to the wretched end."

"Do not speak of it—I cannot bear it. To see you, to hear you speak again, rives my heart with anguish. How I lived through the days that followed my brother's death, is a mystery to me. I fled from Rome, but I sent you money. I paid you well to keep the secret that was known alone to you and myself."

"And I have kept it. I have done more: I have denied myself every indulgence that I might give your brother's child such an education as would fit her for her future position. I studied your language myself that I might teach her to speak it from childhood up. I have brought her to you in the bloom of her youth; and I flatter myself that she will not be found an unworthy representative of your family."

"I owe you thanks for what you have done for her, and it is my purpose to show my appreciation of your sacrifices in a more substantial manner. Bianca, do not misinterpret what I am about to say to you. Your knowledge of life must make you aware that your presence here must be painful to me; neither the climate nor the habits of the people of this country will prove congenial to you, and I think it will be best to enter into a mutual compact by which your own interests will be served, and such peace as I may now hope for may be secured."

Her face settled into its old hardness of expression as she listened, and with a curling lip she briefly said:

"Go on; I shall not misconstrue your language."

"I propose this: If you will return to Italy, leaving Savella to my care, I will pledge myself to pay you a liberal annuity as long as you live. *My* presence cannot be more welcome to you than yours is to me; then wherefore keep alive the bitterness of the past by inhabiting the same house, or even dwelling in the same land?"

He paused, and earnestly, almost imploringly regarded her. Her cheeks had a spot of crimson in the centre of

each, and her black eyes glittered as those of the basilisk about to strike. In tones of concentrated passion she said :

"So—you care to offer me a bribe to leave the child of my adoption, to be paid from the wealth that is lawfully hers! for you, as a criminal, have no rights. The hour in which you immolated the father of this child, gave to her your possessions as the price of his blood. I have brought her hither to claim her rights, and they shall be exacted to the last farthing. Neither will I leave her to the mercy of a man stained with the crime of fratricide, for I do not know what deeper wickedness you might be tempted to commit. Savella is as dear to me as this beggar you have picked up and reared as your daughter can possibly be to you, and to defend her rights against *her* I will maintain my ground whether my presence is welcome or not."

Contempt, anger and indignation alternately swayed the heart of the listener, and for a few moments he was incapable of speaking. He finally said :

"I have long known you to be a hard and unscrupulous woman, Bianca, but I did not anticipate defiance and insult under my own roof, even from you. How innocent I was of any intention to injure my brother, no one is so well aware as yourself; how bitterly the frantic act, committed in a moment of outraged feeling, has been repented is attested by the lines upon my brow, the snowy hair that lies upon my temples. But you are ruthless; you have come hither to embitter the life which God knows, was sad enough before; but there is one thing you *shall not* do: You shall not insult, or treat with contumely, the child I have reared as my own. Isola was thrown upon my protection in an hour in which I felt forsaken by God and man. She was helpless, and motherless, but I have no reason to believe that she belongs to a plebeian race. Her appearance contradicts the supposition; besides, her clothing was of fine material, and the ornaments she wore were not such as are within

the means of the poor. I have reared her as my heiress; but when she heard of the existence of my niece, she received the news with such disinterested joy that she rendered herself more dear to me than she ever was before. I shall do no wrong to Savella, but if my life is spared, I shall provide for my child as becomes the position I once intended her to fill."

"Perhaps you have thought of marrying her," sneered the listener. "That would be the easiest method of providing for her; and men of your age usually prefer a bride of tender years."

Could a look have killed, that which flashed from the eyes of Fontaine must have had that effect. His voice rang out with terrible emphasis :

"Woman! is nothing sacred to you? Would you sully the tender paternal interest I feel in the child who came to me in her infancy—who pillowed her baby head upon my breast, and learned to lisp from my lips—by such an insinuation as that? I should as soon think of wooing the daughter of my own blood as this one of my heart. If I dared to ask another to share my broken life, there is one better suited to me in years who would have been my choice above all other women; but I will shadow no heart with the grief that rests on mine. Alone I shall walk to my grave; alone bear the punishment of the crime I committed at *your* instigation."

"You obeyed the voice of your own passions—of your own jealousy—yet you seek to shelter yourself behind *me*," she contemptuously retorted. "So let it be; but *my* hand was guiltless of blood; no penalty attaches to me, as it does to you. I came hither to watch over my niece, and here I will remain; that is my ultimatum. So you may spare yourself any future efforts to rid yourself of me; and I exact, as the consideration due to the heiress of the Fontaines, that Savella shall be recognized as the mistress of this es-

tablishment, and the dependent be placed in her true position."

"Madam, you assume too much when you dictate terms to me. This is *my* house, and I shall act in it as seems best to me. If my niece is dissatisfied with her position, I can divide the estate, and set aside her portion. She can then go whither she will, though I should have preferred to keep her with me if she could remain alone."

"And are you prepared to pay the accumulated income of all these years?" she maliciously asked. "It is a large sum, and with my consent Savella shall never abate a penny of the reckoning."

She saw the change in his face, but he steadily answered:

"It would inconvenience me to do so at once, but my niece is under age, and I am her natural guardian. By the time she attains her majority, I think I could arrange my affairs in such a manner as to enable me to settle with her. I would do so even if it impoverished me, for limited fortune would be more welcome to me than dishonor—an humble home more congenial than a splendid one filled with discord."

"It is a pity that your fancy cannot be indulged," she lightly replied, "but it is impossible. Savella is charmed with her surroundings; fascinated by her newly found uncle; and she will never consent to leave the home in which her father first saw the light. She has even taken a fancy to your adopted daughter, and declares that it is her purpose to regard her as a sister. Since she is generous enough to do this, you can surely tolerate beneath your roof the presence of one who has been a mother to her."

Fontaine's brow cleared slightly:

"I am happy to hear that Savella thus far proves herself worthy of the name she bears. I entreat you to leave her heart to act out its own promptings, for I earnestly desire that she and Isola shall be the best of friends; it will be

an advantage to both of them. Let us declare a truce, Madam. Since your resolution to remain at La Fontaine is immovable, I pledge myself to extend to you that courtesy which is due to a guest; but, as the mistress of my house, I will recognize neither yourself nor your niece. Isola shall not be reduced to the condition of a mere dependent, for she is the child of my affections, and, so long as I live, she shall maintain the position I have reared her to fill."

Finding him immovable on this point, Senora Roselli arose and said:

"Perhaps it will be as well for Savella to avoid the burden of housekeeping on a large plantation, for she is young and has no experience. She can live without that care till she marries; besides, her studies are not yet completed, and Mr. Summerton, who has been her friend and tutor for years, has the hope that you will permit him to complete the education of his pupil. He also has made sacrifices on Savella's account, and it is but just that——"

"Enough, Madam," interrupted Fontaine; "I am already aware of his kindness to my niece, and I see no objection to what you propose. Mr. Summerton seems to be a man of varied information, and as he has done so much for Savella without reward, it is but just that he shall retain his position now she can afford to pay him a liberal salary. You can tell him as much from me."

"Thank you; and now, Claude, let us sheathe the dagger and be good friends."

She held out her hand, which he took in his own; but with a thrill of repulsion he instantly dropped it, although he remarked its singular beauty; the long tapering fingers and perfect proportions are found in sculpture, but rarely seen in flesh and blood. Fontaine remembered another hand of the same statuesque mould which his own had once

pressed with all the ardor of a first passion; but this was the sole resemblance he could detect between the sisters.

Senora Roselli left the library, and Fontaine paced the floor a few moments after her departure; but the very atmosphere seemed still pervaded by her presence, and he felt that it was oppressive to him. He threw on his hat and hurried out on the lawn to seek in rapid exercise to throw off the incubus the last interview had left upon his mind.

The two girls were returning from their ramble to order horses for a ride. Savella was to take her first lesson in equestrianism, and when she saw her uncle she gaily proposed to him to be their escort in the proposed excursion.

Fontaine could not well refuse her first request, and the three promenaded on the lawn till the horses were brought out. A beautiful Arabian, with flowing mane, had been given to Isola; gentle as he was spirited, Selim had borne her many years in safety, and she was as much attached to him as one could become to so noble and serviceable an animal. She now offered him to Savella as more tractable than any other horse upon the place, and mounted one of less beauty herself.

Fontaine placed the two in the saddle and mounted on his coal-black steed, which answered to the name of Lucifer; he took the bridle rein of his niece and guided her horse for her.

As the party rode away, Summerton joined Senora Roselli, who stood upon the piazza watching the trio. He waited till the servant had disappeared, and then asked:

"Is it settled? Am I to remain here as a satellite of the new heiress?"

"Of course; my power could accomplish that, or it could do nothing. To do him justice, though, Fontaine offered no objection. He said it was due to you to permit you to retain your situation now that Savella can remunerate you handsomely."

"Ha! ha! I can but laugh at his credulity. Tutor! yes, I have taught Savella many lessons she would never have learned without me, and to me she chiefly owes her correct knowledge of the English language. It is well that I am to remain, for it is necessary to the success of our plans that I shall be established in the house. You with your temper, and Savella with her wilfulness, would soon disgust and annoy this proud man till he would risk everything to free himself from you. He is as haughty as the prince of darkness himself, and requires nice management to bring him to the point that is essential to our interests."

"And that point?" she interrogated.

"Of course you know it is to induce him to settle everything he owns on Savella. Till that is accomplished, nothing is gained."

"You will not succeed. I have tried my power over him, and, great as it is through my knowledge of the dreary secret of his life, he baffled me. He even refused to dethrone that odious girl in favor of his heiress."

"Ah, bah! that only proves that you are no Machiavelli in petticoats. You try to browbeat people into yielding to your imperious will; but I have other and surer means of success."

"What are they?" she impatiently asked.

Summerton lowered his voice to a whisper, and after uttering a few mysterious sentences again spoke aloud:

"As to the girl, I leave her to you. So insignificant an obstacle to the possession of this noble property can be easily dealt with. Have you any scruples as to the means?"

"None; she must be removed, and that quickly, though without suspicion falling on me. Your skill will enable you to arrange it so."

"Of course—I have meddled with chemistry, and I know agents that will undermine the health slowly and naturally. No ordinary physician can detect their operation; besides, I

intend to be her medical adviser myself; so lose no time in letting Mr. Fontaine know that I am skilled in the healing art. I will volunteer to go with him to visit the negro that was hurt yesterday, and by my skilful treatment I will gain his confidence. In fact, there are few things I have not attempted to do, though my appearance in the character of a reverend clergyman is the last thing I once thought I should undertake. My parents educated me for one; but I ran away from them sooner than accept the dull life of a country curate."

"You look as meek and sanctified in your black garments and shovel hat as if you had studied the character thoroughly. I would hardly know you myself, so completely are you transformed by them."

"It's a respectable character, and as a novelty it suits me," was the mocking rejoinder. "I am prepared to sustain it, too; for if the bishop himself was to come along, I could discourse learnedly of the mysteries of theology, and enlighten him on the condition of ecclesiastical affairs in the various European countries in which I have sojourned. Oh! I am a clever fellow, and I am about to fulfil my destiny by gaining the long deferred reward of all my toils—a luxurious home and plenty of money."

"Wait till the end comes, before you congratulate yourself on acquiring possessions that may yet slip from your grasp," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"I understand my position well enough. With a proud and unsuspecting man, who is himself the very incarnation of romantic honor, I have very little to fear. I can coil myself around him till he will have no volition but mine, and I intend to do it. So, now, let's to business; come with me to my room, and a certain little case I have there will afford the means to relieve you from your *bête noir*; though that is a harsh name to give to so pretty a piece of humanity as the girl you are ambitious of sending among her kindred hours."

The levity of his manner, so strikingly at variance with his assumed character, and the terrible nature of the deed they were planning, did not shock the woman beside him, for she laughed as she said:

"The sooner she takes her place among the angelic choir the better for our purposes. The warrior slays his scores on the battle field, and is applauded for it, then wherefore shall not we remove from our path the stumbling-block that encumbers it, even if it does happen to be a young and tender girl? She is more innocent now than she will ever again be, and it is really doing her a service to remove her from future temptation."

"In my ecclesiastical character I can give her a passport to the courts of Heaven," said Summerton, with a mocking laugh, and the two entered the house, and ascended the staircase together.

Celia was in the parlor, setting it in order; through the opened windows she witnessed this interview, and vainly tried to comprehend what was said; but the two accomplices were too cautious to speak in English, and she joined her grand-parents at their breakfast, with a feeling of aggravation against the whole party of intruders. She had not forgotten the insult of Savella on the previous night, and she threw herself upon a seat, exclaiming:

"Here we is, in a reg'lar mess! Dese here new people aint got no feelin' for darkies, an' even the young mistis said she were feared o' me las' night, jis' as if a 'spectable cullor'd person was agwine to do anything to her. I clar, granny, I wish marster had never heerd o' dis new gal what's come to take Miss Isola's place."

"An' I'm sure I wish so too," was the heart-felt response of the old woman.

"Dey aint *much*," said Cæsar, in his most oracular tone. "I does wonder dat a Fontaine would demean himself to marry a furriner, for in my 'pinion, dey is all poor white

trash. As to de young mistis as is to be, she carnt take the shine off'n *our* pretty little rose-bud, anyhow."

"I spec' it will be hard to find one dat *can* do dat," replied Aggy. "She's a lady in de grain, for she's kind, and good to every one dat comes nigh her. I don't wish no harm to de new one, but I jes' wish she'd stayed whar she come from. I knows dat I'll neber like her as I does de chile I nussed, and petted till she growed up into de sweet creetur she is now. Marse Claude can give her his fortin' any how, an' I hopes I b'longs to him, eaze I don't want dat woman wi' de shiny eyes to have nothin' to do wi' me. My! aint she got a temper of her own!"

"Well, I reckon you'd a thought so, ef you had seed her face dis mornin', when missy took her place at de bottom o' de table. I reckon she wants to sit thar herself, or to put the young one in it, but Marse Claude won't 'low dat no how. *He* thinks dere's nothin' under the shinin' sun as missy, and *I* think he's mighty nigh right."

"So he is," said Celia, "an' I hopes dat marster 'll git a gal from de quarters to wait on Miss Svelly, for I don' feel no call to do no more for her den I can help, sence she said outright dat she was feared o' me," said Celia, indignantly; but she fell to eating her breakfast with an appetite not at all impaired by her wrongs.

It was finally agreed among the trio that they would bear with the presence of the intruders from respect to Mr. Fontaine, but they would maintain a strict espionage over them.

CHAPTER XIII.

FANNY BERKELY'S INTENTIONS.

DURING their ride the party from La Fontaine encountered Fanny Berkely mounted on Dashaway, and attended by the black groom. She had not yet heard of the arrival of the heiress, and she checked the speed of her horse and rode forward quite demurely for her."

"Good morning, Mr. Fontaine; it is something quite wonderful to see you a squire of dames. I was coming to Isola to be consoled, for George is actually gone; and everybody at home insists that it is best he shall go, when I think that for me it is the very worst thing that could have happened."

"You have lost a brother and I have gained a niece, Fanny," said Fontaine, with his rare smile. "Permit me to present her to you, and I trust that Savella Fontaine and Fanny Berkely will be good friends in the future."

The two girls nodded and smiled at each other, and Fontaine said:

"We will now return, as Savella has rode quite far enough for a first essay on horseback. We will detain you with us for the day, and send Pompey back with a message to that effect."

"Oh no, thank you. I promised cousin Carrie to return before dinner. I left Philip Vane at the Vale for her to entertain, while I scampered off to see Isola, for I have a very important communication to make to her."

At Philip's name Fontaine's face darkened, and he said, curtly:

"Young ladies' secrets are usually very important, in their own estimation at least. If Mr. Vane is your guest, I fancy Miss Carleton can play the agreeable to him quite as well as you can."

"Oh! she can do it a great deal better, for I do not presume to place myself in competition with Cousin Carrie. She is a queen, and I am only fit to be her lady of honor."

"I did not give you credit for so much humility as that. Ride on with Isola, and we will follow more slowly, for Savella is yet a little afraid of her horse."

"Afraid of dainty Selim! Oh, you needn't be, Miss Fontaine, for he is the most thorough-bred horse in the country, and by that I mean that he is too well bred a gentleman to attempt anything to alarm you. Isola rode him in her school days, and he is as obedient to her voice as if he possessed reason. Come, Isola, let us canter forward."

The two were soon out of sight, and Savella made innumerable inquiries as to the family and fortune of her new acquaintance. When she learned that herself and her brother were the presumptive heirs of a large estate in the neighborhood, she felt a little vexed that George had made his exodus before she had an opportunity of seeing him, for Savella had made up her mind that one endowed with the brilliant fortune she came to claim was entitled to the homage of every presentable man that approached her. She asked:

"Who is this Philip Vane of whom Miss Berkely spoke?"

With some constraint Fontaine replied:

"He is the son of a neighbor, and has been partially educated with the young Berkelys and Isola."

"Is he handsome? Is his father wealthy?"

"As to the last I cannot say; but the Vanes live in handsome style, and Dunlora is one of the most desirable places in the valley as a residence for a man of ample means. As to Philip's appearance, I will leave you to judge of that when you see him. But I must warn you of one thing, Savella; I have reason to know that when Philip Vane marries he will not make a disinterested choice. If

he should attempt to approach you in the character of a wooer, remember that you must not calculate on gaining my approval."

"Thank you for the warning, Uncle Claude, and be sure that I will remember it," she said, with seeming earnestness. "You shall guide my choice if I ever make one, for a young girl who is a stranger to all around her might easily fall into the snare of a mere fortune hunter."

"Only abide by that determination, Savella. Consult me in everything in which you are vitally interested, and you will be saved from many a danger. I am your best friend, remember; yes—your *best* one, for neither your aunt nor Mr. Summerton can have the same interest in your future which I have. You are a sacred bequest to me from a brother I fondly loved, whose fate I shall never cease to deplore; and to make you a good and thoughtful woman is my most earnest desire. Providence has delegated to you a great responsibility, and as you use or abuse it you will hereafter be judged."

"Oh, uncle, you frighten me by such solemn words. Though Mr. Summerton is a clergyman, he has never said as much to me as that."

"Because few people think as I do on this subject. To eat, drink and be merry is by most persons considered as the legitimate use of a large fortune; but I regard the possessor of wealth as a steward who will be as severely judged for its misuse as the man who buried his one talent without attempting to use it. You will be a slave-holder, and such property as human souls is a heavy responsibility laid upon the owner. The blacks are warm-hearted, easily attached to those who treat them kindly and justly, and it is this I wish to teach my dear Savella how to do. I trust you will not disappoint me, for I have the welfare of my poor people much at heart. When I am gone, I hope they will find no cause to regret the hands into which my authority over them may fall."

Savella impulsively exclaimed:

"My dear uncle, you are the best man I have ever seen. I will try and do as you wish, and although I may sometimes disappoint you through heedlessness, and sometimes through wilfulness, yet I have not a bad heart, and I will at least make an effort to come up to the standard you wish me to attain. These dark people are repulsive to me; but in time I shall overcome that, and to follow in your steps will be my highest ambition."

Fontaine was pleased with this speech, for he saw that it was a genuine expression of feeling, and as they rode slowly forward he sought to draw her out and become more familiar with the spirit that inhabited a form so closely resembling what the Nemesis once was. But for that he could have taken Savella to his heart in perfect trust as all that remained to him of his lost brother.

The young girl, mindful of the cue which had been given her, prattled on gaily, and with apparent artlessness; with a quick appreciation of character, she intuitively knew what would please the fastidious and reserved man beside her, and when they arrived at his own door, Fontaine had arrived at the agreeable conviction that the fine nature of his niece had been unswayed by the teachings of her subtle protectress, and she would yet be a comfort and pride to his declining years.

In the meantime, Isola and Fanny had gained La Fontaine, and retired to the chamber of the former. When they were alone, Fanny said:

"So—the long expected have come at last. The girl is only passable; what are the others like? You see that I have assumed the character of your confessor, Isola, and I expect you to speak out exactly what you think. Do you like these people?"

"Really, Fanny, you ask so many questions in a breath that I hardly know how to answer you. I can have formed no accurate judgment of our guests yet."

"I understand exactly what *that* means. I see they are not to your taste, for there is a cloud on your brow already. But I'll tell you one thing: if these strangers make you uncomfortable in your own home, I shall take you to ours; There! you need not say a word; I shall do it; and grand'pa told me this morning that if anything should happen here to make you desire another home, his should always be open to you."

"My dear Fanny, what can you possibly have said to General Berkely to draw forth such an assurance? I can rely on my father's affection to sustain me under every trial, and I will never—never forsake him. But I am not the less grateful to your grandfather for his kindness, though I trust that I shall never need to put it to the test."

"Perhaps not; but Mr. Fontaine is not your *own* father, remember, and no one knows what may happen. Until lately, had you not as much faith in one who has proved—I won't say what."

The heart of Isola painfully contracted, but she quietly said:

"This is a very different thing. I cannot compare my just and noble father with him to whom you refer. He has proved recreant, and I have given him up."

"Finally and forever, Isola? Is there no lingering feeling of interest for him in your heart? I seem cruel, dear Isola, but I am only kind, for I have a motive so weighty for asking the question as to absolve me from the charge of impertinence."

"I no longer love Philip Vane," firmly replied Isola. "I believe now that I was only fascinated by his beauty and wit; for since the conviction came to me that he cared more for the fortune with which he supposed I should be endowed than for myself, I have found it easy to relinquish him. I hope you are satisfied now, Fanny."

"Yes, you darling girl, I am satisfied with this candid

avowal; and what is more, somebody else will be made happy when I tell him this. Here is a letter I have brought you. There—don't attempt to read it now, for I claim every moment of your time while I am here, and that can wait. I left Phil. over at our house talking over the 'affair,' as he calls it, with my cousin. He has lost ground in her favor, I can tell you; but the best of it is, Philip professes to adore you still; but in the same breath he says that he cannot defy the wishes of his parents so far as to marry you. I am sure that he *does* like you next to himself, but I know that if his imperial highness said I *will* to that poor old father of his, he would carry the day. Send Mr. Vane to Coventry, dear, for he merits no better fate."

"I fancy it is now of little importance to him whither I send him," replied Isola, with an attempt to smile. "This letter, I see, is from George. I will do as you bid me, and lay it aside till I am alone. I do hope he will enjoy his travels, and come back to us improved in every way."

"I expect he'll become such a grand seigneur that he will hardly deign to look at poor little me; but I'll have my turn. I am going to Richmond this winter, and I'll find a lover willing to take me on a bridal tour to Europe; mind if I don't."

"Let me be your *compagnon du voyage*, Fanny, when once this grand match is secured," said Isola, laughing with something like her former animation.

"Of course I will. By that time you will be sick entirely of these new people, for I have a presentiment that they have come here to put you out in the cold. In spite of the ominous warning—'Judge not lest ye be judged,' I am going to sit up in judgment upon them. There is the bell for lunch now, and I must see if I am presentable."

Fanny flew to the glass, smoothed her brown curls, and arranged her collar, while Isola placed George's letter in her

work-box and locked it. In a few moments the two were ready to descend, and in the lower hall they overtook Senora Roselli and Summerton.

Miss Berkely was presented to them, and the trio entered the dining-room, to find Fontaine and Savella already seated at the table. Fanny laughed and chatted with her usual vivacity, but she was covertly watching the strangers and drawing her own conclusions. The soft and insinuating manner assumed by Summerton did not please her honest nature; Senora Roselli positively repelled her; but she made up her mind that Savella might be tolerated; but as the heiress of the Fontaines she was a poor representative of their stately beauty and refined courtesy.

In spite of Savella's promise to her uncle, she could not repress a sarcastic smile when Fanny spoke to Cæsar as he offered her something from the table.

"How do you do, Uncle Cæsar? I hope Mammer Aggy is well this morning."

"So, so, Miss Fanny. My ole 'oman begins to feel dat she aint so spry as she used to was. You looks bright as de roses yerse'f dis mornin'."

"Thank you for the compliment. You are always gallant enough to remember that I like to be flattered."

"Flattery! from such a source!" muttered Senora Roselli under her breath; but Summerton blankly said:

"This kindly feeling between races so distinct is really charming, Miss Berkely. You have given me a new lesson in politeness."

"I never thought of being polite," said Fanny, honestly. "I only expressed the kind feeling I have for an old friend I have known from infancy. Uncle Cæsar has brought me many a childish treasure in the shape of speckled bird's eggs, and baskets of chinkapins, which I yet remember with pleasure."

The old negro's face beamed with delight, and he afterwards privately informed Aggy:

"Dat Miss Fanny put down dat furrin man in her off hand way, an' give him a lesson he won't forgit soon."

Fontaine seemed more animated than usual. He exerted himself to talk, and Fanny noticed that his manner to his niece was tender and deferential. She augured from this that he was satisfied with Savella, though she could herself see very little reason why he should be so. Then she chided herself for so harshly judging one so little known to her; and after lunch was over, she endeavored to atone for it by her attention to the heiress. When her horse was brought around for her to return home, she said to Savella:

"This unceremonious visit was not intended as a call on you, Miss Fontaine; for I was not aware of your arrival till I met you on the road. To-morrow the Berkely family will appear in state to welcome yourself and your aunt to our happy valley. We who dwell in it think it only inferior to the Garden of Eden."

"Into that a serpent intruded," said Summerton, in his smoothest tones. "Pray, Miss Berkely, choose a better comparison: the Vale of Tempe, or the Happy Valley of Rasselas, would be more appropriate."

"I prefer my own," said Fanny, "for God ruled over it, and He sent the angel with the flaming sword to execute vengeance upon the faithless and presumptuous, as he will ever do."

She regarded him steadily as she uttered these words, and Summerton shrank before the glance. Had this mere girl instinctively detected the evil within him, that she should venture to speak thus. He recovered himself, and, with resumed sanctity, said:

"Excuse me, Miss Berkely, but such comparisons appear to me to profane scriptures too sacred to be applied to common things."

Fanny's lip curled slightly, but she said:

"Pardon me if I have wounded your prejudices in any way. I had no intention of being irreverent."

"Perhaps I am too easily touched on this subject," replied Summerton, placing his hands sanctimoniously upon his breast, "but I have been reared in a rigid school. Pardon me in my turn, Miss Berkely, for presuming to speak thus to one so much a stranger to me."

"We forgive any degree of ascetism to one of your cloth, Mr. Summerton, so we will part good friends. My father and grandfather will be glad to make the acquaintance of a gentleman of your learning and piety, and they will doubtless call very soon."

Her adieux ended, Fanny whispered to Isola:

"Now you may read your letter and ponder over its contents. I shall carry home a faithful report of all I have seen, thought and felt within the last hour."

Fontaine placed her on her horse, and sent an invitation to the family at the Vale to come over without ceremony and spend the following day at La Fontaine. She promised to accompany them, and dashed away at her usual pace, impatient to reach home and impart her first impressions of her new acquaintances to Miss Carleton. She found her with Mrs. Berkely in the sitting-room, into which Fanny flashed in a state of great excitement, exclaiming:

"I have seen them! They have all come, and the heiress is nothing very great, after all."

"So, the long looked-for have arrived at last," said Mrs. Berkely. "Sit down, Fanny, and give us your first impressions of our new neighbors. Your shrewd observation has doubtless furnished you with a pretty accurate idea of their characters."

"I am afraid you will think me uncharitable, grandma; and cousin Carrie will look up in her grave fashion when she is displeased, and call my name in her deepest tragic tone; but I must say my say even if I am naughty."

Miss Carleton smiled on her; her face had lost some of its girlish beauty in the years which have passed since we

last saw her, but it had gained much more in mobility of expression, in the refinement which reveals the earnest soul animated by a gentle and benevolent temper; she said:

"Speak out, Fanny; I am deeply interested in these strangers, both on Isola's account and on Mr. Fontaine's. I hope they will bring no discord into his home."

Fanny gravely shook her head.

"I am afraid they will. Senora Roselli is a hard woman of the world, I should say, who will not let feeling or politeness prevent her from doing or saying what seems good to her. Mr. Summerton pretends to be very devout, but I am ashamed to say that I have an impression that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing; though Mr. Fontaine spoke highly of his kindness to his niece, and told me that he would remain in his family as her tutor. Savella, it seems, is ambitious of becoming a learned lady, for she intends to continue the study of the dead languages and mathematics with him."

"You do not judge the elder members of the party leniently, my dear; but what of Miss Fontaine herself? Does she resemble her father's family?"

"No, ma'am; she is what mammy Phoebe would call the 'very moral' of her aunt. In her youth, I can fancy that Senora Roselli looked exactly as Savella Fontaine does now. She is dark, with little color. Her hair and eyes are black; and the last, in the intensity of their hue, reminds me of those of my old wax doll, though they had not quite so staring an expression. Her manner is caressing, and I fancy she has already made a favorable impression on Mr. Fontaine."

"I am glad to hear that," said Mrs. Berkely. "Claude is a fastidious man, and if he approves her, Savella must be worthy to be received among-us, even if she is not as attractive as the women of his family have been considered."

"You can judge for yourself ma'am, for Mr. Fontaine charged me with an invitation for the whole family to spend

to-morrow at his house. I think he will feel slighted if we do not all go."

"We seldom decline an invitation to La Fontaine," said Mrs. Berkely, "and on this occasion it must certainly be accepted. I own that I am impatient to see the heiress, and judge for myself of her fitness for the position she is to assume. How does Isola seem affected by their arrival?"

"Isola would not be drawn into discussing them, though I tried to draw her out; but I am afraid she begins already to realize that their presence will not add to her happiness."

"Poor child! it is a great change for her, and if Philip Vane reports truly what passed between Claude and himself, I am afraid that he will be unable to provide for her, though he declares his intention to do so."

"Philip Vane is a false and mercenary man," said Fanny, indignantly; "I expect to see him bowing before this golden idol at the first opportunity; but I do hope that Mr. Fontaine will deal with his pretensions as summarily as they deserve. I have given up nearly all my old liking for Phil, and I don't intend to play the hypocrite toward him. He shall see what I think of his conduct in this affair."

"My dear Fanny," said the clear voice of Miss Carleton, "Do not judge poor Philip too harshly. Some respect was due to his parents, and I know that they would bitterly have opposed his marriage with a fortuneless girl. I do not defend their mercenary ideas, but their son was bound to pay some attention to them."

"Cousin Carrie, you are always finding excuses for those that are in fault; but I know that Philip rules his parents, and he could have extorted their consent to his marriage with Isola if he had chosen to do so. But the young gentleman thinks his pretty person too valuable to be thrown away on Venus herself if she had not a cestus of gold."

Don't tell me about Philip Vane, for I have no patience with him."

"What are you saying about me?" asked Philip, coming in from the hall, looking radiantly handsome. "I hope you are not in one of your tantrums with me, Fanny. What have I done to arouse your indignation?"

"If your own heart does not tell you, I shall not take the trouble to enlighten you," replied the young girl, with a toss of her head. "But I have news for you that you will be glad to hear: the *heiress* has come, and I have seen her."

"Indeed!" he said, with cool indifference. "I do not know that I am particularly interested in the advent of this young lady, especially as under present circumstances I cannot visit at La Fontaine."

"Do you not really intend to call on her?"

"I fancy not—it would be painful to me to see—No, I shall visit at La Fontaine no more."

There was a tone of feeling in his voice that partially disarmed Fanny, and she began to think that after all he might regret his separation from Isola more than she had thought. She more gently said:

"I am sorry for you, Philip, for you have relinquished the fairest prospect of happiness that any man could have hoped for."

"Do you think I would have given her up, Fanny, if I could by any means have avoided it? I am the victim of circumstances, and it is out of my power to explain to you why I have been compelled to act as I have done. In your heart you brand me as a mercenary wretch; but I know that I am something better than that. Mr. Fontaine dismissed me almost with contumely, and Isola passively acquiesced in his decision. I resent the treatment of both too deeply to present myself as a visitor at La Fontaine. I really think you might at least be just to an old friend."

"I will try to be so, Phil., so let us say no more on this painful subject."

He drew her aside and asked:

"How does Isola look? Has she suffered from—
from——"

"From losing the light of your beauty and the sparkle of your wit?" asked Fanny, in a mocking tone, which she could not control. "Not in the least, Mr. Vane; Isola looks as handsome and seems in as good spirits as usual. She told me with her own lips that all is at an end between you, and moreover she said she believed she was more fascinated by your external advantages than attached to your noble qualities. So you see that on both sides it has been 'Love's labor lost.'"

Philip fairly gnashed his teeth, and the pale shade of anger that swept over his face his tormentor might have attributed to some deeper feeling; but Fanny's intuition taught her that Philip was only a consummate actor, and her hard heart did not again relent toward him. He spoke in a constrained tone:

"It is well for me to know this, for my course is now plain before me."

"I am glad to hear it, for nothing is so comfortable as a decided course of action. Isola will not 'pine in green and yellow melancholy,' and you may understand that you are quite free to seek something *yellow* that is more substantial than the first fancy of a young girl."

She fitted away at the summons of her mother, leaving Philip to glower through the window beside which they had been standing, with rage and mortification swelling at his heart. He muttered:

"They all see through my shallow pretences, and despise me as I deserve; but I will come out winner yet. Indifferent as Isola may profess to be, she shall yet feel my desertion. I am not to be thus taunted with impunity."

The sound of the dinner-bell interrupted his bitter musings, and over the table no wit was so bright, no spirits apparently so gay as those of Philip Vane.

In the evening his father and mother came over to the Vale, and Mr. Vane in a long conversation with General Berkely, took on himself the entire blame of his son's conduct; he protested that Philip would have married Isola at all hazards, but himself and his wife used all their power over him to break off a match with a portionless girl, whose family was entirely unknown to them; besides, Philip was dependent upon his parents, and he had no other resource but to submit.

General Berkely listened politely, but at the close of the conversation he said:

"Of course you understand your own position and wishes best, Mr. Vane; but if my grandson had been the fortunate pretender to Isola's favor, I should have received her with the certainty that so gentle and lovely a being is worthy to be mated with the best, however obscure her origin may prove to be. Neither do I think it likely that we shall ever know to whom she really belongs."

"That may be true enough, General; but I have my prejudices, though I do not deny that I might have overlooked them if she had really been the heiress to the Fontaine estate."

"I thought that your pet theory enabled you to overlook even the difference in races," General Berkely rather maliciously remarked.

"That is merely speculative, sir; merely speculative; but in a matter of family descent it is quite different. You know that we Virginians are proverbially tenacious on that score."

"The best blood is that which produces the finest specimens of the human race: judged by that standard, Mr. Vane, this young girl is a Princess in her own right."

"Perhaps so—I will not dispute it; but even a Princess without a dower is a forlorn match for a man who has nothing he can call his own. My law-suit hangs in the balance, and if it goes against me we shall have nothing but Dunlora,

and you know how inadequate that is to the maintenance of the luxury to which we are accustomed."

General Berkely had never heard of the suit till within the last few days, but under this new aspect of affairs, he prudently thought that it might be as well for Philip to pay some attention to the wishes of his father.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLOTTERS AT WORK.

WHEN Isola again found herself alone in her room, she unlocked her work-box, and took from it the letter given to her by Fanny.

With much emotion she read the following lines:

"DEAREST ISOLA:—I cannot leave my native land for an indefinite time, without saying to you what would have remained unspoken but for the recent change in your destiny.

"I know that Philip Vane has withdrawn his pretensions to your favor, for I had the assurance from himself; and I am not invading any right of one who has been my friend from boyhood in thus addressing you.

"Isola, you have long known that I love you—but how truly, how tenderly, you will never know unless Fate gives me the privilege to call you mine at some future day. I can wait; I can hope without asking any pledge from you. Just now I feel how ungenerous it would be to plead for such a thing; but love such as mine can await the revolution in your heart which time may produce in my favor.

"I tell you this now, that you may compare other pretenders to your affections with your early adorer, whose de-

votion will never fail you, under any circumstances, while life is left to me.

"With the entire approbation of my family, I reveal to you the unalterable sentiments of my heart, and I will hope that in time yours will be moved to respond to them. I love you for yourself alone, Isola, and no change in your prospects can affect my feelings. A stranger is coming to claim the inheritance we have all believed would be yours, and if she makes your home unpleasant to you, I entreat that you will seek shelter and protection from those who have loved you from your childhood. Should it be necessary, I believe that Mr. Fontaine will consent to this arrangement, for your happiness has for years been his first care.

"My cousin Carrie has promised to stand your fast friend in every crisis that may arise, and I have such confidence in her goodness—in her sense of right—that I am willing to trust you to her guidance. I need not tell you to rely on her as a firm friend, for that she is such to you you already know.

"I will write to you from Europe; only friendly letters, Isola, for I will not persecute you with my love. Reply to them as a friend, if you can find in your heart a feeling of preference for me. If you cannot, leave them unanswered, for although the pang will be severe, it will be best to cherish no false hope of success if I am ultimately to fail in winning the light of my eyes, and the desire of my heart.

"I shall be absent two years, and in that time you can learn to understand your own feelings; but be assured mine will never waver in their devotion to you. Adieu, my precious friend, and may God and His holy angels guard you from all evil.

GEORGE BERKELY."

Isola read this letter over several times, and she wiped

away her falling tears before placing it in her writing-desk. After her late bitter experience, this disinterested devotion was very sweet to her; and with a sigh she wished she had been more clear-sighted in judging of the merits of her two lovers. But just now the very thought of love was odious to her; a few months hence she might feel differently; she might be able to respond to this noble and generous suitor in such a manner as would satisfy him that his cause was not hopeless.

Isola knew that the desire nearest to her guardian's heart would be fulfilled if she accepted George Berkely as her future husband, but that was something so far distant that she need not trouble herself about it just now. Several months must elapse before she could hear from him from the far distant land to which he was bound, and in the interim she could decide whether she could conscientiously give him the tacit encouragement he asked.

Accustomed always to confide in Fontaine, she sought him in his library, and laid before him the letter which had so deeply moved her. He read it with evident gratification, and on closing it exclaimed:

"Noble, generous fellow! How different from Philip Vane. My dear child, this manly letter only confirms the high opinion I have always had of George. If you ever marry, I hope he will be the man you will prefer above all others. Is not your heart touched by his tender care for your happiness, Isola?"

"I do not know," she wearily replied. "I am grateful for his high appreciation, especially at this time; but my heart seems to have contracted and grown harder with the experience of the last few weeks. I do not know that I shall be worthy to accept the affection poor George so lavishly offers, in that distant time to which he refers."

Fontaine drew her toward himself, and looked tenderly into her drooping eyes; he regretfully asked:

"Has the arrow struck so deep, my love? Must your young life be permanently shadowed by the heartless Adonis, who cast you aside so soon as he comprehended that you could not endow him with great wealth? My beloved child, I conjure you to be true to yourself, and let the lofty scorn of a noble nature crush out the last vestige of your preference for Philip Vane."

He felt her tremble in his clasp, but she no longer avoided his eyes. She looked up firmly, as she replied:

"It has already done so, Father. I no longer love Philip, but there is a dreary void—a blank feeling of desolation in my heart, that oppresses me almost unto death. I am yet in the depths of the valley of humiliation, but God, to whom I earnestly pray, will in His own good time lead me out of it. After this penance is completed, if I feel that I am worthy to accept the love of a true and honorable man, I will not refuse poor George's prayer. I will then write to him, and in the interval of his absence I will endeavor to become a better and truer woman for his sake; for such love as his merits a rich reward."

A joyful smile irradiated Fontaine's face at this assurance, and he tenderly said:

"Persevere in the course you have marked out for yourself, my dear child, and the blessing of Heaven will ultimately fall on you. To see you happy is the most cherished desire of my heart, and I will have faith to believe that the God who cast you on my protection will yet enable me to provide for your future welfare. I have commenced looking into my affairs, and if life is spared me, I hope in a few years to make you no contemptible heiress yet. I am better off than I thought I was, but I am glad that what has happened here has enabled you so clearly to distinguish between the true metal and the false."

"You are too good," she replied with emotion. "You think only of me, and I have lately suffered my thoughts to

dwell so much on another. But I am disenchanted, and I promise you that right reason shall soon resume its sway."

"That is right, my darling; there is much latent strength in your soul that has never yet been tested. You will emerge from this trial with as tender a heart, as gentle and true a nature as before it fell upon you. When you feel as if you can conscientiously do so, answer poor George's letter, and give him a gleam of hope."

She smiled faintly,—

"When I can do so, I will, dear father. Now I will interrupt you no longer."

In the warm summer weather the doors were all open, and as Isola turned to leave the library, she thought she heard a movement in the outer room; she stepped quickly forward, but was not in time to detect the eavesdropper, who was no other than Senora Roselli. She had seen Isola going to her guardian carrying an open letter in her hand, and an irresistible desire to learn to what that letter referred seized on her. She softly glided through the outer apartment and stood near enough to the door to overhear every word that passed within.

She made good her escape, and when Isola came into the hall she found her seated in a large chair, apparently absorbed in a book she had snatched from a table as she passed. As the young girl approached her, she started very naturally, and looking up, said:

"Oh! it's you! I was really so absorbed in this charming book that I had quite forgotten everything around me. Mr. Fontaine has a good library, I believe. I should like very much to look over its shelves, for I am a great reader."

"My father will not object to your doing so, Madam; but he usually sits in that room, and he would prefer that your visit shall be made when he goes out for his daily walk. The window on the piazza opens to the floor, and in his absence I will go in with you at any time."

"He does not like to be disturbed, then? Mr. Fontaine seems very solitary in his habits."

"Yet among his friends he is very social, as you may already have observed. He is fond of study, and sometimes, for days, he confines himself to that apartment. At such times, I do not even apply for admittance."

"I wonder if he is seeking after the Philosopher's stone," said the Nemesis, with a constrained laugh. "I should not wonder, for Claude was always a fanciful man."

"I am certain that he is too practical a man to seek anything that would be so useless to him," responded Isola drily. "Mr. Fontaine is satisfied to be a faithful steward in the use of the wealth Providence has bestowed on him, without seeking such means as you hint at to increase it."

"Yet it would be a grand thing to discover. Think of the immense good such a man might do with the wealth which would then be his."

"My father has no desire to become a second Midas, Madam. I have reason to believe that his time is spent in more ennobling studies than seeking to increase the fortune which is already amply sufficient for all reasonable purposes."

"You speak of your protector as if he were almost a god," said the Senora, with a repressed sneer.

"There is but one God," said the young girl reverently; "and even in thought, I dare not liken any human creature to him; but among men, my father has few peers. I have every cause to estimate him highly, for to me, he has been the best and most generous of benefactors."

"And you do not even know your own name? Do you know to what nation you belong?" said the hard woman, caring little if she wounded the sensitive creature she despised, and was resolute to trample on.

"I bear the name of him who adopted me as his child, and I claim to be a Virginian by education, if not by birth,"

replied Isola with dignity, for she felt that the speaker was impertinently endeavoring to wound her. She passed on and joined Savella on the piazza.

After looking out on the beautiful scene bathed in the early sunshine, she turned to the heiress, and said:

"I have not yet heard you play or sing, Savella. Since you are from the land of song, you should excel in music."

"You shall judge for yourself," and the two passed into the drawing-room. The piano was a fine-toned one, and kept in excellent order. Isola played well, and sang sweetly herself, but when Savella ran her fingers over the keys, and executed a prelude of great brilliancy, she at once confessed to herself that she had never heard so skillful a touch before.

Savella played some difficult Italian variations, and then struck into a wild German air possessing all the weird power of their wonderful music. Attracted by the magic of the sounds, Fontaine came from his room, and sat down near her, charmed and entranced. As the last note died away, the performer arose and said:

"That will do for the present. Now you must play for me, Isola."

As she turned, her eye fell on Fontaine, and she exclaimed:

"You here, uncle Claude? That is indeed a compliment to my poor skill."

"Do not undervalue your great gift, Savella, for such playing I have rarely heard, and I am no mean judge. You sing, too? With such a musical organization, a fine voice must have been given."

"Yes, I can sing, too," she smilingly replied, "and I shall be very happy if my performance can give you pleasure."

"Music is a passion with me, and such as yours might delight one even less enthusiastic than myself. Let me hear your voice, my dear."

Savella resumed her seat, and commenced a wild and passionate wail from Norma. For an instant Fontaine regretted the choice she had made, for he had heard that opera performed in Naples by the finest European musicians, and he feared an amateur would fail to render isolated portions of it with all their heart-rending pathos. But after the first line he listened in breathless amazement; the rich and flexible voice of the singer deepened to the lowest wail of anguish, or soared to the highest note of despair without breaking or losing a single inflexion of the magnificent music. Fontaine almost held his breath to listen, and at the close of the performance he seized her hand and warmly said:

"My dear Savella, you have afforded me more pleasure than I have known for years. Your voice and execution are wonderful; you would make a successful Prima Donna."

"So Mr. Summerton once thought; and by his advice I have received the best musical instruction afforded by my native land; and you know that is saying much. If I had failed to discover the residence of my family, I should have gone on the stage."

"Thank Heaven that you were saved from that!" said Fontaine, emphatically. "Yet with your powers, it was a wise forethought in him. Sing to me, Savella, when I am sad, and you will always have the power to drive the demon from me, as David did from Saul."

"Oh, uncle! how glad I am that I can do something to make you happier," she exclaimed with animation. "This is my sole talent; but I shall estimate it more highly than any other since you so generously appreciate it."

Fontaine kissed her brow and smilingly said:

"I appreciate both that and yourself very highly, I assure you. Sing on—let me hear you in something less sad than poor Norma's broken-hearted wail."

Savella willingly complied, and for an hour the two listeners sat rapt in the melody that filled them with delight.

During this time Senora Roselli joined Summerton, and walked on the piazza with him. She said with a sneer:

"Savella's music has produced the effect I anticipated. I counselled her not to play till she was asked to do so, that they might be more surprised at her performance than if she had volunteered it. I never heard her sing better."

"I don't know, after all, but it would have been better to let her take her chances on the stage than to bring her here to claim this inheritance. She must have made a brilliant fortune."

"Perhaps so; but it was uncertain, and she is difficult to manage. Flattery and the incense of public applause would soon have turned her head, which we both know is none of the strongest. She would have escaped from our control, and probably married some worthless man, who would have taken from us the reward of all our efforts. This was our surest card, and to play it with success must now be our sole object."

"So you have always contended, and I yielded to your opinion. Time will shew which was right. We can secure what we are now working for, and Savella may yet carry out her destiny by becoming world-renowned as a singer."

"Perhaps so; but that the future must decide. I have made a discovery which is important to us, and I have sought the earliest opportunity of communicating it to you. I saw that girl going in with a letter to Claude; I noiselessly followed her, and listened to all that passed between them. It was a love letter from young Berkely, I suppose, from what they said. They spoke of a disappointment connected with Philip Vane, who, it seems, has also been making love to her till he discovered that she would not be an heiress. But what concerns us is, that Fontaine told her, if he lives long enough, he will make her rich yet. She shall never have a penny from this estate; every dollar he has shall be given to Savella; on that I am determined."

"Not more firmly than I am," said Summerton. "But you have in your possession the means of circumventing him. If you do your part, the girl will never live to enjoy his savings. What use have you made of the powder I gave you?"

"It is here," she replied, placing her hand on the pocket of her dress. "Are you quite sure that it will impart no taste to water?"

"If you put in the minute quantity I indicated it will not be perceived. Your own safety depends on that, for her fading away must be too gradual to excite suspicion, and the sentimental disappointment to which you alluded will readily account for the failure of her health."

"I understand all that," was the impatient response. "Now I can see my way clear enough. A small pitcher stands on a table near her bed which Celia fills with iced water every night. I can easily find my way there before she retires, and——"

She did not complete the sentence, but the hard compression of her cruel lips spoke even more eloquently than words.

"Poor Berkely," said Summerton, with a chilling laugh. "I am afraid he is destined to a second disappointment, even more grievous than the first. Who is this Vane?"

"The son of a planter in the valley. Both he and Isola attended the school at the Berkely place, and it seems that both the young men made love to her. One was in earnest, but the other shied off with the change in her prospects, as I before told you."

"I shouldn't wonder if this Vane should be trying to snatch our quarry from us. Savella must be warned that he is only a fortune-hunter, for if she took a fancy to him there would be the deuce to pay. She'd never give him up, do what we would to separate her from him."

"She is already warned. She repeated to me a portion of her conversation with her uncle this morning when they

were out riding, and he gave her explicitly to understand if Mr. Vane presumes to approach her in the character of a lover, he will not be acceptable to him."

"If Fontaine only understood her as well as we do, he would never have done that. You know that Savella has always been actuated by the most contrary spirit; what we desired her particularly *not* to do, she is always sure to attempt. Philip Vane now has an interest in her eyes, which he might never have possessed had she been left to herself; and when she learns that she can also rival this young girl, she will be sure to make an effort to do so."

"Oh, well, she can amuse herself by flirting with him, but marrying him is quite another thing."

"I tell you," replied Summerton, with some heat, "that if she falls in love with him, she will have her own way at the risk of her life. With her fortune, she should make a brilliant marriage. If we could get rid of *encumbrances* we could return to Italy and give her a Prince for a husband."

"I have already hinted as much to her."

"And how did she receive it?"

"She seemed to assent, but at the moment she was thinking of something else, and she said nothing with reference to it."

"Impress it upon her again. Dazzle her imagination with visions of high rank, and the prestige that accompanies it. Leave no means untried to keep her free from any entanglement in this semi-barbarous country. I already shudder at the thought of remaining among these mountains through the coming winter."

"Be sure that I shall do my best." And when dinner was announced the two conspirators went in with smiling faces and smooth words, to greet those against whom they cherished schemes of such deadly import.

On the following day the family from the Vale came over

to dine at La Fontaine, and form their own estimate of the strangers.

Aware that such an ordeal must be undergone, Senora Roselli was extremely solicitous about the appearance of herself and her niece. Her own dress was simple, but rich and becoming, and on Savella's toilette she expended all her skill. The result did credit to her efforts, for the plain dark girl issued from her room a brilliant vision of Parisian elegance. A handsome wardrobe had been ordered while they were in New York from a French modiste, and with the keen delight of a young girl, Savella found herself in possession of the beautiful things she had so often coveted when worn by others.

A pale amber-colored silk, trimmed with black lace, fell in flowing folds to the floor; Roman pearls glittered on her neck and arms, the last of which were of sculptured beauty. Her magnificent hair was braided into a heavy plait fastened at the back of her head with jewelled arrows, and a faint tinge of rouge lighted up her dark eyes. As Savella glanced at herself in the mirror, she was satisfied with the effect of her toilette, though she said:

"I am afraid that I am overdressed for the occasion, Aunt Bianca. This is not a grand dinner party, you know; only a gathering of my uncle's oldest and best friends."

"And those are the very people who will criticize you most severely. It is fitting that the heiress of these broad lands shall be arrayed as becomes her position. They are at home, and you are a stranger, therefore you should appear in your best."

"Well, you know best, and I am satisfied with my appearance. I have never seen myself look half as well before."

"Yes—you are really handsome to-day. Be natural and engaging as Isola is, for I must confess that she is attractive. Don't sing till you are pressed to do so, for it is as well not

to make an ostentatious exhibition of your skill. In *that* at least, you can excel all the competitors you are likely to find here."

"I will remember; and now I may go down and show myself to my uncle?"

"Yes, if he will receive you."

As Savella descended the staircase, Isola joined her, dressed in a white muslin robe, with a few natural flowers in her hair. She glanced over the brilliant figure of the heiress, and smilingly said:

"You are radiant to-day, Savella. Rich dress is very becoming to you."

"That means, I suppose, that I need finery to set me off to advantage; but you look well in anything. Do you think my uncle will be satisfied with my appearance?"

"He will be very difficult to please if he is not. Shall we go together into his *sanctum*?"

"If he will permit us, I shall be glad to do so."

"Oh, yes; this is not one of his dark days, and he will be happy to see us."

"Dark days!" repeated Savella. "What do you mean, Isola? Is my uncle subject to fits of gloom?"

"Yes—he has suffered much in his early life. Sometimes he cannot bear intrusion, but now you have come, I hope we can jointly brighten him up so much that they will become less frequent."

When the two girls entered the library, Fontaine arose and laid aside his books. He seemed surprised, and pleased as his eyes fell upon his niece, and he said to her:

"Truly, my dear, you take one by surprise in every way. A little while ago I discovered that you are a genuine nightingale, and now you come to me almost a beauty. I am proud of my little girl, and my rose and my pearl need fear few rivals in the valley."

"Thank you, dear uncle," she joyfully said. "But I do

not wish to be called a rose. I am afraid that I am but a yellow one, and the whole race is too ephemeral. If Isola is a gem, give me as appropriate a name as pearl is to her."

"Then you shall be my ruby," he replied, with a smile.

"That is better; rubies, with their scarlet glitter, suit my style."

"If you like them, my first gift to you shall be a set worthy to be worn by the last descendant of my family."

"Oh, Uncle Claude, you are too good, and I promise to try and be all you wish me."

He drew her toward himself and kissed her brow; then bestowing the same caress on Isola, left the room to receive his guests, who at that moment drove up to the door.

Isola accompanied him, but Savella lingered in the library till the party was established in the drawing-room, and her aunt and Summerton had been presented to them.

As she had anticipated, her uncle came for her, and drawing her arm through his own, with stately pride Fontaine led her into the apartment, and introduced her to his friends.

When Fanny saw her she could scarcely repress an exclamation of surprise, and she thought:

"Goodness! is that the same girl I saw yesterday, looking sallow and commonplace enough? I declare she has bloomed into beauty all at once. Won't Cousin Carrie say I was prejudiced!"

Savella immediately found herself the principal object of attention. She replied with ease and grace to the kind words addressed to her, and her slight foreign accent gave piquancy to all she uttered. Senora Roselli and Summerton admirably sustained her, and the incidents of the day were a triumph to the subtle schemers.

When dinner was over, music was called for; Isola and Fanny both sung ballads with sweetness, and they responded at once to the request. The former knew that their per-

formance would soon be eclipsed, but she made it a rule never to refuse to play when asked to do so.

Savella, with much apparent diffidence, at first declined an invitation to the piano, but when Fontaine himself approached her, and taking her hand, said:

"Come, my love, and let our friends enjoy the treat I have looked forward to with pleasure," she could no longer refuse.

As the first notes of her brilliant voice arose, General Berkely and his son came in from the piazza, where they had been smoking and talking with Summerton. The whole party gathered around the performer, listening in almost breathless silence.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the general, at the close of the first song, "that is marvellous! It throws you all in the shade, ladies. Carrie, you and your pupils must hide your diminished heads after such music as that."

"No, indeed," she pleasantly replied, "we shall do no such thing. The sparrow still twitters his little song even when the nightingale is abroad. Really, Miss Fontaine, we must thank you for an enjoyment that rarely falls to our lot in this secluded valley. Your voice is exquisite, and your execution admirable."

"I have had the benefit of the best masters," Savella quietly replied, "and my fondness for music led me to profit to the utmost by their instructions."

"That is easily seen; but pray give us more. Do not attempt to leave the piano yet."

Thus solicited, Savella struck into a grand fantasia which displayed her skillful execution, and at its close she was petitioned for another vocal effort. The finest opera music was familiar to her, and she sang the most difficult portions of them apparently without an effort.

There was a bright moon, and at a late hour the guests departed, charmed with the young stranger, and pleased

with her two satellites. When the four ladies were shut up in the carriage, Mrs. Berkely said :

"My dear Fanny, how could you be so prejudiced in your description of these strangers? They promise to make a very agreeable addition to our society."

"There! I knew it! I have been saying to myself all day that you would accuse me of ill-nature. But I declare I was as much taken by surprise as you could be, and I am almost puzzled to think that the commonplace people I saw yesterday can be the elegant and well-bred ones I have seen to-day. They were got up for effect, and I must say that the whole affair was an artistic triumph."

"Nonsense, child. You saw through green spectacles, that was all. You were jealous of them as Isola's rivals, but the heiress seems fond of her already."

"Well, grandma, you are entitled to your opinion, and so am I to mine. The surface seems fair enough, but when we get below it, we shall find that soft words do not always tell what is passing in the heart. I hope that I misjudge them, but my instinct tells me that these people are unfriendly to Isola, and if Mr. Fontaine loved her less I should have many fears for her happiness."

"She does not yet feel the change in her prospects," said Miss Carleton, "for she was serene and happy to-day, in spite of the late rupture with Philip. I was glad to see that it has not more seriously affected her."

"If it had you would never have discovered it, for Isola is proud and reticent. She would die sooner than betray her sufferings; but I do not think that Philip has wounded her in a vital part. Contempt can kill love more effectually than anything I know of, and that she has a right to feel for him."

"Fanny, you are too bitter," said her mother, reprovingly. "Philip has been almost a child of our family, and we must not judge him too harshly. We are enjoined not to judge others, lest we be judged ourselves."

"But, mother, the same record says, 'by their fruits shall ye know them,' and Philip's actions have spoken loudly enough; but I am dumb in the future as to his delinquencies. Wait and see for yourself; for with the first opportunity I know he will be crawling at the feet of the golden idol. There! that is my last prophecy about him, and when it is fulfilled, perhaps I may dare to speak of him again."

"But not to abuse him, my dear. You know it has always been our practice to speak well of the absent."

Fanny uttered no further sound. She threw herself back in the corner of the carriage, and gazed out upon the moon which lighted up the picturesque mountain road through which they were traveling.

CHAPTER XV.

ISOLA'S DANGER.

THE fame of Savella's great musical abilities soon penetrated to every house in the valley, and day after day carriages filled with elegantly dressed ladies, escorted by cavaliers mounted on horseback, drove up to the stately front of La Fontaine; and attention and flatteries enough were lavished upon the heiress to have turned a much stronger head than hers.

During these visits Isola was often made to feel the change in her position, by the half expressed sympathy of some or the careless neglect of others; but, to their honor, many showed that in herself she was worthy of esteem, even if her origin was unknown, and the smiles of Fortune had deserted her; for, through Philip Vane's imprudence, it had become well known in the valley that the young orphan would not inherit any portion of Fontaine's fortune.

All pitied her, a few attempted to patronize her, but she was so calm and dignified under this reverse, that all were surprised. But as the days glided away, her cheeks lost their hue of health, and a feeling of lassitude, for which she could not account, often oppressed her. She suffered from insatiable thirst, which nothing seemed to have power to quench, and with deep sorrow Fontaine saw the evidences of what he believed to be an incurable wound to her affections. In vain she protested that he was mistaken; that no mental uneasiness caused the evident decline in her health. He could see no other cause for it, and in his heart he execrated Philip Vane as the author of all her sufferings.

Dinner and evening parties were given in honor of the advent of the young heiress by every prominent family in the valley, and with a sense of inexplicable weariness Isola dragged herself from house to house, unwilling to cloud the enjoyment of Savella by betraying how ill she really was; for she seemed to have formed a strong attachment to her, and energetically declared that half her pleasure would be destroyed if Isola was not the companion of her triumphs.

At these gatherings they always met Philip Vane, and as he looked on the changed appearance of Isola, he laid the flattering unction to his soul that his desertion had not been unfelt. Like Fontaine, he could attribute her failing health to no other cause, and his vanity was soothed by this involuntary tribute to his power.

At first Philip seemed shy of approaching the heiress, but from the moment Savella's eyes first rested on his magnificent person, she used every coquettish art to lure him to her side. His apparent indifference piqued her, his beauty dazzled her, and when at last he laid aside his reserve and fairly entered the lists with other pretenders to her favor, she was completely captivated by the fascination of his manners.

One of those passions, as sudden as it is violent, sprung up in the breast of the ardent Italian, and with terror Senora Roselli saw her own fears verified. All the efforts used to prejudice Savella against Philip seemed to have recoiled on those who had attempted to make them. All the warnings of her uncle; the certainty that he would oppose her union with a man who was not even received in his house; all the vehement opposition of the two who wished to retain her under their own control was of no avail.

If Philip Vane loved her well enough to ask her to become his wife, she explicitly declared to her aunt she would brave everything to do so. But as yet Philip had some sense of manliness left in him, and when he looked on the pale face of the poor girl he believed to be fading into her grave because he had deserted her, he felt that it would be base to inflict a new wound when the last seemed to have struck so deeply.

He satisfied his conscience by refraining from making a positive declaration to Savella, though he made love to her with every opportunity that offered itself; he felt secure that no rival could foil him there, for he read the passionate soul of this poor girl as the leaf of an open book, and awaited a more favorable time to ask her the momentous question, would she become his wife?

Philip spoke to Savella of her uncle's distaste to him, and protested that he had lost his favor through no fault of his own. Mr. Fontaine was fastidious and peculiar to an unusual degree, and unfortunately a mutual misunderstanding had arisen between them. He confessed that he had once admired Isola, but never till he saw Savella had his heart really been touched; now, when he had the sorrow to know that his pretensions to her favor would be scorned by him who had the control of her destiny for several years to come.

Savella listened enchanted, infatuated, and with effort she repressed the words that arose to her lips;

"I care not; I will defy all to become yours;" but he had not yet asked such a sacrifice, and she could not throw herself into his arms without being entreated to do so. Philip learned that, since the increasing weakness of Isola forbade such exercise, Savella often walked alone in the vicinity of La Fontaine. On the very next afternoon he managed to encounter her in the forest and from that time their meetings were almost of daily occurrence.

With each hour passed in his society the heart of Savella became more deeply enthralled, till she owned to herself that without him life, fortune, or any earthly good, would be valueless in her eyes. With the cool skill of a skillful diplomatist, Philip led on this impassioned creature till he felt secure that in spite of opposition she would give him her hand and fortune when the time for action arrived.

He liked her; was flattered by her openly avowed preference; but, until his father's suit was actually decided against him, he could not make up his mind to the last irrevocable step which his vanity led him to believe would prove a death-blow to Isola.

The change in Isola's appearance was remarked with pain by Miss Carleton, and she finally came over to La Fontaine and insisted on taking her young friend to the Vale to pass a few weeks with her old friends.

To this Fontaine eagerly consented; for in his uneasiness he was ready to grasp at any change that promised diversion to her mind. He fully believed that the desolate feeling of which she had spoken to him was killing her slowly, and he hoped much for her from the cheerful companionship of the family circle at the Vale.

Much as she disliked to be separated from her guardian, Isola felt that she was no longer as necessary to him as she had once been, and she accepted the offered kindness, in the faint hope that the visit might prove beneficial to her.

Summerton, who had proffered his medical skill, and been

employed as her physician, cordially approved of the proposed change. He prepared for her use a vial of drops which he counselled her to take three times at least within the twenty-four hours, and Isola promised faithfully to follow his directions.

Savella loudly expressed her regret at losing her, but promised to ride over every day with her uncle to inquire after her health.

Fanny received her friend with exuberant joy, and gaily said:

"Now we have you among us again, I mean to try grandma's specific on you, Isola. The 'home bitters,' you know, that she used to dose us with when we were children. If it cured us then, it may do as much for you now, and I have a large bottle in this room ready for you."

Isola smiled, and replied:

"Mr. Summerton is a physician, and I have brought a supply of medicine with me prepared by him."

"Have his prescriptions done you any good? Tell me that, Isola."

"Not much, I am afraid. The drops seem to exhilarate me for a few hours, but the reaction brings on a feeling of weariness and depression that is indescribable."

"Then you shall take no more of them while you are with us. Try grandma's elixir, if you love me."

"But I have a vial freshly filled, and I promised to take the drops regularly."

"Let me see it, dear," and Fanny took the small crystal flask in her hand, and held it up to the light. It was limpid as water, and on opening, proved to be perfectly scentless.

"It looks innocent enough, but I have no faith in it. Just try the bitters, Isola; won't you to please me?"

Isola was just in that listless state in which she cared very little what was offered to her, and she said:

"As you please, Fanny. I don't suppose it makes much difference what I take, for nothing seems to do me any good."

"But we mean to do you good, and make you quite well again. Don't talk as if you intend to go away from us in the first bloom of youth. It is too, too bad, Isola, to see how lifeless you have become;" and the impulsive girl burst into tears."

"My dear Fanny, I shall be only too happy if I could lay aside the haunting dread that has settled upon my heart. I confess that it is hard to go down to darkness,—to lie in the cold grave at seventeen. But if it is the will of my heavenly Father, I must submit."

"You must not, you shall not die, Isola. Oh! what will become of poor George when he hears that—that you——"

She choked, and could not go on. Isola sadly said:

"He will feel it, I know; but if I conceal from him that I might have loved him in the time to come, he will not be inconsolable."

"Would you, then, leave him to think that love for that false man wounded you unto death?" asked Fanny reproachfully. "My dear Isola, give George the consolation of knowing what you have just expressed; even if the bitter anguish of losing you by death must be his. The blow will be softened by the certainty that your heart had asserted its freedom, and Philip Vane is no longer your ideal of manly excellence."

"I do not believe he was ever *that* to me, Fanny; and now, he has lost all power over me. This is the simple truth, though my father will not believe it."

"But *I* believe it my darling; and, strange as your illness is, I believe that grandma's skill can rival that of your *Æsculapius*. Do you know, Isola, that if I were in your place, I should be afraid to take anything offered me by those people?"

"Nonsense, Fanny. Why should they seek to injure me? I beg that you will not insinuate anything so dreadful. Mr. Summerton has attended to poor Sam, who was so dreadfully injured by the falling of a tree upon him, and he is now quite well, and strong again. He has also nearly cured several of the negroes who were afflicted with long standing diseases. His skill is great, and his kindness to me unfailing. To speak the whole truth, I did not at first like any of these strangers; but they have improved on a longer acquaintance. I am really attached to Savella, and even her aunt has been so attentive to me since I have been sick, that I am ashamed of my first distaste to her."

But Fanny was still skeptical; she said:

"They have everything to gain and nothing to lose by showing sympathy; but if the affection of Mr. Fontaine for you had been less tender, his course less firm in sustaining you as the child of his adoption, I fancy they would have acted very differently. I don't believe in any of them; Savella has more heart than either of the others, but she is a shallow parcel of vanity, and her head is already turned by attentions to which she is unaccustomed. Have you remarked the manner of Philip Vane to her of late? She has evidently done all she could to attract him, and I believe he is now ready to transfer to her the allegiance he once professed to you."

"He is quite welcome to do so; but Philip will scarcely dare appear before my father with another proposal for his heiress."

"Perhaps he will not think that ceremony necessary. There are such things as elopements; and if the truth is told about Mr. Fontaine's affairs, his consent will make no difference in the fortune his niece is entitled to claim."

This seemed to arouse Isola from her apathy; she raised herself from the large chair in which Fanny had installed her, and gravely said:

"My dear Fanny, that is supposing that Savella has neither principle nor gratitude. Do not suggest such an impossibility as an elopement. Philip himself would shrink from the thought of such perfidy toward a man who has treated him with marked kindness from his boyhood."

"Oh! well, let us waive the subject, Isola, for we shall never agree. Time will prove which of us is right."

Miss Carleton here came in, bringing a waiter on which was a glass of port wine and some light biscuit, for which Mrs. Berkely's cook was famous. She insisted that Isola should take some refreshment, though of late her appetite had utterly failed her, and she craved nothing but iced water to allay the inward fever that consumed her.

"Thank you, dear cousin Carrie," she gratefully said: "you are very good to wait on me yourself, and I will try to eat a small portion of one of these nice biscuits; but I must follow Mr. Summerton's directions and take my drops first."

"They seem to do you so little good, my dear, that it may be as well to let them alone for once."

As the vial was drawn forth, Fanny seized on it and bore it away victoriously.

"Eat your lunch, Isola; I am going to mine; and when you get this again you will have to beg for it, I can tell you."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEMON AT WORK.

FANNY left the room laughing, and Isola, with more appetite than she had lately felt, ate a fragment of biscuit and drank a small portion of the wine. Miss Carleton carefully observed her, while she talked pleasantly with her. She saw

with pain the delicate, wax-like complexion from which every shade of bloom had vanished, the weary outlook from the large, dark eyes, and the drooping lassitude of the slender figure. After a pause, she said:

"May I speak with you, Isola, and advise you as freely as I did in your childish days?"

"Surely, yes, my dear cousin. You know that to you I always look as my mentor, for next to my father you have been my best friend."

"Then suffer me, my dear girl, to use the privilege of friendship to probe your heart. Isola, is disappointed love wrecking the promise of so noble a life as I hoped yours would be? Speak the truth, my child, and know that she who asks the question has known enough sorrow herself to comprehend all the depths of yours."

"Sorrow to you! I thought that you had always bloomed in the sunshine, and no blight had fallen on you, cousin Carrie," said Isola, in surprise.

"So the world judges; yet I have had my struggle with fate—my bitter disappointment; but I have not permitted it to destroy my usefulness, nor to mar my rational enjoyment of the blessings still left to me. But you evade my question, Isola; will you not deal frankly with me?"

"I did not mean to evade it—for I can lay my hand upon my heart and assure you, in all sincerity, that the passing fancy I had for Philip Vane has nothing to do with my illness. From the moment in which I became convinced of his worldliness, I gave him up. At first I suffered; but at that time my feelings did not affect my health. There must be some radical defect in my constitution, which has developed itself just as I attained maturity. I overheard Mr. Summerton tell my father that such is often the case."

Miss Carleton took her wasted hand in her own, and thoughtfully regarded it.

"You were a remarkably healthy child, Isola. You have

scarcely been sick an hour since you came to La Fontaine till this mysterious illness attacked you, and only two months ago the roses on your cheeks were as brilliant as if you had been mountain born. It is inexplicable to me that you should have so suddenly faded away. Does Mr. Summerton think that your lungs are affected?"

"No—I have no cough. I must have inward fevers, for I am devoured with insatiable thirst. My heart is sometimes strangely affected—it will throb violently a few seconds, and then seem as if about to lose all motion, and I often feel as if I must suffocate. After such attacks I am languid and nervous for hours."

"And is Mr. Fontaine satisfied that Mr. Summerton is a better physician than Dr. Sinclair? I wish he would call in to see you."

"I am not ill enough to require two physicians, and father often says there is less safety in such a course, as doctors always disagree. He has reason to confide in the skill of Mr. Summerton, for he has given evidences of it in his treatment of several chronic cases on the plantation."

"Perhaps Mr. Fontaine is right, but I wish that Dr. Sinclair could see you nevertheless. Are you quite sure, Isola, that the poison of jealousy is not lurking in some little corner of your heart—for I know that Philip has joined Savella's train of admirers."

"I have declared from the first that my illness has nothing to do with Philip. If he were to marry Savella tomorrow, I should only feel it as it affected my dear father; but he, also, has this idea firmly fixed in his brain, and if I die, I shall have the mortification of knowing that those I best love will think that I was weak enough to give up life, and all its duties, because a heartless man proved faithless. Oh! cousin Carrie, think better of me, for I deserve that you should do so."

Her earnestness called a faint flush to her cheek, and Miss Carleton drew near to her, and decisively said:

"I am satisfied, Isola, that you are not perishing of a broken heart, and now I have the hope that we can bring you back to health again. We will lavish such cares upon you that you must revive: I shall make you my especial charge, for I promised one who is far away to watch over his darling."

"Yes—George wrote me as much," was the frank reply, "and I am very grateful to both him and you for your kindness. Make me well again, cousin Carrie, and I will prove to you that I no longer have any regard for Philip by replying to George's letter. Will that satisfy you that I am indifferent to Philip?"

"It will—for you are incapable of acting a double part. I can trust your honor as I would my own, Isola, and my dear George will not meet on the threshold of life so severe a disappointment as the loss of the woman he has loved from boyhood would be."

"If he loses me, it will not be through treachery on my part," said Isola, firmly; but she suddenly became so pale that Miss Carleton was alarmed; she quickly said:

"You are fatigued and over-excited, my dear. I should have been more thoughtful. Let me help you to the bed, and then try and sleep."

"I am nearly as helpless as a child. I am afraid I shall be a great trouble to you."

"You must not think of that, my love. If I can help you in any way I shall be too happy to do so."

Exhausted even by the short drive to the Vale, Isola soon fell into a broken slumber, in which she started and moaned as if in pain. Miss Carleton maintained her watch beside her, though Fanny came quietly in once and demurely placed upon the dressing stand the vial she had taken away.

Though full of inward glee at the feat she had performed, she did not choose to betray what she had done. Every

drop of Summerton's potion had been thrown away, the vial washed thoroughly, and clear spring water substituted in its place.

Fanny believed Summerton to be an ignorant quack, whose plausibility had imposed on Mr. Fontaine, and she wondered at his infatuation in allowing the life of his protégée to be risked on his skill. His success on the plantation must have been accidental, for Fanny was determined to have no faith in him.

When Isola found her drops restored, she faithfully continued to take them, and the rapid improvement made in her health by ten days' stay at the Vale, she partly attributed to their efficacy. Every member of the family showed the kindest solicitude in her recovery, and at the close of the second week she had regained strength to walk and ride out again.

Every day Fontaine came over, accompanied by Savella, to inquire after her, and he was thankful to see a faint tinge of rose again blooming upon her cheeks; but Isola observed with concern that a shadow, deeper even than any his brow had hitherto worn, had fallen over him. He was gloomy and self-absorbed, and she wondered if the knowledge of Philip's attentions to Savella had thus affected him.

Fontaine rarely attended evening parties, and when, by chance, he was present, Philip was very careful not to make his devotion to Savella so marked as to attract his attention, for it was his policy to conceal his plans from her uncle till they were ripe for execution.

Isola made many efforts to wile him from his sadness, but she saw that she failed, though he made an effort to talk as usual. One morning, on parting from her, he pressed her hand between his own and said:

"I must soon claim you again, my darling. I cannot live without you much longer, and it is my firm resolve to keep you under my own roof in spite of the powers of earth and Heaven."

His expression was so strange, his manner so different from his ordinary one, that Isola looked up at him in surprise.

"Nothing opposes my return, father, and if you miss me so much I will go back with you now. I am so much better that I no longer need the kind care that has been lavished on me here."

"No, no—not yet—not yet. Remain at the Vale till you are stronger, for——"

He stopped abruptly, kissed her brow, and offering his warmest thanks to Miss Carleton for her kindness to his child, mounted his horse and rode swiftly away. Both were struck with his pre-occupied manner, and a cold fear fell on the heart of Miss Carleton that some fearful weight was pressing with renewed force upon his heart. She would not believe him capable of crime; if evil had been done, he must equally have been the victim with the brother who had so mysteriously perished, and she felt the certainty in her own mind that Senora Roselli was cognizant of what had occurred in Italy; that she had probably participated in the scenes which had left such an indelible impression of sadness on Fontaine.

That this woman came to his house for any good purpose she could not believe, but she was far from suspecting the black turpitude which those two smooth hypocrites were slowly consummating.

On the night after Isola's departure, Fontaine was alone in his library, deeply engaged in looking into the state of his pecuniary affairs preparatory to making his will; for he thought it best to secure his protégée from all future contingency by providing for her at once.

A sudden rise in tobacco had enabled his merchant to sell his last crop at a high price, and the proceeds, amounting to nearly ten thousand dollars, he intended to settle on Isola. If he lived, he would yet be able to do more for her; if he

died, or lost his reason, the last of which he often dreaded, Savella would come in possession of his whole estate as the lawful heir; and as she appeared willing to listen to his teachings with reference to the management of the slaves, he no longer dreaded the thought of leaving them under her control. Celia, who had waited on Isola from her childhood, he would give to her, and a rough draft of the will he intended to make lay upon the table beside him.

His head was bent over a column of figures, when he was startled by a shock as if the wire of a fully charged battery had touched the hand that lay upon the table. Then three loud raps came suddenly from beneath it, and the voice so long unheard breathed almost in his ear:

"Claude, I am again beside you. I *must* come to tell you how happy I am that you have sent from you the rival of my child. Let her stay from beneath this roof, for her presence is a curse to it."

For an instant Fontaine was unnerved, but anger and disdain at this assertion restored to him his self-possession. He exclaimed:

"Fell and evil spirit, for such I now know you to be, avaunt! I defy your power! I refuse to obey your dictates. Get thee hence, and leave my house unpolluted by your accursed presence!"

"Claude!" and the tone became concentrated and menacing, "beware of speaking thus, for I possess the power of life and death over both her and you. Did you not feel the thrilling touch of my fingers just now? I could as easily have struck you senseless had I chosen to do so. Take *my* child to your heart; make her the heiress of all—*all* you possess, and I will leave you in peace. Act otherwise, and I will fill your house with such devilish revelry that you will be glad to come to terms."

It was Henry Fontaine's voice that sounded in his ear; but the unhappy listener felt that his brother's nature must

have become strangely warped in the spirit-land to speak thus. Though a cold dew gathered in large beads upon his pale brow, he firmly said:

"An evil demon has obtained power over me through my own fratricidal act; but that you are Henry Fontaine, I will never believe unless I have ocular demonstrations to that effect. If I see you with my own eyes, I may believe their evidence; nothing less will convince me."

"Ho! ho," laughed the invisible speaker—and the weird sounds seemed to echo from every portion of the room—"with you, seeing is believing, is it? Well—you shall have even that proof,—but I cannot make myself visible in the light of that lamp. So impalpable a presence as a ghost must float out upon the darkness, his form rayed forth through the magnetic power bestowed on him in the spirit-world. If you can bear the sight, I promise to render myself visible to you."

Wrought up to a pitch of almost frenzied excitement, Fontaine exclaimed:

"Let me see you now—this moment. I will extinguish the lamp," and he put out his hand to remove the shade.

The voice spoke as if receding from him:

"Not yet, Claude. The sight would blast your vision—perhaps madden your brain; for when I *do* come, it will be as you last saw me—bleeding, dying by *your* hand. Can you bear that, my brother?"

Fontaine sank down, gasping for breath, and pale as the dead. He shuddered in every fibre of his strong frame, and vaguely putting out his hand, said:

"Go away, for God's sake! Once before, your presence near me, nearly drove me to suicide. Persist in coming to me, and I shall lose the light of reason. If you *are* my brother, and not some 'goblin damned' who has assumed his identity to torture me, you will depart and leave me to bear my burden in such peace as I now may find."

Again that thrilling touch sent its electric shiver through his veins, and the departing voice said:

"Adieu.—I have shaken hands with you, Claude. I leave you at your command; but, if you pay no respect to my wishes, I shall make my presence felt by you again."

Three resonant raps filled the room with their echoes, and, in another moment, Cæsar appeared in the open doorway with an ashen, scared face, and faltered:

"Was you a knockin' for me Marse Claude? I were goin' through de hall, an' heerd de noise, an' I thought mebbe you was taken sick and wanted suffin."

Fontaine lifted his white face, now stern with anger, and quickly asked:

"How long have you been near that door? Have you overheard anything except the raps?"

"Fo' de blessed Lord, I hasn't; I'd jest come in to shet up de house for de night. I hopes you don't s'pect me of spyin' on you, Marster?"

"I should not do so, Cæsar, for you have always been faithful; but something very strange has happened. I cannot understand it myself, and I desire that you will say nothing of the noises you have overheard. No doubt they will soon be satisfactorily explained."

"Mebbe 'twas rats, sar; but dey'd have to be whoppers to make sich a racket as dat."

At that instant another resonant peal was struck, beneath which the lamp and the papers upon the table visibly trembled. The negro clasped his hands over his eyes, and fell on his knees almost paralyzed by fright. He cried out:

"G'way from here, you cussed debil dat you mus be,—g'way from here. What does ghosteses want in *dis* house? Get out'n dis, or I'll make my ole 'oman scold you."

A ghastly smile crept over Fontaine's white lips at this absurd threat from the poor old man to a being as intangible as that to which he spoke. He remained standing in

the same attitude several moments, listening for any further demonstration that might be made; but as all remained quiet, he recovered sufficient presence of mind to attempt to account to the ignorant and trembling creature before him for what he had just witnessed.

"You have heard of spirit-rapping, Cæsar, and you have seen experiments tried here by the young people. They have always failed; but it seems that I must be a medium, for one has come to me unbidden. There is nothing to alarm you in it, for I have witnessed such things at the North, and no evil came from them. Get up, and attend to closing the house, for it grows late."

At this command, the old servant arose; but he was shaking in every limb, and he piteously said:

"I aint usen to sich things, Marse Claude. I aint got much gumption, an'—an' to tell you de trufe, I is feared to go out'n de hall by myself. Ef dat ar' thing was to foller arter me, an' hammer on de do', I should drap down dead in my tracks."

His rolling eyes, and husky complexion, proved the truth of his assertions, and Fontaine kindly said:

"I will go with you then, Cæsar; but I think the visitation is over for this time. I forbid you to speak of what you have witnessed here. Not even to your wife, must you give a hint of this, for it would spread among the servants, and each one would soon be afraid of his own shadow."

"I'll 'member what you say, Marse Claude, an' I—I'll try to 'bey you; but I wishes dat I hadn't heerd nothin' on it myself."

Heartily responding to the wish, Fontaine preceded him in his tour of the house, and saw all the windows and doors closed. At every step they made Cæsar glared around in affright, and the creaking of the floor threw him into new paroxysms of terror.

What he had himself suffered taught his master to feel

for him, and he kindly attended the old man to the extreme end of the back piazza and saw him descend the steps. As the faithful creature was leaving him, he grasped his hand and entreated:

"Don' have nothin' to do wid 'em, Marse Claude. Dey is debbils in 'sguise. Ax de blessed Lor' to sen' 'em back to de place dey come from, an' He'll take de cuss away from you."

"I have not called the spirits, Cæsar; and you may be sure that I shall pray to be delivered from their persecutions."

"Dat's right, sar; but I hates to see you go back inter dat haunted house all by yourself."

"Have no fears for me; I shall be quite safe from anything they can do to harm me."

The bright moonlight fell upon his face, and, in spite of this assurance, Cæsar noted the rigid whiteness that had settled on it, the stern compression of the lips, and the restless fire that burned in his dark eyes.

In the open air the old man was no longer afraid; but he saw his master re-enter the house and close the door behind him with a feeling of dread that almost stifled him.

He watched and listened for a few moments; but all remained still, and he moved quickly toward his cabin in a state of bewilderment which did not escape the keen observation of Aggy when he appeared before her. But to all her inquiries he only replied by deep groans and the oracular observation "dat de debbil was to pay in de ole house."

"I s'pected as much when dese furrin people got to stay in it," she replied. "But what's happened now?"

"Nothin' as I knows on; only de debbil's to pay, dat's all."

"Ef he is to pay, I hope he'll take his debt out'n *you*, you old stupid," was the indignant retort. "I jes' wish you'd hold your infurnelly old tongue, or else talk sense wid it."

Cæsar literally obeyed her wish; for he refused to speak further, in spite of her abuse, or the cajoleries which Aggy at length condescended to practice to discover what had upset him to such a degree. She at last taunted him with being possessed by a dumb devil, to which he ruefully replied:

"Dat a dumb debbil was better'n a talkin' one."

"Dat dar's for me, I s'pose, so I'll jes' shet up. But I'll find out what has frustrated you so much, in spite o' your circumbendibusses. Thar! I don't b'lieve Marse Claude knows a bigger word dan dat, wid all his booktionary larnin'."

Cæsar made no response, and tired of her vain attempts to discover what had so discomposed him, Aggy at length addressed herself to repose; but for Cæsar there was little sleep that night. He placed a pine torch in the open chimney, which he renewed as often as it burned away, for he had been too thoroughly frightened to be willing to remain a moment in darkness; and he sat nodding in a large chair, expecting every moment a summons from his master to aid him against the goblins with which he fancied him contending in the dark and silent mansion.

At length day dawned, and soon afterward he heard the voice of Fontaine speaking to the overseer in the yard. Thanking God that he was still living and unharmed, the old servant aroused his wife and prepared himself for the duties of the day.

CHAPTER XVII.

PHILIP VANE UNEARTHED.

NIGHT after night, throughout the whole of Isola's absence, the same persecutions were repeated, the same attempts made to extract from Fontaine a pledge that she should never return to the shelter of his roof, but without effect.

The draft of his will was clearly copied, and he placed it in his desk with the original, intending in a short time to go to Lynchburg and have it formally engrossed by a lawyer. A few days afterward he again sought for them to make some trifling alterations, and both papers were found torn into fragments, which were scattered over the bottom of the desk.

That night his familiar told him that he had done it; that he would find means to destroy every instrument which alienated from Savella any portion of the property which was justly hers.

Fontaine had fallen into the habit of replying to the voice as if the speaker were a tangible presence, and he resentfully said :

"I will place my will where even you cannot reach it."

In response a mocking laugh came, followed by the words :

"Try it—try it, Claude, and see if you can find a spot into which I shall be unable to penetrate."

The night-side of nature had always possessed a mystic attraction for Fontaine, as it has for most imaginative persons ; and terrible as this visitation was, he was gradually becoming accustomed to its nightly presence, and indifferent to its threats.

He was firmly resolved that no power should induce him to give up the child he had reared, and loved as his own ;

and in his heart he derided the thought that the will of a phantom could induce him to commit such an injustice.

The will was written and placed in an iron chest, in the closet in his own room ; he carried the key constantly about his person, yet three days afterwards, when he sought for it, that he might take it with him to Lynchburg, he found it destroyed as the other had been.

A thorough examination of the lock convinced him that it had not been tampered with ; but, strange as the occurrence was, Fontaine still persevered in carrying out his original intention. A skeleton, to be filled out, was sent to his lawyer in Lynchburg, with an urgent request that he would have it ready for signature at the end of a week, when he would be in town to complete the business before competent witnesses.

During the absence of Isola, Savella endeared herself to Fontaine very much ; she accompanied him in his daily walk to the quarters, and when there showed the liveliest interest in the welfare of the people who were to become her property at some future day. She appeared to have overcome her distaste to them, and the kindness with which she addressed them won for her golden opinions, in spite of the disparaging comments made upon her by the house servants, who all looked with jealous eyes on the rival of Isola, although she was the representative of the family whose dignity was as much a matter of pride to them as to those who bore the time-honored name of Fontaine.

Savella endeavored to fill the place of the absent Isola, and for hours every day she played and sang to her uncle, who, like Saul, felt the evil demon that haunted him exorcised by the spell of music.

Seated in a large chair, with his noble head bowed upon his hands, Fontaine listened to the wild German airs she played, and visions of the Hartz mountains, with all their legends of diablerie, arose before him. His brother and

himself had lingered long in Germany before visiting Italy; and that happy time, each hour of which was filled with some new and delightful impression, came back to him with vivid power. He lived those days over and over again in memory, and vainly tried to cast into oblivion all that followed them.

Autumn, with its gorgeous beauty, and days of serene grandeur, had set in. The mountains were bathed in purple mist, through which the changing foliage gleamed like brilliant jewels. The frost king had already breathed upon it, and like the princess in the fairy tale, whose words were pearls and diamonds, his magic breath had scattered ruby, emerald and topaz hues over every portion of the beautiful valley.

One afternoon Fontaine was detained from home several hours later than usual, and returned deeply depressed in spirits, he yearned for his usual consolation—music; but on inquiring for his niece, he was told that she had gone out for a walk.

After a few restless turns through the hall, he again threw on his hat, and took the pathway which he had observed Savella always pursued of late when she set out for her afternoon walk. It wound over the hill and descended on the other side into a deep, romantic dell, through which a narrow stream rippled.

The woodland had been cleared of underbrush, and rustic seats were placed at intervals beneath the trees. Fontaine had proceeded half a mile without encountering any one, and he began to think Savella must have taken another path, when the sound of voices struck upon his ear. The speakers were sheltered behind a clump of bushes; but a few rapid steps brought the intruder in full view of the two who fancied themselves secure from observation.

Savella was seated in a grape vine chair, formed by twisting the long pendulous branches together, and at her feet

reclined Philip Vane, resting his head against the side of her rustic seat, and holding her hand clasped in both his own.

He was speaking earnestly and passionately, and the expression of the girl's face fully revealed what was passing in her heart. Fontaine read its meaning in one rapid glance, and then strode forward, crashing the fallen leaves beneath his tread.

Savella looked up, uttered a faint cry, and Philip sprang to his feet to confront the angry face that glared on him with bitter contempt.

"So—o— Mr. Vane condescends to amuse his leisure hours by attempting to beguile another unsuspecting heart to love him. I ask you, sir, if it is the part of an honorable man to enter my grounds without my knowledge and meet my niece in this clandestine manner?"

Philip recovered his natural audacity, and he coolly said:

"My first meeting with Miss Fontaine was accidental, I assure you. Since that happened, as I was no longer a welcome visitor in your house, I have availed myself of such chances as offered themselves to see your niece. Tomorrow I should have waited on you to offer my proposals in form, as Miss Fontaine has just honored me by accepting me as her future husband."

Fontaine listened to this address with indignant surprise. He turned to his niece and sternly asked:

"Savella, can this be true? Have you so recklessly disobeyed my express wishes as to suffer your heart to be won by a man I assured you would never be acceptable to me?"

She looked up appealingly and faltered:

"Oh, Uncle Claude, I loved Philip from the first moment I saw him. It was my fate, and I could not evade it. I know that I have done wrong; but he loves me, and—and I will never marry any one but him."

Her uncle scornfully said:

"Doubtless Mr. Vane has induced you to believe that he adores you; but it is not very long since he came to me and professed the same feelings for another. I cannot understand the facility with which his affections have been transferred from her to you; yet why do I say so, for I am afraid that I do comprehend it but too well."

"Philip never loved Isola," Savella passionately exclaimed. "He has told me so, and I believe him."

"A glance of contempt from Fontaine's eyes flashed over Philip. He almost cowered before it; but he retained sufficient self-control to speak calmly.

"Miss Fontaine speaks the truth, sir; it was but a passing fancy I had for another; but for Savella I feel the only true affection I have ever known. I do not regret this discovery, as it affords me the opportunity I have some time desired, to express my real sentiments."

"Philip Vane, your audacity passes beyond all bounds," said Fontaine, haughtily. "Do you suppose that I am not aware how much your professions are worth? Can I not measure your worldly soul by its just standard? Savella, when this man learned that Isola would not inherit my property, he deserted her; and in this brief space of time he professes to have attached himself to you with a degree of ardor unfelt for her. Judge for yourself if he would not be equally faithless to you if the smiles of fortune should forsake you."

"Oh! Uncle Claude," pleaded Savella, "do not speak so, for I love him—I love him, I tell you! and I shall die if I am separated from him! No, no—he never loved Isola; he loves me, me—*only me!*"

There was such a burst of passionate feeling in her voice, that Fontaine was touched. He more gently said:

"Poor child! you, too, must suffer from the perfidy of a man whose great personal attractions are his only recommendation. But I must save you from him, Savella, at all hazards."

Then turning toward Philip Vane, he went on:

"Mr. Vane, if anything could have added to the distaste I have for you, it is the knowledge that in this underhand manner you have attempted to win your way into my family. I decline accepting you as a suitor to my niece, and in time, I believe she will be induced to listen to reason, and give up a man who, I am convinced, seeks her for her worldly advantages alone."

"Speak, Savella," said Philip, insolently; "Shall it be so? You are not dependent on your uncle. Your inheritance is your own; and I am sufficiently independent in fortune to lift me above the suspicion of the interested motives which Mr. Fontaine has imputed to me. I have told you that I love you; you are aware of the real nature of the obstacle that lies between us; and you have seen that Isola now only regards me in the light of an old friend. Accept or reject me at once, for on your decision now rests our future relation to each other."

His magnetic eyes were fixed upon her—his strong will enthralled her, and she made a step forward, laid her hand in his, and fervently said:

"Philip, I believe in your truth—in the nobility of your soul, and I will love you to the end. Opposition will only strengthen my resolve to be yours—yours through all."

"You hear, sir," said Philip triumphantly. But Fontaine, with a gesture of haughty disdain, drew Savella away from him, and held her to his side by throwing his arm around her.

"Philip Vane," he sternly said, "I am responsible for the welfare of my brother's child till she has attained years of discretion. I am her legal guardian, and, until she is of age, her fortune is under my control. To you, I will never surrender a penny till that time expires; and I forbid you to approach her as a suitor. In the interim, if she does not discover for herself how false and hollow are your professions

of love, she will possess but little of the foresight of the race from which she sprung. There lies your path, sir, and here lies ours. I could wish that they might never cross again in this life. Good evening. Come, Savella, the sun is sinking, and we are far from home."

He would have drawn her away, but she eluded his clasp, sprang toward Philip, and burying her head in his bosom, exclaimed with passionate fervor:

"Oh! my Philip—my beloved, my adored—believe him not. My heart will be true to you; they shall never, *never* separate me from you! I will close my ears and heart to every insinuation against you. We shall find means to meet, we shall be happy together yet."

"I believe so, my precious Savella—my plighted bride, my future wife," he tenderly responded; and when Fontaine approached, and forcibly drew Savella from his embrace, he defiantly said:

"You see, sir, how useless opposition will prove. She loves me with all the ardor of her southern blood, and I promise you to be a good and tender husband to her."

"Leave us, Mr. Vane; your promises are nothing to me; and if this unhappy girl refuses to listen to her best friends, she will surely plunge into a sea of wretchedness from which no effort of mine can extricate her. A few weeks of happy illusion, followed by years of neglect and misery, must be her inevitable fate as your wife."

He again encircled the form of Savella with his strong arm, and almost supported her faltering steps as he moved away with her. She looked back at Philip as long as it was possible to do so, and the expression of her eyes confirmed what her lips had first uttered.

Philip watched them a few moments, and then a triumphant smile broke over his lips. He muttered:

"I have paid you back for your insulting dismissal of my pretensions to Isola, and I will repay you for this. That

girl will blindly do what I bid her; I hold her fate in the hollow of my hand, and be it happy or miserable, she shall yet become my wife."

Then he fell into a fit of musing.

"How lovely Isola looked this morning when I ventured to call at the Vale; and how coldly she treated me. She was as self-possessed as if I had never been anything to her. I could see Miss Carleton watching us, or I might have ventured on an allusion to the past. I wonder how she would have received it. Oh, how I wish the Italian had never come between us! She loves like a tigress, and I know she will be desperately jealous if I even speak to another woman. Heigho! fate played me a shabby trick when she forced me to exchange the true gold for a poor counterfeit. Yet I am a wretch to think thus of poor Savella. *Poor!* no—rich—rich in youth, in passion, in the possession of the whole Fontaine estate. Philip Vane, you are a fool, and an ungrateful one too, to dare to think thus."

He strode toward the tree to which his horse was fastened, and mounting, dashed off in the direction of Dunlora to tell his mother how he had sped in his wooing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAVELLA DEFIANT.

IN the meantime Fontaine moved in the direction of the house, still sustaining Savella; but after proceeding a short distance she extricated herself from his arm and resentfully said:

"I am quite able to walk alone, uncle. I do not wish to be too burdensome to you."

He regarded her more in sorrow than in anger as he gravely said :

"I have never felt that you are a burden to me, Savella. I have indulged the hope that you would prove a blessing and a comfort to me ; but what I have just witnessed has so deeply shaken my faith in you, that I have many misgivings for the future. My child, have you not been taught that duplicity is a deadly sin toward those who love you ? I would not have believed that you could so far forget the delicacy and reticence of a refined woman as to meet in secret with a lover of whom you were aware I could never approve."

"And why will you not approve him ?" she impetuously burst forth. "He is all that a reasonable person can ask—noble in mind, beautiful as a demi-god, attached to me tenderly. I love him, Uncle Claude ; I tell you again that I love him to such a degree that I would cling to him even in death. Deception was forced on me, because he was not welcome in your house. We first met by accident, but afterward, I confess that I again sought that spot every afternoon that I might look upon my king, my true love from whom you nor any one else shall sever me."

Fontaine saw that in her present state of excitement remonstrance would be useless, and he only said :

"I shall take care that these clandestine meetings shall take place no more. If you marry Philip Vane, it must be without my consent, for it will never be given to such a union. To-morrow, if you were bereft of fortune, he would desert you ; I can place no confidence in a man who has proved himself as unprincipled as he has."

Savella turned on him with flashing eyes and panting breath.

"Uncle, hear me, and feel that I speak the truth. I shall die if I am separated from Philip. I love him to that degree, that if I had the certainty that my wealth could pur-

chase his hand, I would give my last dollar to gain it, hoping that, in time, my devotion would meet its reward. But I *know* that you wrong him, for he has given me such proofs of his attachment, that I should be base to doubt him."

"Very lately he gave the same to another," replied Fontaine, "and do you think that in the brief space of three months a heart worth having can detach itself from its first love and enshrine a second idol in her place ?"

"He never truly loved Isola. He has told me of the fascination she at one time exercised over him, but until he saw me his heart was never really touched. I know that I am not as lovely as Isola, but it is not the most beautiful women that are the best beloved."

"Are you aware that Philip and Isola have grown up together ? that he has been attached to her from her childhood ?"

"Yes—I know that they were partially educated together, and that he regarded her as a sister. Boys and girls who are reared together rarely fall in love with each other."

"I am afraid these two did, in spite of Philip's protestations to the contrary ; but Isola is far beyond his reach now. She has nobly redeemed herself from the blight of such love as his, since she learned to comprehend Philip's true character. You are yet too young to marry any one, Savella ; at seventeen a woman often accepts a lover who at twenty would scarcely be permitted to approach her in that character. Give me a promise that you will wait till you have attained that age before bestowing your hand on Mr. Vane, and I pledge myself that if you are both still faithful to each other, I will withdraw my opposition to your union."

Savella's face brightened, and she warmly said :

"You are my own good uncle Claude again ! But I must consult with Philip ; without his consent I have no right to bind myself by such a promise. I have consented to marry

him, and if he is dissatisfied to wait so long, I cannot do what will make him unhappy. If he should get angry, and desert me, I should perish in your sight. Oh! uncle, you do not know how dearly I love him."

"Poor, deluded child!" said Fontaine, compassionately, "is there no possibility of saving you? Will you rush headlong upon the cruel fate that will shatter your life? Savella, hear me: You *shall not* marry Philip Vane while I possess any legal power over you. You are my child now, and I must guard you from yourself."

Savella disdainfully repeated:

"Shall not!" and walked on beside him in utter silence till they gained the house. Springing up the steps, she swept rapidly past Summerton and her aunt, who were on the piazza watching for their return. Senora Roselli apprehensively regarded Fontaine, and said:

"I hope Savella has been doing nothing to displease you, Claude. I am accustomed to the outbreaks of her temper, but I hoped she would be on her guard with you."

Fontaine moved toward the window of the library which was open, and said:

"Come in here, Madam. I have a communication of very serious import to make to you, and I trust you will aid me in impressing on my niece the necessity of submitting to my authority."

An alarmed glance was exchanged between the two confederates, and making a rapid sign to Summerton, Senora Roselli passed into the room and closed the blind after her.

"Madam," said Fontaine, "I hope what I have to tell you will be a surprise to you. I trust that you have not encouraged my niece to disobey my wishes with regard to young Vane. When they have met at the houses of my friends, have you remarked that his attentions to her were those of a lover?"

"Certainly not. They have not been so marked as those of half a dozen other gentlemen; and I have not thought of him in that light. I trust that Savella has not given him encouragement to hope for success."

"On the contrary, they are plighted lovers. I went out this afternoon to seek my niece, and found her with Philip Vane. They have thus met for many weeks past, and she openly declares her determination to marry him."

His eyes were fixed upon her face, and he saw from its expression that she was even more dismayed at this discovery than he had been. She vehemently exclaimed:

"She shall not; she must not mar her destiny in such a manner! The false girl! how completely she has deceived me! She has spoken of this Vane so openly—condemned his conduct so freely—that I never imagined she had any regard for him."

"Regard is a faint word, Madam, in this case. Savella cherishes a headlong passion for him, and, unless we find means to restrain her, she will rush into his arms in defiance of us all. She has told me as much herself."

In her anger the Nemesis forgot her usual caution. She violently said:

"I will lock her up. I will give her only bread and water to live on till she comes to her senses. How dare she defy me thus?"

"Softly—softly, Madam. In my house I cannot permit such extreme measures to be used; nor are they often of much avail. By tenderness and persuasion this headstrong girl may be led to do what is right; but she will never be driven into terms. I am glad to see that you are as much opposed to such a union as I am, and I ask you to use your influence to bring her back to reason. Just now the glamour of passion obscures all sense of right in her mind."

"I pledge myself to do it; I will aid you in every possible way, for Savella is yet too young to give her hand to any

one," she more coolly said. "I was so astonished and exasperated by her duplicity that I expressed myself too strongly. I ask your pardon, Mr. Fontaine, for speaking of your niece as I did. I forgot the respect due to her position."

He arose and said:

"We understand each other now with reference to this affair. Be gentle with Savella, I entreat, for she is in a state of excitement that will not bear increasing. If we win her over at all, it must be through kindness."

"I shall remember; I will go to her at once."

As the Senora passed out a figure flitted from the shelter of the blind, and she found Summerton awaiting her in the hall. He spoke rapidly in Italian:

"I overheard it all; and the wretched girl has baffled all our plans. I tell you that you may as well speak to the raging winds when the storm is at its height, and command them to cease blowing as to hope to wrest Savella from the man on whom she has set her heart. Why have you not kept a stricter watch over her?"

"Have I not done my best? But she has basely deceived me from the first. I once accused her of attempting to attract this Vane, and she asserted that she only wished to avenge his desertion of Isola by drawing him on to a proposal which she would reject. Yet she has secretly met him; she has promised to marry him. Oh! if I dared, I would slap her and pull her hair as I did when she was a child; but *he* talks of gentleness, tenderness, and all that namby pamby stuff. He don't know Savella as we do, or he would adopt more stringent measures."

"Why, what can any of us do? If she will marry him, she will, you know as well as I do. I tell you we had best make up our minds to keep fair with Vane, for he will reap the reward of all we have done for her. Let him purchase our consent to the marriage, by a sufficient annuity, to ena-

ble us to return to Italy and live in comfort there. We do not care particularly about leaving Savella behind, I am sure."

"Why do you talk thus?" she fiercely asked. "With my consent, Savella shall never marry him nor any other man in this stupid country. As a last resource to prevent it, I will——"

She paused and regarded him fixedly. Summerton understood the meaning of that look, and hastily said:

"You will do no such thing. You would ruin all, for that would be fatal to our hopes. I *know* it would, and if you attempt such a thing, I will desert a sinking ship, and you may swim to the shore as you can."

After a few moments of thought, her passion abated, and she replied:

"I believe you are right. Such a course would be injudicious; so I must go up to her, but not to soothe her, and play patience, as Mr. Fontaine recommends. I fancy if he could witness some of the scenes between us, he would be astonished; but not so much at my violence as at Savella's, for he knows me of old; but he has yet to learn that she is turbulent in her temper as ever I have been."

"Do not let your anger get the better of your prudence this time," was his parting caution, as Senora Roselli left him to seek the apartment of her niece.

She found Savella walking up and down the floor weeping, and wringing her hands as if in despair.

The Senora advanced deliberately towards her, and stood confronting her. Their eyes met, and Savella imperiously said:

"Get out of my path; don't come near me now, for I am not in a mood to be talked to now by any one."

"And least of all by me," was the cool rejoinder. "But I have come here to speak with you, and I mean to do it. If you are Claude Fontaine's heiress, you are also the child

I rescued from poverty, and reared as my own. If you owe *him* nothing, you owe me a debt you can never repay, yet you are making no effort to do so. You are circumventing me at every turn, and running contrary to my dearest wishes. You know that I would sooner lay you in your grave than have you marry in this dull country, yet you have practised the vilest deceit toward me, and you are ready to throw yourself away on this insignificant Vane, because he has a pretty face, and talks nonsense to you. I expected more from you than this stupidity, Savella."

The girl listened to this torrent of words with a curling lip and frowning brow. She contemptuously retorted:

"I do not know why you should have expected better fruit from the training I have received. *You* have taught me nothing good—nothing true. To serve your interests and my own was the one idea inculcated, to the exclusion of every other. I have always yielded to you till now; but in this I will not be dictated to. I am rich—Philip Vane loves me, and the man I have chosen shall not be frowned on by you, if he is by my uncle."

"This defiance to my face! How dare you speak to me thus, you wretched girl!" Her passion choked her, and Savella retorted:

"I am not wretched—I am supremely blessed in the love I have accepted with my whole heart; and I defy you, Mr. Summerton, my uncle, the whole world, to break my plighted troth. You have the truth now, Aunt Bianca, and you are welcome to make the most of it."

Senora Roselli threw herself upon a chair, trembling with the rage that filled her. After a struggle with herself, she again spoke:

"The proverb which says, 'Put a beggar on horseback, and to the devil he'll ride,' is fully illustrated in your case. But for me you would have been reared in poverty and ignorance. I stinted myself to support and educate you for

the position I hoped you would some day fill; and now you turn on me and defy me. But I have power over your fate of which you are not aware, and if you persist in this insanity, I may be driven to use it. In such an extremity, I do not know what I may not be tempted to do."

Savella listened to her last words with evident incredulity. She proudly said:

"I owe you something for the sacrifices you say you have made on my account, but money can repay you for them. I am not a niggard, and you shall have back tenfold what you have spent on me. In my childhood you tyrannized over me; you bent me to your will by the strong hand of oppression; but I am now free to act as I please, and I refuse any longer to be dictated to by you. Use the power at which you hint, and see how easily I will baffle it."

The Senora began to comprehend that Fontaine was right; if Savella was won over it must be through persuasion; and she most unwillingly changed her tactics. She burst into tears, and sobbed:

"I hoped that some tenderness for me, who has been more than a mother to you, was left in your heart, Savella; but I see that I was mistaken. You think only of yourself, and I am nothing to you. If I have the power to injure you, I would never exert it, you know full well, and that is why you treat me thus. It will break my heart to see you make so contemptible a marriage as this, when so brilliant a career lies before you. Only consent to be guided by me for a few months, and I promise everything that your heart can desire."

"It desires but one thing, and that you have set yourself against. I know that you wish to secure my property, and return to Italy; but my uncle will not surrender it till I am of age, and I no longer desire to leave this country. Your aspirations toward a union with a man of high rank in Europe have no attractions for me. I would refuse the

hand of an emperor if Philip Vane held out his little finger to me and said, 'come with me,' I would go to him—I would cling to him, and glory in my choice."

Senora Roselli was in despair. She arose and said:

"Dull and obstinate, I have always known you to be, but this stupidity passes belief. This man will squander the money for which he is ready to sell himself, and break your heart by his indifference. All my efforts to restore you to your rights will only end in consummating your wretchedness. But I will, at least, perform *my* duty towards you. You will be permitted to walk out no more alone, and the most watchful duenna was never more rigid in her guardianship than I will be over you. Your uncle has delegated this task to me, and I shall perform it with a strictness which will leave you no chance to communicate with your lover."

Savella smiled disdainfully:

"Perform your part of the comedy, aunt Bianca; but do not forget that 'love laughs at locksmiths.' I shall find means to communicate with Philip in spite of you. You cannot shut me up, and keep me entirely out of society. If I can no longer meet him in the woodland, I can see him in the houses I visit, as I have hitherto done. Give up this contention, aunt, and leave me to take my own way, for I warn you that I will have it at the risk of my life."

"Hard-hearted, ungrateful wretch!" burst from the lips of the enraged Senora, and she rushed from the room to seek her confidant, and inform him of what had passed in the interview.

Savella locked her door, washed away the traces of her tears, and sat down beside the window to contemplate a miniature of Philip, which he had that day given her.

She refused to appear at supper, and spent the time, till a late hour, in writing to Philip an account of all that had passed since she parted from him, trusting to some chance

to deliver it to him, in spite of the surveillance with which she was threatened.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLOTTERS AT WORK.

WHEN Summerton heard of the improvement in Isola's health, he loudly expressed his delight at the success of his prescription, and went himself to the Vale to visit her, carrying with him a fresh supply of his invaluable medicine.

He was surprised at the marked change in her appearance, and congratulated her on her return to health, at the same time claiming the merit of her convalescence. She thanked him, and smilingly said:

"Yes, your drops have had a magical effect, but they must be different from those you gave me before I left home. They oppressed me with a sense of failure and sinking, but these have removed that feeling, and, thanks to your skill, I am nearly restored to my usual health."

With ready tact he replied:

"When I found the first prescription did not suit your constitution, I changed the medicine. But you must have used all you took away with you, and I have brought you a fresh supply."

"Thank you; I shall need it, I have no doubt, and I shall not fail to take it regularly till I am quite well."

"That will be best; but how long will it be before you return to La Fontaine? Savella is not in good spirits, and I think she misses you very much."

"She has not been over for several days, and father told me that she is indisposed. I am sorry to hear that she is not well, but I have promised to remain here till the close

of this week, and unless Savella is seriously ill, I should prefer doing so."

Fanny remained near her friend while she talked with Summerton, for in spite of his specious manners and assumed piety, she cherished an intuitive feeling of dread and mistrust toward him. She quickly said:

"I will go over and look after Savella myself. You must not leave us, Isola, till you are entirely well. I think grandma's bitters have done you quite as much good as the drops, highly as Mr. Summerton thinks of them."

He thanked her for her offer to visit Savella, and turning to Isola, said in a low voice:

"I hope you have not been induced to take any nostrums compounded by a person ignorant of medicine. In your condition, it is very dangerous to hazard such a thing."

"I have only taken a small quantity of the bitters every morning, to please Fanny; but your medicine I use three times every day, as you enjoined me."

"Can you let me see those bitters? Excuse me, but I am particularly opposed to any one tampering with a patient of mine."

"Certainly—I will bring the bottle to you."

"Thank you. Here are the fresh drops. Now you are accustomed to their use, I think you may increase the quantity one-third. Remember to be very accurate, for they are dangerous if taken in excess."

"I will be very careful," and she was rising to go on her errand, when Fanny, who had managed to overhear what he had said in spite of his cautious tone, prevented her.

"Sit still, Isola; you are not yet strong enough to run up and down stairs. I will bring the bottle myself."

She presently returned, and presented it to Summerton as she said:

"It is only a tonic, which Isola needs. If you wish to stand well with grandma, you had better say nothing

against her pet medicine, for she doses the whole plantation with it, and it has never hurt any one yet."

"That is more than can often be said of such compounds, Miss Berkely," he gravely said. "But this seems innocent enough. It is only brandy poured on bitter herbs; yet, with a tendency to inward fever, it may prove injurious to Isola. I would advise her to take only the life elixir I have prepared for her myself."

"I will do so, if you wish it," and Isola took the vial he offered her; Fanny held out her hand for it and said:

"I will take it up and put it on your toilette, where it will be safe from accidents. I can fancy Mr. Summerton's consternation if the precious flask was broken and its contents spilled."

"It would indeed be a sad accident," he impressively replied; "for its contents are worth more than their weight in gold."

Fanny took the vial in her hand and pretended to regard it with reverential admiration.

"Is it distilled from gold?" she asked. "I have read of such an elixir, and the man that made it believed that its use would render him immortal."

"No, I do not pretend to such skill as that. This is a chemical compound, the secret of which is known only to myself and one other, a distinguished Italian chemist, from whom I learned to prepare it."

"Really! the joint product of two wise heads should be carefully kept. It should be put up in a flask of Venice glass, for that I believe is considered the most precious in the country of your instructor."

Fanny looked him full in the eyes, as she spoke these apparently random words: but she was not ignorant of the famous Venetian goblets, which tradition states would shiver into fragments if a poisoned draught was poured into them. Summerton was too good a diplomatist to be embar-

rassed by a mere girl; he shrugged his shoulders and quietly said:

"In the days of the Borgias there was good use for such things; but we have fallen on better times, and even in Italy, precautions against poison are now considered superfluous. There is nothing deleterious in my elixir, Miss Berkely, as the amended health of your friend proves."

"Pardon me, Mr. Summerton; I did not accuse you of so deadly an abuse of your medical skill," said Fanny, gravely; and she moved away, carrying the vial in her hand. A servant offered to take both that and the larger bottle, but she only gave the latter to her, and went herself into her chamber; after locking the door she poured the precious elixir into an empty bottle and filled Isola's with water. This was placed upon the dressing-stand, and the genuine drops borne off, while she muttered:

"I may judge him wrongfully; but I am determined to be satisfied about it. I will get Dr. Sinclair to analyze these, and find out of what so precious an article is composed."

Unluckily for her purpose, the vial slipped through her damp fingers and shattered into fragments upon the floor, its contents spattering over the carpet. With an expression of dismay at the failure of her project, Fanny snatched a towel and hastily wiped up the stains, fearing some one might detect what she had done. She thought:

"At the worst, I can speak to Isola and tell her of my suspicions more plainly than I have yet dared to do. Oh, how I do wish we could keep her here, where I know she is safe. Poor George—now she has answered his letter, if anything should happen to her, it would be almost a death blow to him."

On Summerton's return to La Fontaine his accomplice sought an opportunity to speak with him alone, and she eagerly asked:

"Is it really true that Isola is recovering?"

"She certainly appears to be rapidly improving."

"Yet you assured me that the medicine she took with her would keep up the slow decay that was consuming her life?"

"I cannot understand it," he replied. "She assures me that she takes it regularly, yet she is regaining her health. Some constitutions assimilate poisons, after a certain portion has been infused into the system. Hers must be one of that class, though I did not believe the vital principle could be so strong in a person as delicately organized as Isola is. However, all will be right now; I have made the drops I took to her to-day much stronger than the last, and I ordered the quantity taken to be increased. We must get rid of her, for the will is actually made which gives her ten thousand dollars, and Fontaine went to Lynchburg yesterday and signed it."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw the draft of it on his table, with the letter to his lawyer. You know that I accompanied him to Lynchburg, and, while there, he spent two hours in the office of Mr. Winston. It was easy enough for me to comprehend what his business was."

"How angry he would be if he knew that you enter his sanctum in his absence and pry into everything there."

"He will never know it," Summerton indifferently replied. "If we can only prevent Savella from making a fool of herself, we shall soon grasp the reward of all our toils."

"Leave that to me; I never lose sight of her long enough to give her a chance to play me any trick. She has made several attempts to send a letter to Philip Vane, but I have baffled them all. I have one of the precious morceaux in my possession, and such a silly, love-sick effusion, I did not believe even Savella would write to a man she has known but two months."

"She springs from a passionate Southern race, so what else can you expect? She has hitherto been permitted to have no associations with young persons of the opposite sex, and of course she fell in love with the first handsome man who talked sweet nonsense to her."

"And for this lip-worship she would renounce the brilliant promise of her life," said the Senora, bitterly. "If I could only convince her that Vane is as false as he is beautiful, she might listen to reason; but when I speak disparagingly of him she flies into a storm of wrath, and then puts her hands over her ears to shut out my words. But I'll conquer her yet or die in the attempt."

"Fight it out between you; but if you *do* conquer, I shall esteem you as a greater tactician than Napoleon himself. In defiance of her uncle's opposition, Savella seems to cling to him even more fondly than before this discovery."

"Because Mr. Fontaine is gentle and kind with her; he expects to subdue her by such means; but if she were left to him she would soon elude us all, and make good her escape with her lover; for she hints at the possibility of a clandestine marriage in one of her letters."

"Ha! I feared as much; and as a last resource I know what I shall do."

"Not make friends with Vane?" she asked, in great wrath. "If you attempt that I will do what I threatened."

"Pooh! you are as stupid as Savella. I know what I am about. You only keep your own counsel, and leave me to take care of our mutual interests. You know that such a course must be my last throw upon the dice, and will not be resorted to unless in the belief that all other means of securing our interests must fail. You will submit to whatever I may think best to be done; for, if you refuse, I will throw the whole thing up and turn King's—no, State's evidence against you."

"You would not dare!" she gasped.

"I would not only dare, but do it, if you should be guilty of the imprudent act you threatened. Go to Savella now; she has already been left too long alone, and here comes Fontaine to hear my report of the amended health of his darling."

In a white rage, Senora Roselli precipitately left the hall to avoid the scrutiny of Fontaine, who rode up and dismounted in front of the door.

With his blandest smile, Summerton met him on the piazza, and gave him the most pleasing accounts of Isola's convalescence.

"This is glad news to me, Mr. Summerton; and to your skill I owe the restoration of my beloved child. I shall not forget this service, you may be sure," said Fontaine, with animation. "There is a fine horse in the stable which you are in the habit of riding; hereafter you will consider him as your own. He is the brother of Lucifer, and not inferior to him in spirit. I have noticed that for one of your cloth you have a good knowledge of horseflesh, and can manage a fiery steed as well as the best of us."

"Oh! thank you, Mr. Fontaine, you are too munificent; the trifling service I have performed for your daughter scarcely merits such a reward. As to my knowledge of horses, in my wandering life I have had some practice in that line. I have been among the Arabs of the desert and the wild riders on the steppes of Tartary."

"You have been a missionary, then? I once thought of adopting such a career myself; to bring the knowledge of Christ to the heathen I hoped might be accepted as an atonement for the faults of my youth; but just as my purpose was assuming a tangible shape, accident threw Isola under my protection, and I selfishly perhaps, preferred devoting my life to her."

Mr. Summerton did not enlighten him as to whether he

had played the part of the missionary among the nomadic tribe of which he had spoken, for, at that moment, Cæsar announced that supper was ready, and the two went in and joined Savella and her aunt at the table.

The face of the young girl was sad and clouded; but when her uncle came in, she looked up to him and smiled faintly. Fontaine inquired how she had spent the day, and endeavored to draw her into cheerful conversation; and in this he was seconded by Summerton with the tact he so eminently possessed.

By his seeming piety and humility, the *soi-disant* clergyman had gained the entire confidence of his host; for Fontaine found it pleasant to have so intelligent a companion, who was ready to talk or be silent, as suited his moods, and he also believed that Summerton used his influence to hold in subjection the fearful woman whose advent in his house had been so terrible a blow to him.

Himself high-toned and honorable as a knight of chivalry, Fontaine was incapable of suspecting or comprehending the fatal snare that was narrowing around him with every passing hour.

When they went out from supper, Savella said:—"You have had no music for several days, Uncle Claude. Shall I play for you this evening?"

"If you please, my dear; I shall be charmed to hear you sing again. Your proposal to do so proves to me that your spirits are beginning to recover from their late depression. If we do that which is right, Savella, no common sorrow can long affect our happiness."

"Oh! uncle, I am afraid that I shall never do right. I am naturally bad, but, in spite of my—of what you discovered, you know that I am not usually deceitful."

"I believe that your nature is a frank and truthful one, Savella; and in those two qualities lie the basis of much that is excellent in human character."

Savella seemed to be scarcely listening to him. She suddenly said:

"Oh dear, darling uncle Claude, if you would only make me happy in my own way, I should be the most grateful creature breathing."

"Remember my promise, Savella. Give me a pledge to remain unmarried till you are twenty-one, and I will then, if you remain true to your lover, and he to you, give my consent to your union."

"Let me communicate with Philip then, and see what he says. If he consents, I will agree to his proposal; for anything is better than being constantly watched by such a Cerberus as my aunt. She scolds, and worries me, till I am ready to turn away from you all."

"I entreated her to be gentle with you. Savella, do not speak of such a thing as an elopement; for I consider it an indelible disgrace to a woman to make a clandestine marriage."

"Sometimes no other course is left to her."

"In a few cases it may be so, but they are very rare; and a girl who rashly takes her fate in her own hands in such a manner, is very apt to have cause to repent of it in bitterness of spirit."

"Ah well, I shan't have the ghost of a chance to try such an experiment, for Aunt Bianca never leaves me, night or day. She has taken up her lodging in my room, and, I verily believe, she sleeps with one eye open; for I cannot move that she does not ask me if I want anything."

"I regret that you should be subjected to such annoyance, but it is with my approbation that you are thus guarded. I hope such precautions will not long be necessary, my child; but it depends on yourself when they shall cease."

Savella made no reply, but sat down to the instrument and dashed off into a perfect storm of sounds. She knew

that this was not the style of music her uncle preferred, but it accorded with her own humor at the moment, and after wreaking her irritated feelings on the unoffending ivory, she struck into one of his favorite airs.

Piece after piece was played, and it was ten o'clock when Fontaine arose from his seat, and said:—"You must be tired, Savella. I will tax your good nature no longer."

She came up to him and again offered him the good-night kiss, which she had withheld since the adventure in the woodland; and he courteously led her to the foot of the staircase, and watched her ascend, with a fullness of tenderness for her he had never felt before. If he could only have believed in Philip as he once did, he would gladly have given to her the happiness for which she pleaded; but he had lost all confidence in him, and he felt the assurance in his own mind, that the passionate love of this inexperienced heart was not reciprocated by its object.

CHAPTER XX.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

Fontaine went to his library, and in a short time the house was buried in the deepest silence. He watched and waited for his usual visitor, but no indication of his presence came, and after reading an hour, he retired, hoping that he would have a night of undisturbed rest, for he had ridden many miles that day.

Fatigue soon steeped his senses in a heavy slumber, which lasted till after midnight; but suddenly he was aroused by a chorus of raps, which seemed to come from every part of the room. Fontaine started up, and the voice came to his ear in clearer tones than usual:

"Claude, I am, at last, permitted to become visible to you. Behold me as you last saw me."

Through the dense darkness of the room a pale light suddenly flashed upon the white wall opposite his bed. Heavy curtains, closed at the foot, but looped back in front, hung around the bedstead; and through this opening, Fontaine had a distinct view of a circle of flickering light, in the centre of which a dim figure was outlined, leaning upon the breast of a kneeling woman,—whose face was bowed over him.

With a feeling of death sickness, he gazed upon the dying form, from whose breast the clothing was torn, and the gaping wound inflicted by his own hand lay exposed to his shrinking sight. The pallor of approaching death was stamped upon the features, and he almost fancied he saw the pale lips move as the terrible words, "Parricide, behold your work!" met his ear.

Fontaine attempted to get out of bed, that he might test the reality of this fearful vision; but his powers of volition seemed suddenly paralyzed, and, with a faint cry, he sunk upon his pillow insensible.

Many hours passed before he recovered from the death-like trance into which he had fallen. So soon as consciousness returned, the whole scene at once flashed upon his memory. He opened his eyes to see if any vestige of it yet remained, for as long as he kept them closed it seemed to him as if the bleeding image he had seen was stamped so indelibly upon the retina that it would remain with him forever.

Daylight was struggling into the room, and one glance assured him that the pure white wall retained no trace of the phantasm it had shadowed forth on the previous night; but to his deep horror, the vision seemed to be gliding from it toward himself. It paused when just beyond the reach of his arm, and it seemed even less shadowy than on the previous night.

Fontaine pressed his hands upon his burning eyelids; but when he removed them the image was still there, and he exclaimed, in agony:

"Oh! Father of mercies, am I indeed haunted by a phantom? Is it henceforth forever to be my companion?"

The voice came in reply:

"Forever!" and the ringing tones seemed to die away in solemn echoes.

In the deep anguish of his soul, Fontaine prayed for death; annihilation, anything was better than this awful punishment for a crime which had been so bitterly repented, so wofully expiated by years of suffering—all of which it seemed availed nothing in his favor.

Many times did Fontaine uncloset his eyes, hoping by that time the vision had vanished, but it was still there; and as the sunlight penetrated into the room, it seemed more of a reality than before.

Though feeling weak and overwrought, he arose and made his toilet, making efforts to turn his back upon the dread figure; but, to his increasing horror, it pursued him; always seeming to stand just beyond the reach of his arm, and receding as he approached, but never disappearing.

Fontaine had read of such illusions, and, terrible as this one was, but for the singular occurrences that preceded it, he should have concluded that his eyes were diseased; but, if that were so, how should he account for the voice that nightly came to speak with him? Claude Fontaine's mind was not even then quite sane, and he came to the fearful conclusion that he was accursed—that an avenging demon was upon his path which he might never elude—and he muttered, with pale lips:

"The end must soon come now. Reason, which has tottered more than once, must be dethroned, and I—I become that outcast of humanity—a living body bereft of its guiding intelligence. Awful, awful doom! Yet perhaps I merit it;

I dare not arraign the justice of God, for I have not merited His mercy."

Fontaine made an effort to appear calm at the breakfast table, but his pallor, and the wild look he cast before him, caused many inquiries as to the state of his health. He replied that he was quite well, but he must have slept too heavily, which caused his unusual paleness. But every time he looked up from his plate, the sudden start he gave betrayed that his nervous system had been severely shaken.

He had no appetite, and after forcing himself to swallow a cup of coffee, he arose, and said that he would walk in the open air, as the atmosphere of the house was oppressive to him.

As he disappeared, Summerton spoke to the Senora, in a guarded tone:

"Mr. Fontaine seems much indisposed to-day. I am afraid my skill as a leech will soon be called on in his service. The pupils of his eyes seem unnaturally dilated, and there is every indication of a severe attack of fever."

Savella overheard him, and she impulsively spoke

"If my uncle is ill, I hope he will not accept you as his physician, nor aunt Bianca as his nurse."

Summerton turned sharply on her, and asked:

"What can you mean? I think you are growing too presumptuous with your new prosperity."

"I know very well what I mean," she undauntedly replied. "It is this: that a prophecy I heard made on the night of my arrival in this house, may chance to meet its fulfilment if he is left to your tender mercies."

Senora Roselli laughed in a singular manner.

"You foolish child!" she said; "because I foretold the probability that Mr. Fontaine would die some day of apoplexy you have taken it into your silly head that I intend to do him some injury. Have no fears from me; if he is ill I shall not approach him; Aggy would think I had unwar-

rantably invaded her privileges if I attempted such a thing."

Savella drew a long breath, and said:

"I am glad that you have given me such an assurance. Yes—let the old woman wait on him as she has always done."

Summerton fixed his piercing eyes upon her, and spoke in low, concentrated tones:

"Savella you have dared much in affixing such a stigma upon either your aunt or I; but you are singularly defective in judgment, and therefore I forgive you. But let me warn you of one thing: *your* prosperity, *your* future are indissolubly connected with ours; so beware how you throw on us the odium of charges which might ruin us even if they were never proved."

"I charged you with nothing. I do not understand threats, nor do I much care for them. I have done your bidding in winning over my uncle, and with him for my friend I am no longer afraid of you; no, nor of my aunt either, though I freely confess that she makes my life a torment to me."

Summerton regarded her in menacing silence, but she seemed perfectly unmoved by his anger, and with a curling lip he presently said:

"We may both yet make you feel that our power over you has not utterly passed away, even if you *have* come in possession of fortune. Go to your room, ingrate, and pray for forgiveness for the deadly sin of ingratitude."

"I will go to my room, because it is my pleasure to do so, but not to say my prayers at your hypocritical command," was the defiant reply, and Savella sprung up the stairs, careless of the baleful glance that followed her till her figure was lost to view. Then turning to the Senora, he hurriedly said:

"Savella is getting beyond all bounds; but we shall soon

have her in our power as much as the others, and she must be made to feel her dependence upon us. Claude Fontaine will not long be in a condition to protect her, or any other person; for if ever incipient insanity was mirrored in a man's eyes, it is in his this morning."

"Are you quite sure?" she eagerly asked. "That would be better than the other; two deaths in the house might bring suspicion upon us, in spite of every precaution."

"You will see. I am a good physician, if I am a poor priest; but you had better follow Savella. She has already been too long alone, for no one knows what such a marplot may accomplish in the few moments she has been out of sight."

Thus admonished, the Senora hastened to join her niece, and Summerton purposely hastened to throw himself in Fontaine's way. He found him walking to and fro upon the lawn, and approaching him, apologetically said:

"Pardon me for intruding upon you, Mr. Fontaine, but I am uneasy about you. In your appearance there is every indication of approaching illness, and I think a few precautions may spare you much suffering."

Fontaine vaguely regarded him. He presently seemed to comprehend what Summerton had said, and turning to him, asked:

"Do I look so ill as to alarm you? Do you think if I refuse medicine that death will speedily release me from the life that has become a wretched burden to me?"

"I cannot say that; your constitution is a very strong one, and you might struggle through without aid, but I would not advise you to attempt it."

"I set no value on life. It is my most earnest desire to escape from it, therefore I refuse to use any means to prolong it, though I thank you for your solicitude on my account. Oh! death—death will be a release; I have no fear

of the shining angel, for he would be the most welcome messenger a merciful Creator could send to me."

There was such fervent passion in his last words that even the material creature beside him felt that he was deeply in earnest. He slowly said:

"Yet your lot is blessed beyond that of ordinary mortals."

Fontaine fastened his glittering eyes upon him.

"Have you not read of those fair fruits which on attempting to gather fall in dust and ashes into the hand? They are a type of my life; my heritage was a goodly one, but its enjoyment was blasted ere the first bloom of life was past. I am but a miserable wreck, tossed upon a sea of doubt, which I might have solved by suicide had not something within me held my sacrilegious hand. Mr. Summerton, you are a man of learning; you have had many experiences; but have you ever before seen a man haunted by a phantom which he could not exorcise?"

"I have read of such illusions, but they are temporary. They generally proceed from some derangement of the nervous system."

Fontaine laughed in so wild and strange a manner that it made even Summerton shiver.

"If it is an illusion, I am doomed to be its victim. There! there it is now; wherever I move, it glides before me, the blood-stained victim I slew in a moment of vehement passion. Ah! the secret of my life is spoken! Yet no—'tis not a secret, for that woman knows it. She has come hither to live in my house—to torture me by her accursed presence; yet I dare not drive her away. What I have endured since she came hither no words may express; yet, even that is less terrible than the voice which nightly salutes me in the tones of the long-buried dead! Man! you are a priest, and I am at the confessional. Reveal what I have now told you, and I will double my crime by taking your life. Do you understand?"

He stood before Summerton menacing, pale, his large, black eyes dilating, his lips writhing with passion. Summerton shrank before him, but his own eyes never left those of the speaker. After a pause, he gently said:

"Mr. Fontaine, I was right. You are already delirious. Come with me to your chamber; let me summon your family physician."

"No—that is not necessary. I am not ill. I was never stronger in my life than I feel at this moment. The pain is here," touching his brow. "The disease is here," passing his hand over his eyes. "Even when closed I see that awful form, which is branded upon my brain in indelible characters. Can your skill send that into oblivion? If it can, I will submit to your treatment. If you are powerless there, I am lost—lost—lost!"

His voice died away in a faint murmur, and Summerton ventured to take his feverish hand in his own. He softly said:

"You are in a strange state of excitement, sir, but I will do my best to relieve you. I have heard of such hallucinations before; but, as I just now assured you, they were temporary. Scattered through medical works, I have found many such cases recorded. As a classical scholar, you must have read of the familiar demons of Socrates. In later times many distinguished men have cherished the belief that they were haunted by a spiritual presence. Oliver Cromwell, hard and practical as he was, had such a belief. Napoleon also, and several others that I could name."

"Yes, yes, I have read about them all, for such things have always had a strange fascination for me; but theirs was not an accusing spirit who came in a tangible shape and spoke with them in audible tones, as mine does. I have slowly come to the conviction that I am accursed above all men. Thank God that no child will come after me to bear the burden of my sin, for God has said—'I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.'"

"Do I understand you aright, sir? Do you say that this mysterious voice has *spoken* with you?"

"Yes, for many weeks past. Before you came hither I first heard it. After your arrival for some time I ceased to be haunted by it, but since Isola left me it has again returned."

"This is indeed strange! Does it speak with reference to her?"

"Always; I am warned to put her away from me, but that not even the infernal powers shall make me do. Isola was given to me in the hour of my deepest desolation; she has been the one thing that made life endurable to me, and I will never cast her off; no—not even at the bidding of one from the regions of the dead."

"You are right, sir," said Summerton, with animation. "It would be a cruel piece of injustice to give up this young girl who is entirely dependent upon you. Neither can I think that the spirit of your lost brother, even if it could communicate with you, would exact such a sacrifice at your hands. You have told me of your interview with Miss Fox, and the strange things you there witnessed; it may be that by entering within the circle of that spiritual influence, some evil demon from the Inferno may have gained power to annoy you thus. Shall I use my priestly skill to exorcise him?"

"Ah! if you could do so! But this is no longer the day for such mummary. Excuse me, Mr. Summerton, but I cannot believe that the repetition of a mere form of words can drive this apparition from me. I trust that my eyes may prove to be only temporarily affected, and I think it will probably be best to accept your advice as to a consultation with Dr. Sinclair. But I shall not send for him to visit me. I will ride over to see him this morning."

"That will be the safest course. I would offer my services, but I am not an oculist, and I am afraid to

tamper with anything so precious as the sight. I think your physician will tell you to return home and go to bed, that you may be treated for the fever that evidently inflames your blood."

"If he does I shall scarcely obey him. In my present state of mind, rest would be intolerable. I must have action, action, action; for I feel that there is little time left for me to act in."

"Are you then apprehensive of speedy death?"

"A living death," he gloomily replied. "Death to all that is noble and grand in the human soul; annihilation to the godlike particle which the Creator breathed into man with the breath of life, while the physical creature still lives on. Oh! this doom transcends all other forms of punishment; yet I have merited it, and I dare not impugn the eternal justice of God."

He turned abruptly away and strode toward the stable. In a few more moments he saw Summerton dash off on his powerful black steed, and ride at headlong speed down the valley in the direction of Dr. Sinclair's residence.

CHAPTER XXI.

FANNY'S VISIT TO LA FONTAINE.

In compliance with her promise to Summerton, Fanny Berkely came over to La Fontaine to visit Savella. She was surprised to see Senora Roselli come down with her and remain near enough to hear all that passed between them, till Savella impatiently said:

"Aunt Bianca, you need not remain as spy on Fanny and me; we are not going to plot treason against your authority, for she is too much in awe of my uncle to do anything of which he would disapprove."

The Senora severely replied :

"It will be a welcome release to me to leave you a few moments in safe companionship ; but if I can trust Miss Berkely, I cannot place the same confidence in you. Since you object to my presence, I will promenade on the piazza, where I can keep you in sight, which will suffice while she is with you."

Fanny looked in a bewildered manner from one speaker to the other, and when the elder lady swept out of the room she rapidly asked :

"What can this mean, Savella? Are you actually under surveillance?"

"You may well say that, Fanny. I am watched night and day, and what do you suppose it is for?"

"You have not planned an elopement already, Savella? You can know no one well enough as yet to place such confidence as that in his hands."

"There you are mistaken, my dear. I fancy I know *my* lover as well as I shall ever know him, for his beautiful soul is imaged in the perfection of his person. My uncle is absurd enough to object to him, because he once fancied himself in love with Isola ; and I know he is afraid she will break her heart if he marries me."

Fanny listened in breathless astonishment, mingled with indignation at this disrespectful allusion to Isola. She asked :

"Has Philip Vane actually asked you to marry him, Savella?"

"Of course he has ; and I have promised to do so. My uncle found us together in the woodland ; and such a life as I have since led is enough to disgust one with everything. I am not kept a prisoner in my own room, but I might as well be, for my aunt watches me unceasingly, and for the last three days I have been unable to communicate with my darling Philip. She intercepted the letters I tried to send

to him, and amuses herself in my presence by repeating portions of them aloud, and turning them into ridicule. Pleasant, isn't it, to have one's tender effusions undergo such an ordeal as that!"

Fanny could not repress a smile ; but she tried to speak in a sympathetic tone :

"It is provoking to be treated in such a manner ; but, my dear Savella, your aunt only wishes to save you from giving your hand to a man who has already shown his motives in seeking a wife. I assure you, you need have no fears on Isola's account, for I know that she has ceased to care for Philip. If Mr. Fontaine objects to him as a suitor to you, it is for a better cause than that. No doubt he regards Mr. Vane as a miracle of versatility, since he has professed a grand passion for two girls in the space of three months."

"You are as bad as the rest, Fanny. You all sing the same song," replied Savella, impatiently. "Just as if many a man has not fancied himself desperately in love with one woman, till another, that suited him better, appeared on the scene. Philip loves me, I am sure of that ; and I do not hesitate to say that I adore him, and I will marry him in spite of them all."

"Will you really act contrary to the will of your uncle ? Oh ! Savella, that will be very wrong ; and no good can come of it, be sure of that."

"Then evil may come ; for I will marry him even if I am compelled to elope with him. Dear Fanny, if you would only take one letter from me, and deliver it to him, I should think you the very best girl in the world."

Fanny shrank in dismay from the proposal, and hurriedly said :

"I would not do such a thing for the world. I should feel guilty whenever I looked at Mr. Fontaine ; and if you and Philip were not happy together, I should accuse myself of helping to make your misery. No, Savella, you will

give up this mad plan; and be sure that I will never help you to carry it out."

"You are very cross, Fanny. When I heard you were here, I thought I might persuade you to stand my friend. I am a stranger here, surrounded by those who are unfriendly to my happiness; for I aver to you that it can only be found in a union with the man to whom I have irrevocably given my heart. Even if Isola was once attached to him, her affection was weak and commonplace compared with that I feel. She has found consolation; but nothing could console me for losing Philip—my beautiful young Antinous, my demi-god—for he is all this to me."

Savella covered her face with her hands, and burst in tears. Fanny said everything to her that she thought could console her, but she firmly resisted the passionate entreaties of Savella to become the medium of communication between her and her lover.

Urged on by so mercenary a wooer as Philip Vane, Fanny saw plainly enough what the end must be with so impassioned and reckless a being as the young Italian. When convinced that Miss Berkely would not assist her to correspond with him, Savella endeavored to extort from her a promise to report to her lover the strict watch that was held over her; but Fanny declined to take any part in an affair that must be a source of great annoyance to Fontaine; and she soon afterward took her leave.

Dashaway never before made the distance between La Fontaine and the Vale in so short a space of time, noted as he was for his speed. She quickly dismounted, gathered up her sweeping riding skirt, and rushed up stairs in a glow of excitement to impart her news.

Isola was seated in a large chair, in front of a cheerful wood fire, which the cool mountain air rendered necessary to one in her delicate health. She laid aside the book she had been reading before Fanny's unceremonious advent, and

regarded her glowing face and eager expression with much surprise.

"What can have happened to excite you so much, Fanny?" she quickly asked. "Is anything wrong at La Fontaine?"

"I have the strangest news! But you can bear it with philosophy, Isola. You no longer care for him, thank Heaven! Has Mr. Fontaine hinted to you what has lately happened to Savella?"

"No; he has looked distressed and annoyed about something, but he evaded my inquiries. What *has* occurred? Nothing serious, I hope."

"Well, I must bolt out the truth at once, for I can never tell anything in a roundabout way. Savella is in despair because Mr. Fontaine refuses to permit her to marry Philip. It seems that they have carried on quite a romantic flirtation, by meeting in the woodland, ever since you have been ill. Her uncle found them together; and since that time she has been under the surveillance of the senora. But Savella openly avows her resolution to marry him, even if she has to elope with him to do so."

Isola slightly changed color, but when Fanny ceased speaking, she calmly said:

"If anything had been before wanted to complete my disenchantment this would suffice. Philip does not love Savella, for only yesterday when he called here, and we were left alone for a few moments, he presumed to refer to the past. He hurriedly said:—'Let me act as I may, Isola, you may always feel assured that you, and you alone, have I ever loved.' I silenced him by a look, and left him. Now, his words are explained; even when they were uttered this poor girl had given him her troth. Oh, Fanny, is there no possibility of saving Savella from so unprincipled a man?"

"I fear not. She is madly in love with him, and noth-

ing that you or I could say would have the least weight with her. She has three guardians to look after her; for I gathered from her that the Senora and Mr. Summerton are as much opposed to the marriage as Mr. Fontaine is, and if they cannot keep her out of Philip's arms I am sure we should fail."

"On what ground does her aunt oppose her wishes? She knows very little of Philip, and his social position is quite good enough to satisfy her aspirations for her niece, I should think."

"I do not know. But the Senora is quite savage against the poor girl, who seems almost in a state of despair because she cannot see, nor communicate with her beloved. I declare I was quite touched, and once I was almost tempted to take a letter she has already written for him. If the Italian was only against the match, I would have done so; but for the world I would do nothing to offend Mr. Fontaine."

"I hope my father does not object on *my* account. I could now see Philip give his hand to another with perfect equanimity. If Savella is so resolute in her determination to marry him as you declare her to be, she had better be married at home than incur the scandal of an elopement."

"Savella thinks her uncle's opposition is grounded on delicacy towards you; but I assured her that Mr. Vane has no longer the power to influence your happiness in any way. She is vain and silly enough to think that he only admired you till she came,—that she is his true love, and predestined mate."

"If Philip had left me the least ground to suppose that he has really transferred his affections to her, I would use my influence with my father to induce him to consent. But convinced as we all are that he only seeks her for her wealth I cannot do so. With her temperament, if Savella discovered that he had married her from interested motives, I am afraid she would go mad, or kill herself."

"Very likely; for she seems a reckless creature, who would be capable of any desperate act in a moment of passion. But I am not quite sure that the consequences may not be as fatal if she finds herself irrevocably separated from Philip. I declare she made me shiver more than once while she talked with me. She seems to have no reticence—no sense of delicacy or pride. It may be her Italian nature; but it is so different from yours and mine that it frightens me."

"Perhaps it will be best for you to tell my father what Savella said. He will then be able to judge better of the course it will be best to pursue toward her."

"It seems like a violation of confidence to do so; yet I have the impression that Savella would not care if I could further her wishes by doing so. Mark my words, Isola; if Mr. Fontaine proves inexorable, Savella will find means to evade them all and give her hand to Philip Vane."

"I fear as much myself, yet what can be done to prevent it?"

"I do not know—I am in a state of bewilderment. Let us consult cousin Carrie; she always knows what is best to be done."

Miss Carleton's room joined the one occupied by the two girls, and they found her writing letters. She laid aside her pen and smilingly asked:

"What is it, Fanny? Your face speaks volumes. What have you come to consult me about now?"

"She was soon put in possession of all the facts of the case, and, after a few moments' thought said:

"I think you can do nothing effective, Fanny. If Mr. Fontaine, with his gentleness and right feeling, cannot restrain this headstrong girl from rushing into certain misery, no one else can."

She turned again to the writing table as she added:

"I am sorry to dismiss you so abruptly; but my letter

must be ready for the mail bag, which goes in half an hour."

Fanny laughingly said:

"You are my oracle, cousin Carrie, so I shall be mute on this subject in Mr. Fontaine's presence."

"Be assured, my dear, that he understands as much as you can tell him, and he will take every precaution to prevent his heiress from becoming the prey of a fortune-hunter. I give Philip up; he has disappointed me; I can never have any respect for him again."

The two girls returned to their own room, and a short time afterward Fontaine himself alighted at the door, on his way from Dr. Sinclair's. Isola saw him through the window and went down to meet him.

His unusual paleness, in spite of his rapid ride in the cool morning air, and the singular expression of his eyes struck her as soon as she looked at him, and she inquired with solicitude if he was not well. With assumed cheerfulness, he replied:

"I am not quite as well as usual, and I have been over to Sinclair's to consult him. He thinks that I am threatened with an attack of fever, but I do not agree with him. I have used my eyes too much of late, and they are singularly affected—that is all. Do not look so much alarmed, my love, for there is not much the matter with me. I have rode ten miles this morning, and I do not feel at all fatigued by the exertion."

He asked to see all the family, and when the servant went to inform them of his arrival, he turned suddenly toward Isola and said:

"Are you not well enough to come back to me now, my dear? I miss you so much that I can no longer do without you. Will you return this afternoon if I send the carriage for you?"

"Certainly—I would have gone before, but you seemed

contented that I should stay; and they have all been so kind to me here, that I could not leave them till you expressed a wish for me to do so. I must go home to nurse you back to health, for I can see that you are far from well."

He went to a window, looked vaguely through it, and then abruptly turning, said:

"I do not know what may soon happen to me, Isola. I feel that I am trembling on the verge of some dire calamity; but remember one thing: I have not neglected your interests—I have done the best I could for you, and if my fears are verified, you will find my will with Winston in Lynchburg. You will be independent, though not rich. There, that is all I have to say, and here comes Mrs. Berkely and Miss Carleton. Put off that scared look, child, lest they think I have been chiding you, and that, I am sure, you have never needed from me."

He turned with his usual grace of manner to greet the ladies, who at that moment entered; and making a great effort, he was soon engaged in a cheerful conversation with them. But through all it was evident that some great weight lay heavy at his heart. This Miss Carleton accounted for through the information Fanny had so lately conveyed to her, but she could not understand why his eyes always wandered beyond her, nor why his fingers should work so nervously as if eager to grasp something from which he restrained himself.

He presently spoke of his intention to send for Isola that afternoon, and Mrs. Berkely reluctantly consented to give her up before her health was completely re-established.

"I *must* have her back again," Fontaine said, with emphasis. "I feel lost without my consolation. Neither Savella nor any one else can supply her place. Yes—one other might, but that is a dream that has always eluded me," and his eyes fell upon Miss Carleton with a singular expression. "There is one woman in the world who could

have made me supremely happy, had not a phantom come between her and myself. There it is now; I see it as plainly as I see you, Mrs. Berkely. It is *always* there; it will never leave me again."

The two ladies exchanged glances of alarm. Fontaine noticed them, and asked, with a nervous laugh:

"What have I said to make you look so? I am not quite well to-day, and I have been over to see Sinclair. He insists that I shall be quiet for a few days, so this is my farewell call for some time to come. That is why I wished to see you all. Where is the General? George and his wife, and my pretty Fanny?"

"All except Fanny have gone to Lynchburg for a few days. Here she comes now."

Fanny approached him, and offered her hand as she cheerfully said:

"Good morning, Mr. Fontaine. I have been to your house to-day to visit Savella."

"And did you see her? Did the grim old Jezebel that keeps watch over her let you in her captive's bower? Of course you are aware that Savella is doing penance for her sins. She is not as obedient as she should be, and I placed her in charge of that blot on humanity—that dire Nemesis who has come here to blur the little sunshine God has left in my life. I don't think she'll hurt Savella; but if she had the power I know she would rid herself of me. But I'll turn the tables on her yet; she shall not *always* stay in my house. The phantom is enough to haunt one man without having a flesh and blood goblin seated forever at his board."

A gleam of sound reason enabled him to read the expression of the appalled faces around him, and he suddenly checked himself. After a pause, he spoke in his natural manner.

"Isola, I will send for you as soon as I get home. Good morning ladies."

He moved quickly across the floor, but suddenly turning to Miss Carleton, he seized her hand, carried it to his lips, and fervently said: "Oh Carrie Carleton, I have held the secret long in my heart, but now it forces its way to my lips. I love you as few can love, but the ban of an evil doom was upon me, and I dared not ask you to share my broken life. Pity me—pray for me, for the curse of God has fallen on me in its most appalling form. I will whisper the dire secret in your ear, but do not breathe it to any mortal creature. There is blood upon my hand, and the stain has crept slowly up—up—up, till at last it has reached my brain, and maddened it."

The last words were uttered in a thrilling whisper, and dropping her hand as suddenly as he had taken it, Fontaine rushed from the room. In another moment he was dashing through the lawn at the top of Lucifer's speed, and before the alarmed group could send a servant in pursuit of him, he was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXII.

CARRIE'S SORROW.

ON the abrupt departure of Fontaine, Isola sank down nearly fainting, with large tears rolling over her pallid cheeks. She moaned:

"O, my father—my dear, good father—he must indeed be mad to accuse himself of a crime he could never have committed. Dear Mrs. Berkely, cousin Carrie, what can I do to help him?"

Miss Carleton seemed frozen into marble. She stood pale and motionless upon the spot on which Fontaine had left her, incapable of thought or action. Mrs. Berkely drew the weeping Isola to her heart, and softly said:

"You must go to him, my child, and show him that you are grateful for all his past kindness. In this extremity, only those that love him should minister to his wants. My dear Isola, this will be a sad trial to you."

"I can prove myself equal to it," she replied, with firmness. "My life belongs to him, and if necessary it shall be devoted to his service."

"That is the right feeling, my love. Pray to God and He will sustain you under this bitter trial. Fanny, go with Isola and help her to put up her things. It will be better not to wait for the carriage from La Fontaine, for it may be forgotten. I will order mine to take her home at once."

Isola thanked her, and the two girls went up to their chamber. When they were alone they wept together a few moments; but Fanny aroused herself and said:

"This will never do, Isola; I have so much to say to you before you go back among those people that you must compose yourself and listen to me. My dear Isola, I am about to bring a very serious charge against one, at least, of the strangers now at La Fontaine. A charge in which I firmly believe your own life to be involved."

"Fanny, are we all going mad together! What can you mean?"

"I mean this; that the medicine prepared for you by that odious man, who I believe is no clergyman at all, was intended to have any other than a sanative effect. *That* made you ill in place of curing you."

"But how can that be? I have regularly taken the drops, and my health has improved with every day."

"You have not taken them since you came here. My suspicions were aroused, I scarcely know how, and I was determined that you should use them no more. I poured them out myself and filled the vial with water. It is my firm belief that if you had continued to use them you would now be past help."

Isola listened with dilating eyes and half-parted lips. After a pause, she said:

"But, Fanny, I was ill before I left home, and Mr. Summerton gave me little medicine till I came hither. You wrong him cruelly by such assertions as you have just made."

"I am convinced that I do not. He has found means to give you poison at home, and the drops were designed to keep up the symptoms of slow decay that suspicion of foul play might not be aroused. I am certain of it."

"That is impossible; he could not place it in my food, for that is prepared and served by our own people, and any attempt to tamper with it would instantly be detected. Besides, others must equally have partaken of it."

"Could he not find means to enter your room when no one was there, and put it in something you use? Think a moment—is it not possible for him to have done this?"

"I never eat except at meal times. I do not keep candies or anything of that kind in my chamber. I only use iced water, which is placed by my bedside every night. I always drink before retiring; but water is so pure an element that I must have detected the taste of any foreign substance mingled with it. My dear Fanny, do not seek to make me more unhappy than I already am, by infusing suspicion in my mind against those with whom I must live in the same house."

"Isola, if I had not the conviction that your life depends on it, I would never do so; but there can be no harm in precaution. This man confesses that he is a learned chemist; could he not easily find some tasteless agent which will work his ends without bringing suspicion on himself? Do not use the water placed upon your night stand. Make Celia prepare another pitcher, and lock it up in your closet. If you will do this you may be saved; if you refuse, I cannot answer for the consequences."

"But what can Mr. Summerton have to gain by getting rid of me? I am not in *his* way, even if Senora Roselli has betrayed jealousy of my father's affection for me. That is natural, perhaps, for she no doubt considers Savella entitled to the first place in his affections."

"My dear, these people are mercenary; I believe their interests are united in some way, and the thought that Mr. Fontaine may give you even a moiety of his wealth is odious to them, and they will sacrifice you to prevent it. I exonerate Savella from any participation in their plans; neither do I think they would dare to trust her with them."

"If your convictions are well founded, Fanny, every precaution I can take will be unavailing; for, if one effort fails, they will find means to reach my life in some other way," said Isola, with blanched cheeks and quivering lips. "Oh, Fanny, this is too—too dreadful. I must go back to my father at all hazards; must be thrown daily and hourly with these people, with such thoughts and fears as you have aroused continually rising against them."

"Yet you must beware of betraying your mistrust, Isola. Only be on the watch till you gain some evidence to confirm my suspicions. Then, be sure, the whole Berkely family will come forward to your assistance if Mr. Fontaine should not be in a condition to aid you. I cannot help thinking that the arts of these people have in some way brought him to his present condition. The Senora has forced herself upon him, though he evidently loathes her."

"If I thought *that*, I would pursue them relentlessly, ruthlessly, till they met the punishment of their crime," said Isola, with flashing eyes. "Oh, Fanny, I thought myself very miserable when I saw the condition to which my poor father is reduced! but what you have just said has doubly increased the burden. If money is their object, why do they not rid themselves of him, as you think they have tried to do of me?"

"They have already done worse, for his mind is unhinged, and it is their work."

A knock upon the door interrupted them, and a servant came in, and said:

"Please, young ladies, Mistis says de carriage is ready to take Miss 'Zola home, and lunch is set in her room."

"Dear me! and we have done nothing toward packing up. Gather up Miss Isola's things, Judy, and put them in her trunk, while we go down and speak to grandma. I shall go to La Fontaine with you, Isola, to see how things are going on there."

The girl busied herself in packing, while the two young ladies put on their hats and shawls. On descending they found Mrs. Berkely alone, looking grave and self-absorbed.

"Where is cousin Carrie?" asked Fanny. "I expected to find her with you, grandma."

"She has retired to her own room, and does not wish to be disturbed. I am glad to see that you are going home with Isola, my dear. I hope you will bring me back a good report of our poor Claude. Here is a cup of tea, Isola; you must drink it, child, for it will do you good."

Isola thankfully accepted and obediently swallowed it, though she felt as if every drop must strangle her. In a few moments they were ready to set out, and tenderly kissing her, Mrs. Berkely said:

"I will be sure to come over to-morrow to see how you are all getting along, my love. Take care of your own health, for you are not yet strong. Even if our dear Claude is long ill, you have so many faithful servants that you need not break yourself down waiting on him. Remember that I have a claim on you now, as my possible future granddaughter."

The young girl murmured a few grateful words, and when she and Fanny were gone, Mrs. Berkely sat many moments with her face shaded by her hand, absorbed in deep and painful thought.

With a heavy sigh she arose when the servant came in to remove the lunch tray, and after a few seconds of indecision, she slowly proceeded toward the apartment of Miss Carleton.

Her low knock was unnoticed, and after repeating it with the same result, Mrs. Berkely softly unclosed the door and entered the room. The blinds were shut, the curtains lowered, and the room was only lighted by a few dying embers that glowed faintly upon the hearth. As her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she saw a figure reclining in a large chair, her eyes closed, and her long glittering hair falling in a heavy coil to the floor.

The attitude was one of utter abandonment to grief, and the colorless face showed that a storm had passed over its owner which had laid her soul desolate. She neither moved nor spoke when Mrs. Berkely drew near, and looked compassionately upon her.

After a few moments Mrs. Berkely returned to the door, locked it, and then drawing a seat beside her cousin, took her cold hand in her own.

"Carrie, darling, I am sorry to see you so overcome. Has this blow so deeply wounded your heart? Yet, if it is so, you have acted your part so well, as even to deceive me. I thought Claude Fontaine no more to you than a friend. Speak to me, Carrie, for your face looks as if death is in your heart."

Miss Carleton slowly unclosed her eyes, from which large drops were now slowly welling, and after a struggle with herself said:

"It is even so, cousin Betty—there is death to hope, to respect for him I thought so far above all other men; and I feel as if a mortal wound has been dealt me. Oh, Heavens! what can be the crime that has destroyed the spring of that noble mind? which has tugged at his heartstrings till remorse has culminated in madness? Tell me—tell me, my dear friend, that I may see if your thought tallies with my own, fearful as it is."

"Can you bear that I shall utter it, Carrie? I have long feared and doubted, but what has this day happened has confirmed my darkest fears."

"Speak!—ah, what can I not bear when with his own lips he accused himself? From another's, I should have rejected the imputation with scorn; but from himself, it bears the stamp of truth, although it is evident that his mind is partially distraught. Of what crime do you believe him to have been guilty?"

"Of *fratricide*!" and the word fell in low and reluctant tones from her lips.

Miss Carleton uttered a cry, and threw her hands over her face. Her frame shuddered in every nerve, and she faintly moaned:

"You have spoken my own thought, yet I dared scarcely acknowledge it to myself. Oh, Claude, Claude—my noble Claude! what could have led you to commit so fatal a deed?"

After a long pause she seemed to become more composed, and Mrs. Berkely gently said:

"You will suffer bitterly, Carrie; for you must put aside the dream that I now see has nestled in your heart for years. When Claude Fontaine first returned from Europe, I own that I hoped he would woo and win you. But when I saw him again—when I noted his inexplicable sadness, and remembered the strange mystery that shrouded the fate of his brother, suspicions were awakened in my mind, which at the time were discussed between the General and myself. Unwilling to cherish them, we agreed to dismiss them, as far as possible, from our thoughts. I should have cast them utterly away, but for one thing: I saw that Claude was becoming deeply attached to you. Cautious as he ever was not to betray his interest in you, I saw it evinced in many quiet ways, and the old fear came back to me when he did not ask you to become his wife. I felt assured that he

dared not put the burden of his sin upon another, and that other the woman he loves."

"I have long known that he loves me, in spite of his efforts to conceal it. But never until to-day has he uttered a word that could betray it. Oh, cousin Betty, to have the most cherished secret of one's life proclaimed in a moment of maddened frenzy is too—too terrible! It is that which has so broken me down. I feel as if I have no longer either life or hope to contend against fate."

"You must not give up to such feelings, Carrie, for there may be much for us all yet to do for this unfortunate man. I am afraid that he has fallen into unscrupulous hands, and the woman of whom he spoke in such bitter terms may gain the power to tyrannize over both himself and that helpless child who is too frail to stand much. In a moment of frenzy Claude may have stained his hand with the blood of his brother; but if all the facts could be made known to us, I believe there would be much to extenuate even such a crime as that. He is one of the noblest of men, and I believe him to be incapable of a mean action. I will never forsake him in his hour of need, and Isola must be looked after as one of ourselves. Rouse up, my dear Carrie—exert your usual self-command, for we do not know what duties may devolve on us in this terrible crisis of poor Claude's fate."

"Leave me this one day to my sorrow, and then I promise to be ready to do my part, sad as it may be. But for this day my heart must revel in its own wretchedness. I know that I am weak, but I am not wicked, and God will help me to bear my burden."

"I will go, Carrie. 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and I leave you to such consolation as you well know how to seek."

Mrs. Berkely left the darkened room, into which no one else was admitted during that day.

Alone with her sorrow wrestled that fair and high-souled

woman, who had seen the idol of her pride and affections dashed in shame and humiliation at her feet. The first bright days of youth were no longer hers, but she was still as fresh in heart as if seventeen summers only had passed over her head, and the power of a strong and fully developed nature had given deeper vitality to her long cherished passion than a mere girl could have been capable of feeling.

With such a woman, to have her love buried in the awful grave which had suddenly yawned to receive it, was worse than death itself.

Alone with her sorrow! Ah! let the veil drop, for her pride is strong as her love, and into that holy sanctuary, a crushed and bleeding heart, let no profane eye be permitted to glance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ISOLA AT HOME AGAIN.

WHEN Isola and Fanny reached La Fontaine, they found its master promenading the piazza engaged in earnest conversation with Summerton. He seemed more composed and quite oblivious of the strange scene in which he had so recently performed the principal part. As he assisted them from the carriage he said to Isola:

"It was very kind in Mrs. Berkely to send you over, my dear, and doubly kind in Fanny to accompany you home; but if you had waited a little while, I should have sent the carriage for you. Now that you are here, my little Fan, you must remain with Isola through the night. Between you, you may brighten up Savella, for she is suffering from a terrible fit of the blues."

"Thank you, Mr. Fontaine," replied Fanny; "I think I will accept your invitation, for to-morrow grandma is coming over herself, and I can return home with her."

"That is right, my dear. Now go in and find Savella. She refuses to walk out, and the Senora is almost a prisoner in the house on her account. Since you have come, she can leave her charge with you a little while. I am not so much afraid that Savella will act contrary to my wishes, but her aunt watches her unceasingly. Go in, my dears, you will find everything as usual."

He talked fast and nervously, but they saw no other indication of the aberration of mind which he had betrayed a few hours before.

Summerton advanced and said something civil to Isola on her return home, but she shrank from him with a feeling of repulsion she could not control. He read it in her expressive face, and a scornful smile struggled to his lips as he watched her retreating figure, while his fingers slowly closed in a vice-like clutch as he mentally said:

"You have strangely evaded me once, but *now* I will surely deal with you. You and Fontaine are both at my mercy from this hour."

With smiling lips he resumed his conversation with Fontaine, and the two girls ascended the stairs and entered Isola's apartment. Celia was there, and she expressed her delight at the return of her young mistress by pressing her lips upon her shawl and the sleeves of her dress, while she danced around her in irrepressible glee.

"Oh, you's come back to us, Missy, lookin' as bright and rosy as de flowers in de summer, an' I carn't tell you how glad I is to see you ag'in."

"Thank you, Celia; how is Mammer?"

"She neber say she's well, Missy, as you knows, but I think she *have* tuck yer bein' away so long mightily to heart; but she'll be all right now."

At that moment Aggy came in, her black face beaming with delight. She exclaimed:

"Oh! de joy o' my heart have come back, lookin' like her

own pretty self. What has you done to her, Miss Fanny, to bring back de color to her pretty face? Ef she gits anything at de Wale dat I don't give her, I mus' find out what 'tis and larn how to 'pare it for her. What has ye fed her on now to make her look so well?"

"We have feasted her on kindness, Aunt Aggy, and I think it agrees with her."

The old woman's face clouded, and she said:

"*Dat's* de one thing dat I carn't git for her, you know, Miss Fanny, only so far as we darkies is consarned. We'd any on us lie down an' let her walk over us ef she'd a mind to, but she hasn't no sich wishes, thank de blessed Lor', which is sayin' more'n can be said for everybody in dis here house."

Isola took her black hand between her own rosy palms, and smiling in her face, said:

"I am quite well again, Mammer, and I intend to remain so, if prudence can help me to retain my health. I spoke to Uncle Cæsar as we drove to the door; he seems to be about as usual."

"Ah! honey, you wouldn't say *dat* ef you knowed what a born fool dat old nigger's got to be. He's feared o' his own shadder, an' he won't lie down o' nights without makin' up de fire dat we may have light in de cabin. I don' b'lieve he sleeps half de time, for de minit it begins to grow dark, dere he is at it agin, chunk—chunk—throw on de wood, tell de blaze roars up de chimbley agin, an' he walls his eyes roun' tell one 'ud think dat de Ebissary was at his heels. Suffin's gone wrong wi' dat ole critter, sho's he's born, but he's mumchance an' won't tell me 'bout it."

At that moment the door which communicated with Savella's room was thrown suddenly open, and she rushed in and closed it after her.

"There! I wish I could only lock her in and keep her there! How do you do, girls? I think you might have

been in to see me before this; for Fanny knows that I am under a she-dragon who watches every movement I make. That is the reason I have not been to see you for the last few days, Isola. Now you have come back here, I hope you will make some diversion in my favor; that is, if you are not jealous. Fanny has told you, I suppose."

"Yes; Fanny has told me all," replied Isola, calmly; "and, I assure you, I do not feel that I have any cause to be jealous. But you speak very imprudently, Savella."

"Oh! I forgot the servants were here; but they know well enough why I am mewed up in the house, for they always find out everything. Their chatter is of no consequence, anyhow. Let them go about their own business while we talk together."

With an offended air, Aggy marched out of the room, commanding Celia to follow her. At the door she paused, and said:

"I doesn't wish to 'trude any longer on yer, Miss Fontaine, so me an' Celey *will* go 'bout our business."

"The impudent old thing! She is always ready with an answer," said Savella; "but uncle has spoiled her so. I am glad we are rid of them, for now we can talk a few minutes without interruption."

"Oh Fanny!" I am so happy, for, in spite of my aunt, I have seen my beautiful Philip."

"How have you managed to do so?" asked Fanny, in surprise. "Your uncle said that you refused to go out."

"So I have; but this morning I sat beside the window that looks towards Duulora; and Philip came on horseback to the edge of the woodland, and waved his white handkerchief to me. I replied to his signal before the very eyes of my aunt, and such a frightful passion as she fell into you never saw. I thought she would have beaten me, as she used to when I was a child; but I am more than a match for her now, and she is afraid to attempt that."

The two friends looked at each other, scarcely knowing what reply to make to this; but again the door opened, this time very softly, and Senora Roselli glided in with her stealthy tread, her glittering black eyes severely fixed upon her niece.

"I overheard you, Savella, speaking of me in so disrespectful a manner as to be a disgrace to any well-brought-up girl. I hope these young ladies will excuse your ill-breeding, and not accuse me of neglect toward you; for I have found it impossible to inculcate any sense of propriety in so wilful a creature as you are. My dear Isola, I am happy to see you at home again, looking quite as well as before your illness."

"Thank you, Madam; I believe I have entirely recovered," Isola briefly replied. The Senora searchingly regarded her, and she saw that the clear lustrous complexion, the brilliant eyes, betrayed no remains of the insidious agent which had been so craftily infused into her blood. Her impassive face revealed nothing of what was passing in her mind, while she conversed freely and easily with them a few moments. Then looking at her watch, she said:

"It is nearly the dinner-hour; come, Savella, your hair is out of order, and you must change your dress before going down."

"I don't care much how I look," she recklessly replied; "but I suppose uncle Claude will be offended if I appear like a fright; but I think you might leave me here to talk with the girls a few moments."

"You will have time enough to tell them all you can have to say after your toilette is made. Come."

Her last word was imperative, and Savella, making a grimace, slowly followed her into her own apartment.

The party, composed of such discordant materials, assembled around the dinner-table. The spirits of Fontaine seemed to have reacted, and he talked much more than usual

Occasionally a discursive tendency in his conversation was evident, but he instantly checked it, and to all outward seeming, was only the courteous and attentive host. But Isola's heart trembled when she saw the same wild outlook from his eyes, and once his very lips grew pale as he clenched his hands as if making a violent effort to prevent himself from clutching at some visionary object before him.

Summerton and his accomplice watched Fontaine stealthily, and once they exchanged a meaning smile, which Fanny intercepted; her heart arose more bitterly against them than before, and she ceased all effort to keep up the lagging conversation. Savella was sullen, and devoured her dinner almost in silence, scarcely replying to the remarks her uncle addressed to her.

At the close of the repast he said to her:

"I am glad to see that your appetite has not suffered through your sentimental sufferings, Savella. I heard a piece of news this morning which may have some interest for you. If you will come with me into the library I will tell you what it is."

She arose with alacrity and followed him. When they were alone, she rapidly asked:

"Oh, uncle Claude, does it concern *him*?"

"You mean Philip, I suppose. Yes—it explains his precipitate declaration to you. His father is on the eve of losing an important suit, which will reduce him to comparative poverty."

"How can any one know that he will lose it before it is tried?" she impatiently asked.

"When a man has gained possession of property by questionable means, he understands pretty well that when a suit is brought against him, the law will do justice to the legal claimants. I am sorry to tell you that Mr. Vane is not so honorable a man as I once believed him to be; and Philip's late conduct has forced me to think that he has as few scruples as his father seems to be troubled with."

"Then Philip will be poor?" said Savella, her voice slightly vibrating with emotion.

"He will have a home at Dunlora, and at the death of his mother the estate may revert to him; but the place yields a very inadequate income for such extravagant people as the Vanes to live on. Unless Philip marries money, he must greatly curtail his expenditure."

"Do you tell me this to alienate me from my true love, Uncle Claude?" she impulsively asked. "If you do, I will say in my turn, that if Philip is impoverished, there is so much the more reason why I should show him that nothing can turn my heart from him. In adversity I will cling to him—I will endow him with my wealth. Give me at once the half of this property that is legally mine, uncle, and I will waive my right to the large arrears that my aunt says are due to me. Consent to my marriage with Philip, and let me do as I please with my own, and you can do the same with the rest. Give it to Isola, if you like; I will not think hardly of you for doing so. You believe that she cares for Philip, but you are mistaken; if she ever liked him, she has ceased to do so now."

Fontaine listened to her with bowed head and wandering thoughts. Again his mind was escaping from his own control, and after a long pause, he said:

"You are very generous, my little girl, and I will remember what you have said. But you are a minor, Savella; you can do nothing yourself in this affair; and Vane, I know, will, if he becomes your husband, exact the last farthing that you can lawfully claim. If I give you to him, he might prove my worst enemy. Isn't it enough to have one in my house whose presence is deadly to me, without bringing a second vampire to finish what the first has begun?"

Savella regarded him with a perplexed expression.

"I do not understand you, uncle, and it wounds me to

hear you speak in such terms of Philip. Oh, uncle Claude, *he* is no vampire."

"You have faith in him," Fontaine sadly replied, "but it is because you are blinded by the infatuation that possesses you, and too young to be a competent judge of men. I would give much to feel toward Philip as I once did, but he has himself destroyed my respect for him. He would forfeit yours too, Savella, when you come to know him well; and then, my poor child, all hope of happiness would be gone."

"With such high-strung people as you, uncle Claude, it might be so; but I am not romantic. I only ask Philip to love me, and in other respects I will not sit up in judgment upon him. I shall feel too tenderly toward him to permit me to do that. Won't you be bribed, uncle Claude to give to me what I declare to you I will possess, with or without your consent. It is my unalterable resolution to marry Philip Vane."

"And I am equally determined that you shall not do so while I possess the power to restrain you. At some future day you will thank me for this firmness, Savella."

"Thank you for making me miserable!" she passionately exclaimed. "If you only knew what a life I lead with my aunt; how she ridicules, torments and threatens me—you would pity me and give me freedom to choose my own fate."

"If this is so, I must interfere in your favor. I gave the Senora no authority to annoy you; on the contrary I enjoined her to treat you with gentleness and forbearance, as the surest means of success with a temper like yours."

"Recommend gentleness to a hyena, uncle, and it would be about as effectual as with her. I wish my aunt and Mr. Summerton would return to Italy, and leave me with you. I no longer need them, and you can give them enough of my money to pay them for what they have done for me. Can't we get rid of them altogether?"

"Would to God I could do so!" was the fervent reply; "but it is impossible. Yet I am surprised, Savella, to hear you speak thus of those who have had charge of you from your childhood. I am afraid you are ungrateful, my child."

"Ah! if you knew all, you would scarcely think so. My aunt has always tried to crush me into submission, but I am high-tempered, and I have uniformly rebelled against her harshness. If you could look in on us sometimes, you would think it better for both of us if we lived on opposite sides of the earth. Mr. Summerton takes sides with her, though he afterward uses all his art to get me in a good humor with himself; but I don't believe in him, uncle—no, I don't."

Fontaine scarcely heard her concluding words. In spite of his efforts to listen, his thoughts wandered away, and he could not bring them back: after remaining silent several moments, he said in a vague manner:

"I—I'll see what can be done, my dear. Go now, for I am tired. My brain feels as if a heavy weight is pressing on it, and I am weary—wearily."

"Then you will relent, uncle; I see it in your dear face," said Savella, as she left the room; but if she could really have read the meaning of that pale and rigid face, she would have felt little cause for elation. There, within a few feet of Fontaine, stood the phantom shape which seemed to have become a part of himself, for if he closed his eyes he could not shut it out.

As the door closed on Savella, he made a rush toward it, but his hand only fell upon empty space, while the spectre glided back, always keeping beyond his reach.

"Henry! Henry!" he cried, in despairing accents, "why do you haunt me thus? Leave me to die in peace, for the struggle cannot last much longer."

He listened eagerly for an answer, but this time none came, and Fontaine sank back and closed his eyes, vainly trying to recover the lost balance of his mind. His thoughts reverted to Miss Carleton, and he muttered:

"Oh, Carrie, if I had dared to entice you to my side, you might have saved me. What did I say this morning that made them all stare so? I cannot remember; but I must have made some very ridiculous figure. Then they thought it best to send Isola back to watch over me. I wonder if that threat to fill the house with such noises as haunted the Wesley family will be fulfilled, now she has returned? Well—it will only be the last drop in the bitter cup I have prepared for myself."

He arose, went to a shelf, and took down an old English magazine which contained the extraordinary account of what happened in the house of Mr. Wesley in the last century. Of all the ghost stories on record, it is the best authenticated, and to those supernatural occurrences divinity is indebted for the services of one of its purest later apostles, the Reverend Charles Wesley.

Fontaine attempted to read it over again, but the print grew blurred before him and the letters assumed all the colors of the rainbow. He remembered that Dr. Sinclair had advised rest, and had prescribed a cooling draught, which he had neglected to take. With a sudden impulse of rage, he drew the vial from his pocket and hurled it into the fire, while he muttered:

"I'll not touch a drop of his mixtures. It will be useless I know that the vital cause lies too deep for medicine to reach."

He tried several other volumes with the same result, and then sat till the sun was setting, looking straight before him, a strange whirl of thought passing through his excited brain.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MYSTERIOUS NOISES.

Fontaine was aroused from the painful chaos of thought into which he had fallen by the arrival of Dr. Sinclair. He was a genial-looking, middle-aged man; kind-hearted, but intensely practical; and he was far from suspecting the actual condition of his patient's mind.

When told that Fontaine could no longer read, that the letters on the page danced before his vision in brilliant parti-colored points, he shook his head gravely and said:

"This indicates a terrible state of the blood. You must go through a course of medicine, and I insist that you shall go to bed, and take my prescriptions regularly, living in the meantime on tea and toast, or gruel."

"It will do no good, doctor; I am too far gone now to hope anything from your skill," said Fontaine, in a sombre tone.

"Far gone, indeed! when you look as strong as I do. Nonsense, old fellow; I never had exactly such a case as this before, but I'll engage to bring you through all right."

"If you knew all you would not think so," was the gloomy response.

"You speak like the hero of a tragedy. Come, my dear Fontaine, this will never do. You must have faith in my skill, or I can accomplish comparatively little. But in any case, I have few fears as to the ultimate result."

"Doctor, I am a doomed man. Madness has never before attacked one of my family; but I shall become its victim. Nay, I am mad already. My thoughts elude me; my will has ceased to rule them; and now, while I speak with you, it is by a great effort that I prevent myself from pouring forth a volume of nonsense that would astonish you. I am losing my reason, and I know that it is leaving me."

The physician compassionately regarded him.

"My dear Fontaine, you contradict yourself; in one breath you speak as if you have no power over your own will, and in the next you say that you control the utterance of the fantasies that have gained possession of your mind. A man who can thus reason about his condition cannot be very far gone in the dominions of Luna. If you persist in this singular delusion, I shall be compelled to have your head shaved, clap on a blister, and put you in a straight jacket. How would you like that, eh?"

"Doctor," said Fontaine, impressively, "we have been friends of long standing, and I wish to exact of you one promise, which, as a man of honor, you will not fail to fulfil. If my fears are verified, I wish you to comprehend that physical causes have nothing to do with my condition. My sufferings are purely mental, and they proceed from memories which have vitally affected my happiness. Since I must fall into your hands, I entreat, I demand, that no violent remedies shall be used with me. If I become unmanageable, shut me up in a room in my own house, with one of my own people to wait upon me; but do not permit me to be sent to an asylum. Will you promise me this?"

His changed face and eager manner affected the listener, and he replied with emotion:

"If it comes to that I will see that your wishes are fulfilled, my dear friend; but if you will permit me to treat you at once with the vigor that I consider necessary, I can soon effectually lay at rest the phantom of which you told me this morning."

"Not if it is sent as a punishment to a crime which has remained unwhipt of man's justice," said Fontaine with a shudder. "Look at my hand, doctor; it is white and spotless to all outward seeming, yet it has been raised against a human life. Through my means a soul was sent to its account, which is yet permitted to wander through space; to

visit me at its own will, and, at last, to assume the form it wore on earth, that it may torture me with its awful presence. There it is now; it stands between you and myself, and is as real to me as you are. It is a horror to me to look upon it, yet I cannot evade it."

His livid face, panting breath, and staring eyes, assured the physician that the form of which he spoke was to him a dread reality; and the confession he had just uttered struck a painful cord in his soul. The color faded from his florid face as he huskily asked:

"Do you know, Claude Fontaine, that you have avowed yourself a murderer? and of whom? Tell me, is it Henry who comes to you? who glides before you as an accusing spirit?"

"*It is Henry!*"

As the low thrilling tones fell upon the ears of Dr. Sinclair, he started up with blanched lips, and eyes scarcely less wild than those of the speaker. Henry Fontaine had been the dearest friend of his youth, and his own father's heart had scarcely mourned more sincerely over his untimely fate than that of Dr. Sinclair. He hoarsely said:

"Oh! my God! this is dreadful! Claude, Claude, what tempted you to the dire wickedness which is bringing after it so fearful a retribution?"

"The old story—jealousy. But I swear to you that I would have taken my own life sooner than have attempted that of my brother. I was the victim of a terrible delusion, which caused his death and has branded me with the undying curse that cleaves to the fratricide. I thought to have carried this secret with me to the grave, but a power I cannot resist compels me to speak of it to you. Soon everyone will know it, for that which is looming before me will loosen my tongue, and force me to speak of what is ever in my thoughts."

There was a long and painful pause, which was broken

by the physician; but in spite of his efforts to speak as cordially as before this revelation, his voice had in it a constrained tone, which Fontaine was quick to detect.

"I will do all for you, Fontaine, that my skill can effect; but with so fatal a cause for this hallucination that oppresses you, I do not know that any good result can come from my efforts. I can promise nothing, but I will do my best to——"

"Your efforts will be useless," interrupted Fontaine. "The only service I will accept at your hands, is to see that my wishes with reference to myself shall be carried out, when I am no longer in a condition to command in my own house."

"That I promise to do. Good evening. Since you decline my medical services, there will be little use in calling every day."

"As you please," was the indifferent reply. "But when you hear that I am really insane, come hither at once, and assume such authority as will enable you to carry out the wishes I have expressed to you."

In a state of utter bewilderment Dr. Sinclair left the house.

Fontaine paced to and fro in the darkening room till supper was announced. He ordered his tea to be sent in to him; and after drinking it with a feeling of unusual exhaustion he threw himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, and fell into a disturbed slumber.

The hours passed on; faint echoes of music came from the closed drawing-room, in which the three girls were left together; but these gradually died away; footsteps ceased to wander through the wide hall, and before midnight the whole house seemed buried in profound repose.

Isola and Fanny occupied the same chamber, and after talking till they were both weary, they fell into the sound sleep of youth and health.

The witching hour of night rolled around, the great clock in the hall rung out its resonant peal, and as the echoes died away, there suddenly came a sound as if a clap of thunder had burst over the roof.

Every creature in the house was aroused, to hear a Babel of noises which seemed to come from the rooms below. The two girls started up in extreme alarm; but Isola had presence of mind to light her lamp. She and Fanny threw on their dressing robes, and prepared to go down together to ascertain what caused the disturbance. But as they approached the door, a sudden shower of raps—loud, resonant and rapid—were struck upon the panels till the whole wall seemed to vibrate beneath them. They drew back, white and trembling; and Celia, who slept in her young lady's dressing-room, rushed forward, locked the door, and throwing herself before Isola, with clasped hands, and rolling eyes, exclaimed:

"Don't go out dar, Missy, for de Ebissary has got persession o' dis house, an' everybody in it. Come, let us say our pra'rs."

"I *must* go! Don't hold my gown, Celia, for I must see what has happened to my father."

Although she was very pale, the resolute face of the speaker showed that she had courage to face whatever danger might be without.

By this time the noises had again receded, and afraid to be left alone, the sobbing negro took the lamp in one hand, and clinging with the other to her young mistress, the three, after cautiously reconnoitering, stepped into the empty hall. At the same instant, Senora Roselli and Savella came from the room of the latter, both looking deeply alarmed.

"What on earth can be the matter?" asked the elder lady. "I hope there is no trouble among the negroes."

Isola quickly replied:

"Do not be alarmed on that score, Madam. There is

nothing to be apprehended from the people; they would protect sooner than injure us. Where is Mr. Summerton? The noise must surely have aroused him, though he does not make his appearance."

"He has probably gone to look after Mr. Fontaine, for he must have been as much frightened as we are by this strange disturbance."

They formed a procession down the staircase, the senora and her niece bringing up the rear. As they gained the lower hall, the door of Fontaine's room was seen to be open, and a light streamed from it. The appalling sounds which had aroused them seemed now to have flitted up stairs, and thundering raps reverberated down the winding staircase in every direction.

Regardless of every thing but her protector, Isola rushed forward, and entered his apartment, to find him lying quite insensible upon his bed, with Summerton bathing his colorless face, and endeavoring to restore him to consciousness.

He hurriedly said:

"I was aroused by the noises, and came down to see what could be the cause of the hubbub. I found Mr. Fontaine lying on the floor in the hall in the condition you see him now. I brought him here, and have used every means to revive him, but he is still in a dead faint. Stay with him, while I go to my room, and get something to restore him."

"Here is camphor," said Fanny, springing toward the dressing stand. "This will suffice, Mr. Summerton; you need not trouble yourself to go. See—the color is coming back to his face, and Mr. Fontaine will soon be sensible again."

Fanny was too much afraid of Summerton and his remedies to be willing to see them tried on her old friend, and with sincere joy she saw signs of returning animation. Summerton turned toward her and regarded her keenly, but Fanny was too busy in her efforts to assist Fontaine to no-

tice him. A faint tinge of color came back to the face of the recumbent man, the heavy eyelids unclosed, and he presently sat up, and looked around with a bewildered expression. His eyes fell upon the wall opposite his bed, and fastened themselves there. He stretched forth his hand in that direction, and said, in a vague, monotonous tone:

"It was there again, haloed by a pale glimmer of light. *That* has passed away; but he has stepped out from the wall and now flits before me, with blood—blood welling from that fatal wound. His voice came to me saying, 'I have fulfilled my threat; you slighted my commands, and I have raised an Inferno in your house.' Hark! the demons are at their work, and I am accursed!"

Fontaine fell back with a cry that thrilled the listeners, for it was a wild maniac shriek, which told that the light of reason was at last extinguished.

Isola, weeping and trembling, bent over him and attempted to take his hand in her own; but he put her back with an expression of horror, and rapidly said:

"Go away—go away from me. Leave me to my fate; *he* commands your absence, and I dare not keep you beneath my roof. You will find friends—go to them and be happy."

"Oh, father, speak not thus. I will never leave you; I will be your nurse, your slave, till you are well again."

Fontaine did not seem to comprehend her words. He feverishly asked:

"Will no one take her away? 'Tis *her* presence that brings this bedlam here. *He* has told me so. Depart, Isola, and leave me to wrestle alone with the phantom that has at last maddened me, for I *am* mad."

Senora Roselli here advanced and stood between him and the trembling girl. She soothingly said:

"I will remove her, Claude. She shall no longer trouble you."

A flash of hatred and defiance gleamed from his large black eyes, and he wrathfully said:

"*You!* fiend! devil! avaunt! You shall not touch her! She is pure, but you are foul! With my consent your leprous fingers shall never touch her. Go, Isola; get away from this woman, for she loathes you even more deeply than I do her. Oh! take your baleful eyes from mine! They burn into my soul the memory of that fatal—fatal hour!"

The menacing expression with which the Nemesis regarded him changed to one of affected pity as she slowly turned away and said:

"Poor Claude; he has spoken the truth of himself; he is certainly insane."

Throughout this scene, Savella stood white and nerveless, incapable of understanding what was going on around her, and dreading she knew not what. Fontaine caught a glimpse of her frightened face, and beckoning her to his side, he grasped her hand with such force as to cause her to utter a faint cry. Bending his lips to her ear, he spoke in an audible whisper:

"Savella, you will be mistress here, for I shall soon be where the weary are at rest. You must be a fast friend to *my* child, for she will need protection from that woman yonder. If she *is* your aunt, she is a bad, evil-minded creature, and it will be best for you to carry out your plan of sending her back to Italy. Give her money; let her go at once. Don't marry Philip, child, for he will break your heart. Give him up, and let Isola be your sister."

He fixed his burning eyes eagerly upon her face, and waited for her reply. As Savella unclosed her lips to speak, a breath, a faint whisper seemed to pass between them, which distinctly said:

"Would you entrap my child into giving such a pledge as that? There shall be no fellowship between her and the usurper of her rights."

Fontaine fell back as if he had received a sudden blow, the hair rising on his temples, cold dew gathering upon his brow. He faintly muttered:

"It is *his* voice again! Go, Savella; I have nothing further to say to you."

Savella, too much frightened to reply, receded from the bed, and sat down in a tremor. The noises still filled the house with their tumult, and, as if to shut them out, Fontaine buried his head in his pillow and drew the coverlet over his ears, refusing to speak further.

Summerton went to his room, in defiance of the sounds, and presently returned with a cup in which he had mixed a draught, which he asserted would act as a sedative to the overwrought nervous system of Fontaine; but when he offered it, that gentleman could not be induced to look up or touch the offered medicine.

The tumult in the house had been overheard in the yard, and the servants who slept in the outbuildings were all aroused and eager to learn what could possibly be going on. With frightened faces and dilating eyes, they gathered near the door of their master's chamber, afraid to look around them, yet their solicitude for Fontaine overcoming even their dread of the invisible agents that produced the incomprehensible confusion which reigned in the old mansion.

Aggy pushed her way among them, and reached the side of her master. When Fontaine heard her voice, he lifted his head and said:

"Send them all away, Mammer, and stay with me yourself. I don't want any one but you."

Tears were streaming over the wrinkled face of the old woman, and she turned to the group around the bed and said:

"You all hears what de marster says—I'm to nuss him, as I usen to do when he were a blessed baby, an' ef anything

wrong's de matter of him, I'll bring him roun' yet. Missy, you an' Miss Fanny'd better go back to yer bed; leave Cely here wid me, caze my old man is too much scared to be o' much use. I can make *her* listen to sense, an' de Ebissary hisself sharn't keep me from doin' my duty by Marse Claude."

Isola would have approached and spoken to Fontaine, but he waved her off and said:

"No — no — *he* would come between us, and I could not bear it. I must give you up. The fiat is spoken, and I must obey."

Fanny saw that he was not in condition to be reasoned with, and she drew Isola away. Senora Roselli also left the room, with an expression of wrath upon her face, compelling Savella to accompany her. The latter seemed almost paralyzed by fright, and submitted to her control without remonstrance.

Isola had scarcely stepped into the hall when the sounds ceased, as if by magic. In an instant everything was as still as if no disturbance had lately made night hideous around them. Summerton, who was standing at the head of the staircase, spoke to her respectfully as she passed him:

"I have been trying the power of an exorcism upon these unseen spirits. Fortunately, I have had the power to lay them to rest. You can all retire now, and sleep in peace; for I am sure they will return no more to-night. It is my purpose to remain in the library near Mr. Fontaine, in case he should need attention."

"Thank you," replied Isola, "but Mammer will stay with him, and I have also left Celia. I would have remained with him myself, but he seemed to wish me to retire."

"That is very well; but I cannot think of leaving him to the care of servants. They may become frightened at the singular occurrences of the night, and he is just in that state in which further excitement will make him a raving maniac. Good night; I shall certainly stay near him till morning."

He passed down the stairway, and entered Fontaine's room while the two girls gained their apartment and bolted themselves in. Fanny turned to Isola, and rapidly asked:

"What can this mean? How could those noises have been produced?"

"God knows! Some awful calamity must be impending over this house in which I am concerned. In my absence those people have worked their evil spells against me until my father seems to shrink from me. He commands me to leave him when he needs me most; but *that* I will never do. I will cling to him to the very last. Oh, Fanny! I am very, very miserable."

Fanny used every art to console her; but she fully agreed with Isola that she must not abandon her guardian, even at his command in this trying crisis of his evil destiny.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DIABOLICAL ACT FRUSTRATED.

By morning Fontaine was raving in a violent brain-fever, and Dr. Sinclair was again summoned to his side. Finding that Summerton really possessed much medical knowledge, he freely consulted with him, and their united skill did everything that could be accomplished in the sick man's behalf; but the mania that possessed him was too deeply rooted to be readily dispelled.

After days of watching and anxiety his physical health improved, but the clouds that darkened his mind seemed to deepen around his mental horizon. For hours he would sit immersed in a dull stupor, to be broken by an access of fury that, at times, was frightful. If he heard the sound of the

Senora's voice, or she attempted to enter his room, his rage seemed beyond his control. Even when Isola came in he showed extreme excitement, though it was of a different character, and Dr. Sinclair soon insisted that she should absent herself from his presence altogether.

After the first few days he did not seem to miss her, and the experienced eye that watched over him saw that unless his mind could be relieved from the terrible weight that pressed upon it, there was little hope that it would ever again recover its original clearness.

How little chance of this there was, Dr. Sinclair too fully comprehended, and the daily reports he conveyed to the Vale had little in them to console the anxious friends there.

General Berkely and his son frequently visited Fontaine, and they were reluctantly compelled to come to the same conclusion. When Isola was finally banished from his presence, Mrs. Berkely declared that the time had arrived to bestow her own protection on her, and she went over to La Fontaine herself to insist that Isola should take up her residence permanently beneath her roof.

Of late, the position of Isola had become almost-intolerable. Since Fontaine's illness, Senora Roselli assumed entire command of the house, and treated her with even less consideration than she showed toward the servants. Summerton also unequivocally betrayed to her that her position in the house was completely changed by the fatal calamity that had fallen on her protector, and she, who had been reared to believe herself the future mistress of La Fontaine, found herself treated as an unwelcome dependent on those she both feared and despised.

The suspicions infused into her mind by Fanny had assumed a tangible shape, for one night she inadvertently drank from the pitcher of water placed on her stand, and the partial return of the feeling of languor she had

before suffered from, convinced her that some deleterious drug was really mixed with the water. She was careful not to touch it again, and morning after morning when she descended she saw the baleful glances levelled at her by the fearful woman whose eyes she began to dread as much as if they possessed the power to work their evil spells by a look.

Savella held herself aloof from her, and often treated her with abruptness, for she looked on Isola as the cause of the strange sounds which still filled the house at intervals, though they were gradually decreasing in volume, and in time might altogether cease.

The report went forth to the outside world that La Fontaine was haunted by evil spirits, whose advent had driven its master to madness. There were strange whispers of a crime of darkest dye, long concealed, for which Claude Fontaine was now paying the dire penalty of loss of reason; and the gay visitors that had lately fluttered through the halls of La Fontaine held themselves aloof from a place on which a double curse seemed to have fallen.

Amid this desolation Isola walked with a sad heart, feeling herself banished from the side of him she would freely have sacrificed her life to restore to health, and unwelcome to those who had usurped all authority in his household.

Every day she was made to feel that she had no right to be there; and when Mrs. Berkely came to her and kindly took her to her heart, with the assurance that henceforth she should be to her as a beloved daughter, she wept tears of gratitude upon her maternal breast. At length she said:

"I cannot thank you, my dear, dear Madam, as I should, but you can understand my feelings better than I can express them. I feel that I am out of place here; I am no longer useful to my father, and I know that I am not welcome to those who now control the place. Even Savella is distant, and at times almost rude to me; so I had better go, painful as it must be to be separated even a day from the

dear sufferer whom I am forbidden to approach. It is a cruel blow to me that he has ceased to love me."

"Do not think that, Isola, for I am sure it is not so. It is often observable in persons suffering from aberration of mind, that those who are dearest to them in their normal condition are most persistently avoided while in that state. That explains poor Claude's conduct toward you, but I trust he will be restored, and you will then see that you are as precious to him as ever."

"Has Dr. Sinclair expressed such a hope?" she eagerly asked. "Oh, if he has, I can bear my grief patiently, and wait God's own good time to give him back to me."

"I am not fully informed of his opinion," replied Mrs. Berkely, evasively; "but we can at least hope on, my child. Can you not return with me to the Vale? All the members of my family are anxious to welcome you among us as one of ourselves. You can come or send every day to learn how our dear Claude progresses, and we will do all in our power to render you contented."

"You are too good to me; but I will try and prove to you how sensible I am of the kindness extended to me at this time, when I so much need it. But I cannot return with you to-night. It already grows late, and I shall have much packing to do. Besides, I must inform the people of my intended removal, and go down to the quarters to bid them good-bye."

"That is but right, my love; yet I wish that you could return with me. Of late I have felt a vague sense of uneasiness about you. I suppose it is the offspring of Fanny's strange insinuations, for she talks in a very startling manner about these foreign people. If Dr. Sinclair had not the charge of Claude, she has made me so suspicious that I should hesitate to leave him in their power."

"I do not think they will attempt to injure *him*," said Isola, with starting tears. "Why should they when they

have made themselves masters of everything he claims? I am unwilling to strengthen your prejudices against them, Mrs. Berkely, but I must say that I am glad to escape from the oppression of their presence. To-morrow morning, if Fanny will come over for me, I will be ready to return with her to the Vale."

"Cousin Carrie will come for you herself, for she is most anxious to bear you away from those she is convinced are unfriendly to you. She bade me say to you that henceforth you are to look to her as to an elder sister, for everything you may need. Her fortune is ample, and the warm feeling of friendship she has long cherished for Claude gives her the right to assume the place he has so long filled toward you."

Isola had long suspected the interest with which Miss Carleton regarded Fontaine, and she readily comprehended that to extend kindness to the orphan he had loved and guarded as his child would be a sweet solace to her wounded heart. She replied to this offer with so much genuine feeling that Mrs. Berkely felt more tenderly toward her than she had even done before.

After a long conversation their plans were finally settled, and the elder lady arose to leave. Dr. Sinclair had strictly forbidden all access to his patient, who was kept confined to the two rooms he had so long occupied. So Mrs. Berkely was compelled to leave the house without seeing Fontaine, much as she had desired it.

Cæsar and Aggy watched alternately over their master, who was never violent with them. Isola had the bitter grief of learning from them that her name was never mentioned by him; that no wish to see her again ever passed his lips.

When the carriage containing her old friend drove away, Isola slowly ascended to her own room, with a feeling of utter desolation in her heart at the thought of leaving the house which had so long been a happy home to her. She

found Celia in her chamber, and when she desired her to prepare to pack her wardrobe, the girl regarded her with a scared expression. She hurriedly asked:

"Whar am you gwine, Missy? Dis here house is a mighty skeary place to live in, but I hopes you ain't gwine to go away an' leave us wid de noises an' de woman dat orders us roun' as ef we was nuffin better 'n dirt."

"Yes, I am going, Celia. I have no longer any right here, and I am not welcome to stay. I can see that plainly enough. Mrs. Berkely wishes me to make my home with her, and I shall go to the Vale to-morrow, to remain there."

Celia burst into a loud, wailing cry:

"Dis is de wust dat's come an' gone yit. I hopes you'll take me 'long o' you, Missy; I's allers bin yer maid; an' ef Marster could speak 'bout it, he'd tell me to go wid you."

"No, Celia; I have no power to remove you; you have never been legally made over to me; so you must remain here, and be as faithful to Savella as you have been to me. I am sorry to part from you—from the dear old home—from everything upon the place down to the very sods over which I have so often played; but it is God's will that I shall do so, and I must submit."

It was difficult for Celia to take this view of the case, and she wept so bitterly that Isola pitied her even more than she did herself. The packing completed, she threw on her hat and riding skirt, and went down to mount her horse, possibly for the last time. The sun was setting as she came in sight of the quarters, and the field hands were trooping in from their daily labor.

When Isola rode into the broad avenue on which the most of the cabins were built, and informed them that she had come to bid them farewell before leaving La Fontaine for another home, their expressions of regret and attachment deeply affected her. Escaping from the blessings that were liberally showered upon her, she rode rapidly back to the

house, to find the Senora awaiting her return upon the piazza with an expression of anger upon her face. As Isola ascended the steps, she abruptly addressed her:

"You have taken a strange liberty in ordering that horse to be saddled for yourself, Miss—Miss—I hardly know what to call you, since you have no right to the name you have so long borne. Selim is now the property of my niece, and I have ordered that he shall be kept for her exclusive use."

By this time Isola had in a measure become accustomed to the insolent speeches which were daily addressed to her by this rude and imperious woman, and she replied, with calm dignity:

"I no longer claim anything here, Madam; but Savella, I am sure, would not object to my riding, for the last time, the horse which has been so long considered as my own. Cease your insults, for to-morrow I leave the home which has so long sheltered me, driven from it by your uncivil treatment."

"Leave La Fontaine! Where will you go? What will you do?"

"I have promised Mrs. Berkely to take up my abode at the Vale. Since I am banished from the presence of my father, and treated as a menial in his house, now he is unable to protect me, I shall go to the friend whose heart and home are open to me."

"To depend on her, I suppose," she replied, with a sneer. "With such a dainty lady as you are, anything will be better than working for your living, though I'll wager anything that those you lawfully belong to have to work hard enough for theirs."

To this vulgar rudeness Isola deigned no reply. She passed on, and went up to her own apartment, to indulge her long repressed emotions in a hearty cry.

The Senora had left Savella under the surveillance of Summerton, while she awaited Isola's return, for the purpose

of giving her what she called a piece of her mind, for the impudence in ordering Selim without her permission. During all these weeks the strictness of her watch over her niece had not relaxed, for she dreaded Philip Vane now more than ever.

She hurriedly sought Savella's room, in which she and Summerton were sitting, and whispered a few words in his ear, which seemed to excite him greatly. The two went out together, leaving Savella alone, but taking the precaution to lock the door on the outside, unsuspecting of the important pantomime that was performing within.

When they disappeared, the young girl jumped up, clapped her hands gleefully, and sprang toward the window. A handkerchief was rapidly waved from it, a thread lowered to which a letter was fastened, and an answering signal came from the woodland, to assure her that Philip was on the watch, as he usually was at that hour of the evening; for, strictly as she was guarded, Savella had thus found means to communicate with him many times. When the handkerchief was waved, Philip waited till nightfall, came to the rosebush below the window, disengaged his own missive, and placed one for Savella upon the slender thread, which escaped even the eagle glance of the Cerberus who watched over her.

While this was passing, the Senora drew Summerton into her own apartment, closed the door, and said:

"I have warned you more than once that your potion had failed in its effect. In place of hurting, it seems to agree with her, and now she is escaping from us altogether."

After deliberating a moment, Summerton said:

"If it were not for the will, I would let her go. But Fontaine will not last many months, and we cannot afford to give her ten thousand dollars that lawfully belong to us. Are you *sure* that she has drank the water? I have made the infusion stronger than at first, and it seems strange that it no longer affects her."

"I have found means to look into her chamber every morning, and the pitcher is always partly emptied. That proves that she uses it; you must have made some mistake, and given me something that is harmless."

"As if I should do such a thing!" he contemptuously retorted. "I believe now that her suspicions are aroused, and she pours out a portion of the water to make you believe she has drank it. If such is the case, you must risk everything sooner than permit her to leave this house alive. How can we manage to give her what will effectually put an end to her claims on any portion of the estate we have fairly earned for ourselves?"

The Senora rapidly said:

"Of late she often has her tea sent to her own room. Tonight she will be sure to do so, for she is now crying because she is going away. I can put the powder in the sugar. She must die before another day dawns, for that is now our only safety. Your skill can produce the symptoms of some sudden and fatal disease?"

"Oh, yes—that is easy enough. The house has been recently painted, and she shall die of what painters call lead colic. I shall say the delicate state of her health predisposed her to it, and, spite of all our efforts, she went to join the angels. Nobody can contradict us, for *my* nostrums leave no trace behind them."

There was something diabolical in the coolness with which this was uttered. Remorse was evidently unknown to the speaker, and she who listened was equally hard of heart. She rapidly said:

"That will do; now bring me the death warrant, for I am impatient to make all safe by getting into the dining-room, unobserved."

Summerton went into his own room, and from a secret drawer in his medicine chest took a minute portion of glittering white powder, the deadly qualities of which had been

condensed by his own nefarious skill. A few moments afterward Senora Roselli descended the staircase in the gathering twilight, and, after a passing glance into the dining-room to ascertain if it was empty, she glided in. The only light came from a blazing fire that roared and sparkled up the chimney.

The supper-table was set, and upon the silver waiter was placed a cup and saucer of fine blue china, overlaid with a gold arabesque. This had been a present from Miss Carleton to Isola, and she always drank her tea from it. To drop the impalpable powder into it was the work of an instant, and the ruthless agent of crime glided out as noiselessly as she had entered. She was a little paler than usual; but there was an expression of triumph upon her hard face which showed that remorse had as little hold on her heart as on that of him who had prepared this subtle death potion.

She went up to Savella, who pretended to be asleep, though in reality she was revolving in her scheming brain the means of effecting her escape from the house, for in his last letter Philip had assured her that everything was prepared for a speedy flight if she could only manage to evade her aunt and join him at their old trysting place.

Supper was at length announced, and the three gathered around the table. As the Senora had anticipated, Celia came down with an excuse from her young lady; she had a violent headache, and wished a cup of tea to be sent up to her.

With a steady hand and unblenching cheek the Nemesis prepared the steaming liquid, and placed it on the waiter held by the girl. She insisted on also sending up cold chicken and biscuit, as Isola might need them after her headache went off. She said:

"Persuade your young lady to drink the tea while it is hot, Celia. It is the very best remedy for a pain in the head."

"Yes, mam—but she allers drinks her tea hot without my axin' her too." And the girl passed out of the room.

The plotters did not look at each other, for they feared that even a glance might be intercepted by the old servant that waited at the table, and interpreted to their disadvantage after the tragic event they confidently anticipated was consummated. They talked more than usual, and Savella seemed in better spirits than she had been in of late. Through the servants she had heard of Isola's intended departure, and when supper was over she arose and said:

"I must go up and see Isola; it seems hard that she should be turned out of the home she has so long been taught to look upon as her own; but the evil spirits that have gained an entrance in the house seem determined not to leave it till she goes, so I suppose we must let her do so."

"You can bid her adieu," said Summerton, "but the warning voice which has spoken so mysteriously to you has forbidden you to claim her as your friend."

She shuddered and changed color.

"She can now never be my friend, for I shrink from her with fear ever since that dreadful night in uncle Claude's room. There must be something supernatural about her, and if she had lived in the old times she would have been taken up and hung as a witch. But I'll go up and tell her good-bye. I cannot let her go without that. You need not come with me, aunt Bianca, for I shall go directly to Isola's room."

Night had fallen; the Senora knew that it would be impossible for Savella to escape from the upper story, and she was permitted to ascend alone. Instead of going directly to Isola as she had promised, she noiselessly flitted into her own room, threw up the window, and drew up a letter from Philip.

She pressed it to her lips and heart in ecstasy, and then read it by the gleaming firebrands with the light of love

shining from her eyes. One paragraph she dwelt on, reading it over and over again.

"To-night will be very dark, my love. If you can escape from the house, you will find me till midnight at the lower gate which opens on the dell in which we have so often met. I have everything prepared for immediate flight, and once on horseback beside me, you could never be torn from me again. Come to me, Savella, for I can no longer live without your dear presence."

"*I will come,*" she fervently said; and lighting her lamp, a few hurried lines were dashed off, hastily sealed, and lowered from the window. She then waved the light in front of the window as a signal to him who she knew was watching for it, hurriedly closed it, and flitted toward the door of communication between her own chamber and that of Isola.

Her knock received no reply, and after waiting a moment, she turned the bolt and went in. Isola was sitting beside the fire in her dressing-robe, with her long hair falling around her. She seemed to have been brushing it, but now her hands had fallen powerless beside her, and her head was resting against the high back of the chair. She was perfectly colorless, and seemed to labor for breath in a painful manner.

Savella sprang toward her, exclaiming:

"Good heavens! Isola, what can be the matter with you? You look as if you are dying."

"I believe I am," she faintly said. "I sent Celia down to her supper, and soon afterward I was seized with so sudden and violent a pain in my breast that I could neither call out nor ring the bell. I am glad you have come, Savella, for I must get to bed as quickly as possible. Summon Celia to me, if you please."

Savella pulled the bell-cord violently, and in a few moments Celia came in looking much frightened. When she

saw the condition of her young lady she uttered a cry of dismay.

"Oh, Miss Savella, what can have come over her since I went down stairs? She said she felt better after drinkin' her tea. What is it, Missy? Whar am you hurt?"

"I don't know—I feel ill all over. Put me in bed, Celia, and send some one for Dr. Sinclair."

The girl lifted the slight form in her strong arms, and placed her on the bed. On her appearance, Savella hurried from the room, to inform her aunt that Isola was very ill; that something must be done for her at once, hoping, in her heart, that this sudden attack might make a diversion in her own favor.

With some show of interest, Senora Roselli went up to see Isola's condition herself. With unmoved heart she looked upon the face so changed within the last hour. Already the livid hue of death seemed setting over it, and her senses had so rapidly failed her that she was unconscious of what was passing around her. Celia was wringing her hands, and exclaiming:

"Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do? She tole me to sen' for de doctor, an' I must do it now; for ef he not here soon my dear missy will die an' leave us all."

"Hush that uproar," said the Senora, sternly. "It is useless to send for Doctor Sinclair now, for she will be past help before he could get here. Mr. Summerton is as good a physician as he is—ask him to come up and see what can be done for her."

Obedient to the command, Celia left the room to seek Summerton, and the Nemesis bent over her victim to ascertain, if possible, how long life might linger in the frame she had doomed to destruction.

Isola's night-robe had been imperfectly fastened, and in lifting her to the bed it had fallen open and exposed a portion of her shoulder on which was a singular mark, which

was concealed by her ordinary dress. The eyes of the woman fastened on it, and with strange emotion, she tore away the white muslin, and laid bare the whole shoulder.

Her breath came in quick gasps, and she became even paler than the half-lifeless being on the couch beside her. Unable to sustain herself, the Senora sunk down on a chair, and sat trembling and cowering before the conviction that arose within her startled mind.

Summerton promptly obeyed her summons; but when he entered the chamber and saw the changed face of his accomplice, he started back in dismay. He rapidly asked:

"What has happened to unnerve you so? Put off that look before the girl returns, or it may betray all."

"Look there," she said in a hollow whisper, pointing to the mark.

"What of that?" he asked. "It seems that she is marked with red wine; but that is nothing uncommon. Come—this will never do; you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"So I have," was the shivering reply; "the ghost of that terrible past. The girl must not die—save her, I command you."

"Have you, too, lost your senses?" he contemptuously asked. "Why should I save her, when you, yourself, doomed her?"

She placed her lips close to his ear, and breathed a few words into it. His face slightly changed as he listened, but he coldly answered:

"Even if this be true, it should but confirm you in your purpose."

"No—no—I tell you no! I am a reckless and hard woman, I know; but this crime I dare not perpetrate. I tell you she *shall not die*. We can otherwise dispose of her."

"But how?"

"Leave that to after consideration. Act—act now; I *insist* upon it. There is an antidote; bring it hither; use all your skill to save her, or—I know not what I may do."

"Is that a threat?"

"Understand it as you please; but in this, my will shall be yours. Refuse, and I will send for Dr. Sinclair. He will comprehend all at a glance, and who will be held answerable? I will save myself by criminating you. There—you know me—to work—to work, for no time is to be lost."

Her imperious tones were almost savage in their earnestness, and Summerton, with a shrug of his shoulders, said:

"I will do your bidding; but if your suspicions are true, she will give us much trouble hereafter."

"I do not act on a suspicion, but on a certainty. Hasten for your antidote, for she is almost in a dying state now; and if she dies, it will not be well for you."

This rapid colloquy was held in Italian, and Celia, who had again crept to the side of her mistress, could make nothing of it. As he turned to leave the room, Summerton ordered her to bring warm water, and in a few moments he returned himself, bringing the antidote to the deadly agent he had used in preparing his subtle messenger of death.

The locked lips of Isola were forced open, and the liquid poured down her throat; her chilling limbs were rubbed with flannels wrung from warm water by Aggy, who came up as soon as she heard of her illness. Faithfully did her three attendants labor with her till a late hour of the night, before there were any symptoms of returning vitality in the nerveless form that breathed through those weary hours, and that was all.

But the Senora seemed never to weary in her efforts to restore her, and in obedience to her commands, Summerton used all his skill to undo what they had done.

At length the purple hue left Isola's lips and hands; her

eyes opened, but with a shudder she again closed them as they fell upon the Senora.

"What has happened to me?" she faintly asked. "I feel like one just rescued from death."

At the sound of her voice, Aggy rushed to her side and said:

"An' so you is, my blessed darlin'. Ef it hadn't been for the Snory an' Mr. Summ'rton, you'd a been wid de angels by dis time. But you's a comin' roun' now, an' you'll soon be well agin."

"I have been really so ill, and *they* have aided me?" she incredulously murmured. "It seems impossible."

"Why so, Isola?" asked Summerton, in his most insinuating tone, as he touched her pulse. "Savella found you here nearly insensible, and on examining your condition, I found that you were made ill by the poisonous effluvia arising from the paint which has recently been used on the house. Fortunately I knew what remedies to apply; you have been in great danger, and under Providence you owe the preservation of your life to the efforts of Senora Roselli and myself."

Isola turned her eyes toward Aggy, as if seeking confirmation of this statement, and she promptly responded to the mute inquiry.

"Yes, honey; Mr. Sum'ton tells you what's jes' so. Him and the Snory has done all dey could to bring you back to yerself. Dey's never lef' you a single minnit, an' I b'lieves dey *has* saved you."

"Then I must thank you," she feebly said; "but I am too weak to talk much."

"Nor is it desirable that you shall do so. You must now rest," replied Summerton, and after giving some directions to Aggy, who was to remain with her till morning, the two confederates left the room together.

Isola was too much exhausted to think, though she was

in a state of complete bewilderment as to their conduct toward her. When she first felt the paralysis that was creeping over her, she had mentally accused them of having at last effected their ends by destroying her, yet to their efforts she was assured she owed her life.

But she soon fell asleep, and at a late hour of the following morning she was aroused by a commotion in the house in which the name of Savella was often repeated. Weak as an infant, she was unable to rise, and at her request, Aggy went out to see what had happened.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ELOPEMENT.

SAVELLA remained in the chamber of Isola till her aunt assured her that the greatest danger was over; that the patient would recover. She watched Senora Roselli and Summerton with dilated eyes, and a puzzled expression as they moved around the couch of the sick girl, and showed the most earnest solicitude for her recovery.

Ignorant as she was of their diabolical intention to rid themselves of her, Savella was aware that they cherished a feeling of deep hostility towards the adopted child of Fontaine; and she was at a loss to comprehend the source of the feverish anxiety her aunt manifested in her restoration.

But when once assured that Isola would recover, Savella's thoughts reverted to her own affairs, and she resolved to avail herself of the opportunity her aunt's pre-occupation afforded her to make good her escape to her lover. She said to her:

"I am tired and sleepy. I shall retire at once, and Celia

can stay in my room with me if you are unwilling to leave me alone."

The girl was nodding in a corner where she had thrown herself down when assured that her young lady was out of danger; and Savella shrewdly thought she would prove but an indifferent guard. In the hurry of the moment the Senora answered:

"Yes—you can take Celia with you; the door is locked on the outside, and you can go through this room into your own."

Savella smiled triumphantly, for she had found means to slip out unobserved, and turn the key which her aunt had left in the lock; for, in spite of her anxiety about Isola, the Senora had not been quite oblivious of the safety of her niece. She had left the room a moment to close all egress from her chamber, unless she passed through that of Isola.

The means of escape were now open to Savella if she could evade the sleepy watch set upon her, and this she considered very easy of accomplishment. At her command Celia made her pallet on the floor near her own bed. A lounge, which stood on the opposite side of the room, had been appropriated by Senora Roselli since she had assumed the office of duenna, and the young girl reflected that her relative would be too much fatigued on her return to the chamber to investigate the state of things very critically.

She was soon in bed herself, and Celia, overcome with drowsiness, threw herself upon her couch, and was sound asleep in a few minutes. So soon as her heavy breathing assured Savella that there was no danger to apprehend from her, she softly arose, dressed herself in a dark traveling-robe, and took out her heaviest wrappings ready for use. Then a bundle of clothing was made up, her discarded cap and gown placed upon the lay figure, and the bed-clothes so disposed around it as to induce her aunt to believe she was still lying there. With malicious glee she thought of the

consternation of the Senora when she should awake in the morning and discover the trick that had been played upon her.

Every arrangement completed, Savella donned her shawl and bonnet, lowered the lamp till only a faint glimmer of light shone through the apartment, and softly unclosing the door, glided out and locked it behind her.

Since the house had been so strangely infested by nocturnal disturbances, the swinging lamp in the lower hall was kept burning through the night, and with less trepidation than she might otherwise have felt, the fugitive stole noiselessly down the stairs, fearful that at every step she should be saluted by the rappings which were still heard at intervals.

But all remained quiet, and she gained the lower hall in safety. Savella was afraid to attempt to gain egress through the front door, lest the watcher who always remained in the chamber of her uncle, should hear her and give the alarm. She hastened to the one that opened on the back piazza, and after a few efforts, succeeded in turning the ponderous key that secured it.

The door opened noiselessly; but here another danger met her, for which she was not prepared. A large Newfoundland dog always kept watch just without the door, and she found him sitting erect and uttering low growls when she unclosed it. Her presence of mind did not desert her, and she spoke in low, soothing tones to him, at the same time patting his rough head.

Nero recognised her, and returned her caress by raising himself and placing his huge paws upon her shoulders. After a slight struggle to rid herself of him, Savella closed the door and rapidly descended into the yard; but Nero did not approve of his young mistress walking alone at that late hour of the night, and he gravely followed her steps till she gained a small gate opening into the grounds.

There was no moon, but the night was clear and starlit, and as Savella's hand was laid upon the latch of the gate, a figure started from the shelter of a neighboring tree, and the voice of Philip Vane exclaimed:

"Is it you, my angel? Have you at last succeeded in escaping from durance vile? Oh, Savella, darling, how supremely I am blessed in this auspicious hour."

Savella was clasped in his arms, and she hurriedly said:

"Dear Philip, I knew I should find you here. Take me away as soon as possible, for I am frightened half out of my wits. I have come through that haunted house all alone, expecting every moment that some mysterious voice would speak to me and arrest my flight. Luckily it did not, or I should have lost my senses, I am sure."

Philip drew her firmly to his breast and fervently said:

"Your courage has made you doubly dear to me, Savella. Our horses are in charge of my servant not far from here; we can get to the nearest station in time for the one o'clock train, and to-morrow we will be united in Baltimore."

The dog whined and bounded around Philip, for they were old friends, but he put him back and closed the gate upon him.

"Go back to your post, old fellow; we have no use for you now. Eureka! my bride is won, and I am the luckiest fellow alive!"

A few yards brought them to the shelter in which his attendant remained with the horses. The negro was ordered to return to Dunlora and report to his mistress the elopement of her son with the heiress of La Fontaine, and in a few more moments the lovers were mounted, and flying like the wind in the direction of the railroad.

In two hours they reached the road-side station; they were just in time, for in ten minutes the northern train dashed up to the platform, halted only long enough to take on the passengers, and again rushed through the night with a speed that mocked pursuit.

Philip left his horses in the care of the station master, and with his hat drawn over his brows, his heavy riding coat so muffled about him as to defy recognition, he triumphantly placed Savella on the seat beside himself, exulting in the thought that he had outwitted them all, and the Fontaine estate would soon be his. Savella kept her thick veil drawn over her face, and she and Philip passed the night in exchanging such tender words as form the habitual currency of lovers. She was supremely, ecstatically happy, and no doubt of the future arose to dim the delicious dream in which she revelled. When fatigue at length overcame her excitement, she slept with her head resting upon Philip's broad breast, her form sustained by his supporting arm, and she believed herself blessed above all women.

They reached Baltimore without detention, and Philip found no difficulty in getting a clergyman to unite them. Two blissful days were spent in the city, in visiting the monuments it contains, and then the newly wedded pair set out on their return to Dunlora.

At the station from which they had started they found the carriage of Mr. Vane awaiting them, and in another hour the bride was welcomed and congratulated by her new parents. Mrs. Vane gaily said to Savella:

"You have endured a regular siege, my dear, and poor Philip has been in despair at your being mewed up so closely. But I think you will be your own mistress after this, and give your aunt to understand that her reign at La Fontaine is at an end. You must be my guest a few days, till the storm of her anger has had time to subside; then you can quietly go and take your true place as the ruler of your own house."

"Thank you; I am really glad to shelter myself with you from the first outburst of my aunt's rage. I will send Philip over to bear the brunt of it, and when he has mollified her wrath by such graceful apologies as he so well knows

how to make, I will venture back myself. Oh, dear! I cannot help laughing when I think of her face when she found the doll I dressed up so nicely to represent my precious self." And Savella laughed with the glee of a child.

The others joined her, and a merry party they made at the expense of the Senora, little dreaming of the power over both she still held in her ruthless hands.

Philip was most lover-like in his attentions, and Savella's eyes beamed with the light of the happiness that filled her heart. To become the wife of her adored Philip had been the one dream of her life for many weeks past, and in its realization she found perfect content. Philip was also radiant in anticipation of the brilliant future that opened before him. Mr. Fontaine incapable of attending to business, his heiress his wife, the whole revenues of that large estate must come at once under his control, and already he was planning the changes in the mode of life he would make at La Fontaine.

Mr. Vane was exuberant in his demonstrations of joy at welcoming his richly endowed daughter-in-law. He slapped Philip on the shoulder and said:

"You're a lucky fellow, for you have won the brightest bride in the State; and," he added, *sotto voce*, "you will have the entire control of her fortune, for poor Fontaine is in no state to interfere with you."

His son nodded intelligently, and the schemers sat down to a delicious little supper with sharpened appetites, and the agreeable conviction that Philip had only to walk into La Fontaine and take possession in the name of his wife.

In the meantime Senora Roselli had discovered the *ruse* which had so successfully deceived her. Tired and depressed, her mind filled with unwonted thoughts, she left the apartment of Isola, and, after glancing at the couch of her niece and trying the lock of the door to see if it was still fast, the Senora quietly disrobed and sought the repose she

so much needed. She believed Savella to be calmly sleeping near her, and never dreamed of the catastrophe which had actually occurred.

She slept till a very late hour on the following morning, and when she arose she was surprised to find Savella, as she supposed, still in bed. She rang for Celia, and said to her when she came in:

"Wake up my niece. It is unusual for Savella to sleep so late; but she was kept up last night much beyond her usual hour for retiring."

Celia approached the bed and called the name of her young mistress several times. When no response came, the Senora peevishly said:

"Can't you speak loud enough to arouse her? She seems like one of the seven sleepers this morning."

The girl obeyed her, and suddenly uttered a shriek so loud as to terrify every one within hearing. The Senora dropped the comb she held in her hand, and asked, with a scared look:

"Is she dead? Has this retribution come to me for——"

She paused choked, indignant, overwhelmed with sudden wrath, for Celia cried out:

"It's only a rag doll, and the young Mistis is clean gone!"

The Senora sprang toward her, seized and shook her violently, as she said, with a convulsive catching of her breath:

"You — you — have — helped — her — to — get — away! Don't deny it, you miserable creature; but I—I'll have you punished for it, see if I don't."

Thus accused, Celia defended herself with the consciousness of innocence:

"I 'clar' 'fore my Marster in Heben, I don' know no more'n de dead what's 'come o' her. Please don' shake all de bref out'n me, 'caze I ain't got nothin' to do wi' dese here

doin's. Ef Miss S'vella's gone, I don' know whar she's gone to, though I reckon I can guess who she's gone wid anyhow."

"Wretch! you helped her away; you unlocked the door for her, or she could never have made her escape."

"I don't know nothin' 'bout de do'. 'Twas locked jes' now when I come up, an' I opened it to let myself in. Ax my Mammer ef I tell lies. I t'ink it's hard to be 'spected, when I aint done nothin'."

The girl's air was so truthful, her expression so perplexed, that the Senora saw she was speaking the truth. She threw on a dressing robe, rushed across the hall, and summoned her ally to a conference. When Summerton approached, she exclaimed, with a distracted air:

"She's gone! The perfidious girl has eloped, and all our plans are dashed to the earth! What can we do? Can we not yet save her from marrying Philip Vane?"

He stood a moment as if transfixed, with the color retreating from his face.

"Why don't you speak?" she passionately asked. "Why do you stand there as if stricken into stone? Rouse yourself up, and follow after her—quick! quick! It may not yet be too late."

"How long has she been gone?" he asked

"Oh! I cannot tell, but it must have been many hours ago. But it cannot yet be too late to bring her back safe. Go after her; tell her how much depends on her remaining true to us. Go! go! I say, and bring Savella back to me."

"It is useless now," he gloomily replied. "All pursuit would be unavailing; for they doubtless were in time for the Northern train, which passes the nearest station at one o'clock at night."

"Telegraph, then! Have her arrested and brought back at all hazards."

"But to what point shall I telegraph? They may stop at the first village after crossing the line into Maryland, or they may go further on. I tell you that we must make the best of this affair, and take the young man into our confidence. He will have few scruples to trouble us with, and he is as much interested in—in *you know what*, as we are."

Her anger seemed to augment at this view of the case, and she frantically said:

"You aggravate me beyond endurance. Take *him* into our councils, indeed! That would be ruin to all. Was not the discovery I last night made enough, but this disaster must follow so soon upon it? and you—you who know how much is at stake, must talk in this absurd manner. I shall go wild! I shall—oh! oh! I don't know what I shall *not* do."

"I will tell you what you *will* do," he replied, with recovered composure. "The only safe course for you to pursue is this: calm yourself and act like a reasonable woman; go and make your toilette, and make up your mind at the same time that Savella's marriage with Vane must take place in spite of every effort we may make to prevent it. A little reflection will show you that I speak the truth. I shall soon show him that he is entirely in our power, and I understand him too well to fear any exposé from him. He will play into our hands sooner than risk the loss of the fortune he covets. There—there—leave all to me; I will act for the best, you may be sure."

The Senora glared on him a few moments, then turned away, and silently went back to her chamber.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CLAUDE'S ANGEL.

THE house was searched over for the missing girl, but Senora Roselli did not command it to be done, for she knew too well that Savella had forever passed from her tyrannical control; that a man as mercenary and unscrupulous as either herself or Summerton was about to step in and take possession of the wealth they had believed almost within their grasp; and she felt that without some strong hold over Philip, he would not long tolerate her presence at La Fontaine. At length she muttered:

"I will find means to manage him, even if I——." The thought that arose remained unspoken, but her lips closed with their most iron expression, and she stood many moments looking vaguely through the window before she could command herself sufficiently to go into Isola's chamber, and inquire how she had passed the latter part of the night.

She found her weak and pallid, but that was to be expected after the severe suffering through which she had passed on the previous night. With an appearance of interest that surprised the invalid, the Senora examined her condition and insisted that she should make no effort to rise, nor leave the house that day. She said:

"It will be risking your life to do so, and after the efforts of Mr. Summerton and myself to save you, I think I have some right to dictate in this matter."

"I thank both you and Mr. Summerton for your kindness; I believe that I am unfit to make any exertion to-day, for I feel as if all vital energy has left my frame."

"That will be but temporary. Your elastic constitution will soon throw off this weight, and you will regain your usual health. When you do recover, I almost wish that I

could place you in the position which is held by my ungrateful niece. You have heard that she is gone; that a few hours more will certainly make her the wife of Philip Vane?"

"Yes—I know that Savella has eloped with him. Poor girl! I fear her dream of bliss will not last long. She adores Philip, and he——"

She paused abruptly, and the Senora took up her words, and went on in an excited tone:

"And he has sold himself for the money he expects to gain. I know that this man loved you, Isola; that he sought you till Savella came to claim the inheritance he thought would be yours. Well, it's of no use to talk about what is so distressing to me; but Mr. Vane will find me more than a match for himself yet. Good morning, my dear; I must go down to breakfast now, and you are still too weak to stand much talking. I have something important to say to you which I think you will be glad to hear; but I must defer it till you are in a condition to bear excitement."

Wondering what the Senora could possibly have to communicate to her, but too feeble to give her mind to conjecture, Isola saw her depart, and after taking the nourishment which Aggy had herself prepared for her, she sunk into a half dreamy state, which was neither sleeping nor waking.

Isola was conscious that Summerton came to her side and felt her pulse; but she could not arouse herself sufficiently to speak to him. Yet there was nothing depressing in the languor that prostrated her physical system. At moments she felt as if floating upon a cloud of radiant light, with soft musical murmurs gliding through the sea of golden mist that sustained her, and angel faces seemed to sweep around her, bending looks of love upon her pale face.

From this dreamy enchantment she was aroused by the sound of a voice she loved, and starting suddenly into con-

sciousness, she saw Miss Carleton bending over her with an expression of tender solicitude upon her fair face. When she saw Isola's large black eyes open and rest on her with evident recognition, she said :

"My dear child, I have come to claim you as my own from this time forth, and I find you thus. What has caused this sudden attack, my love, for of late you have appeared perfectly restored to health."

With an effort, Isola banished the sweet fantasies that filled her mind, and collectedly replied :

"I could not have been strong, cousin Carrie; for the odor of the new paint made me very ill. But for Mr. Summerton's medical skill, I believe I must have died."

"So Aggy has told me since I came. I am sure that I am very grateful to him for his kindness. I hoped to take you back with me to the Vale, but in your present state it will be impossible to do so. I shall send the carriage back, and remain here until you are able to return with me."

"Oh, thank you, dear friend; you are too good. I know that I should be very grateful to the Senora and Mr. Summerton, but I am afraid I am not so much so as they deserve, for I cannot help shrinking from them when they come near me. Very wicked, isn't it, when they have saved my life?"

"After all you have borne from them, my dear, I think your feelings very natural. One benefit, however important, cannot destroy the memory of a series of wrongs and insults such as you have been lately made to endure. But they are at an end, Isola; you shall be my daughter till George returns to claim his darling; and, by the way, we have news from the noble fellow. Letters came this morning, and here is one for you."

Her face brightened at this, and she spoke with animation :

"Let me see it; place it here, upon my pillow, till I am strong enough to read it for myself; but tell me what he says in yours."

Miss Carleton smiled as she obeyed her :

"Here is your precious missive, my dear. George writes in high spirits; he is delighted with St. Petersburg, where he has already made many agreeable acquaintances, and one friend. His presence of mind enabled him to save a stranger from death when his horses had taken fright, and he and George have become fast friends. But he will doubtless tell you all about it, for he seems completely fascinated by this Baron Fontani."

"Fontani," repeated Isola, "the name is almost like ours."

"It is doubtless the same name with an Italian termination, for George says he is from that country; he is in the employment of the Czar as an engineer, and has won high rank and brilliant fortune by his services."

Though Isola showed deep interest in the conversation, Miss Carleton could see that she was overtasking herself, and she placed her hand upon her lips as she was about to speak again, and softly said :

"Rest now, Isola, for you are too weak to bear excitement. I will leave you to repose, and go down and talk awhile with the Senora. I may be able to induce her to forgive her niece for the unhappy escapade she has made."

With a faint smile Isola closed her eyes, and like a tired child she fell off into a deep sleep, murmuring :

"Poor Savella, I am afraid she will find only dust and ashes where she expects to find the fruits of Paradise."

Leaving Celia to watch beside her, Miss Carleton descended to the sitting-room, in which she found Summerton and the Senora in deep consultation. She would have retired, but the former advanced with quiet ease and courteously said :

"Pray come in, Miss Carleton; we are only talking over the disgraceful and distressing event of the past night. As a friend of the family, you doubtless feel it as we do, though

not so keenly as those who have loved and protected this wilful girl from her infancy. Can you tell us anything of Mr. Vane that is calculated to console us for the fatal step Savella has taken?"

Miss Carleton looked from him to the Senora, and she saw in each face that Savella's conduct had indeed struck a deep blow; she supposed upon their hearts, though in reality it was only at their interests. She said:

"I have known Philip from his boyhood, and until lately I have thought very highly of him. He is amiable and well bred, and I am sure that he will always treat Savella with the kindness and respect that is due to his wife."

"Ah! my dear Miss Carleton, if we could only believe that Mr. Vane is attached to her," sighed the hypocrite; "but you know that hearts are not recalled at will and given again at the option of their owner. I greatly fear that La Fontaine was the object of his affections, and not the hapless girl who is now its possessor."

Her face slightly changed, and she spoke with some asperity;

"This place belongs to Mr. Fontaine, and Philip nor any one else, can assert a claim to it while he lives. His friends hope to see him yet restored to the enjoyment of his own; and therefore Philip could not have looked forward to the possession of his estate."

In his most dulcet tones Summerton replied:

"I have no doubt that Mr. Vane will claim it as a portion of his wife's inheritance. You are not aware perhaps, but young Vane is, that Mr. Fontaine is indebted to his niece for the wasted income of her father's property from the day it came into his possession. Since his illness, as the temporary guardian of Savella, I have looked into the condition of his pecuniary affairs, and I assure you that La Fontaine, with everything upon it, will scarcely suffice to liquidate the debt."

Miss Carleton became very pale; she impulsively asked:

"Is it then your purpose to strip Mr. Fontaine of everything? to turn him out of the home in which he was born and reared? Can Savella do this? dare she attempt it?"

"It is not a question of what Savella will do," replied the suave voice, "but of what her husband will be capable of doing. If I judge Mr. Vane aright, he will be as relentless as Shylock in exacting his pound of flesh. I ask you if you believe that Philip Vane will be so hard as to proceed to extreme measures? for I may be mistaken in my estimate of him. If you agree with me, I will endeavor to take such steps as may in a measure protect Mr. Fontaine from his cupidity."

After a painful pause, Miss Carleton said:

"I should be sorry to think Philip capable of committing so great a wrong; but I cannot answer for him. He has disappointed me in other things, and he may prove hard and grasping in this. Pray excuse me, Mr. Summerton; this conversation is oppressive to me. I must walk in the open air to regain my equanimity."

She arose abruptly and passed out of the room, convinced in her own mind that these schemers had laid their plans for the impoverishment of her old friend, and only desired to learn from her how far Philip was to be trusted to carry them out and take on himself the odium of their consummation.

She walked to and fro on the piazza till her spirits became more composed, and then an insurmountable desire seized her to see Fontaine herself, and judge if his condition afforded no hope of ultimate restoration. She turned the green blind which opened from the library window and saw Caesar nodding in his chair near the door which led into his master's apartment. While she hesitated as to the propriety of entering, Dr. Sinclair rode up to the steps and dismounted.

"Ha! Miss Carrie, you here? but I suppose the news of last night's escapade brought you over. I hope my patient knows nothing of the affair, for I am told he was vehemently opposed to the marriage. I can't see why, for Philip Vane is an elegant and clever young fellow, and the heiress hasn't made such a bad choice. Poor Fontaine's mind was probably no clearer on that score than on others, or he would not have opposed her wishes."

"I cannot agree with you, Doctor. I think the objections of Mr. Fontaine were well founded," she coldly replied. "I did not come over on Savella's account, but to remove Isola to the Vale. I am sorry to say that she has been attacked by illness, brought on, it seems, by the scent of the fresh paint upon the house. Mr. Summerton gave her such remedies as he considered necessary, and she is much better; but I shall be glad if you will go up and see her before you leave."

"Of course—of course; such cases are not uncommon, and Isola has a very sensitive temperament. But I must first go in, and see how Fontaine is getting on. It is a melancholy hallucination he labors under, and I almost despair of dispelling it."

"Is it even so?" asked Miss Carleton, with a slight shudder. "Is there no hope for him?"

"I can see none, for there is a *cause* for the spectral illusion in his case—a fatal cause, which medical skill can never remove."

Their eyes met, and both felt that the other knew what that dire cause was. She presently asked:

"Can I not see him? I do not wish to speak with him; only to look upon him and form my own judgment as to his condition."

"I can easily manage that for you. Pass through this window, and remain in the library while I am with him in his own apartment. I have had a curtain placed in front of

the door to conceal the person who watches near him, as it made him irritable to have some one always in sight. You can shelter yourself behind it and look on him while he talks with me."

While he was speaking the doctor opened the blind and threw up the sash of the window. Cæsar aroused himself as he heard them enter, and arose with a deep bow and a look of intense surprise as he recognized Miss Carleton. She motioned to him to remain silent, and passed with the physician toward the heavy folds of damask that swept to the floor.

Dr. Sinclair lifted them aside and entered the larger room, while Miss Carleton, with a quickly beating heart, placed herself in such a position as to enable her to look into Fontaine's apartment without being herself seen.

He was sitting with his face turned toward her, holding a fragment of paper in his hands, which he nervously turned from side to side, rolling it up and smoothing it out alternately, as if unconscious of what he was doing. The crimson cushions of the large chair on which he sat threw out his statuesque head, with its clearly cut features, now nearly as colorless as marble itself. His large, black eyes, as they wandered restlessly around the room, had in them the same wild, unsettled expression they had worn on that last morning at the Vale; and the concealed visitor shrank from meeting them again with a sort of suppressed feeling that shivered through her aching heart.

When Dr. Sinclair appeared before him, Fontaine's gaze dwelt an instant upon him, and then, dropping his paper, he stretched out his hand, and said, in his natural voice:

"Let me grasp your hand, Doctor, to convince myself that you are real. I am so haunted by phantoms, that I cannot distinguish flesh and blood from them unless I touch it."

His visitor grasped his hand, and cheerfully said:

"I, at all events, am a substantial entity, Fontaine, and

I never intend to visit any of my friends in a ghostly shape. Have your filmy friends multiplied? At first it was only one that visited you."

"Yes," he mysteriously replied; "he has brought others with him. He was the head demon; but he has called others to aid him in his work of torture. He has brought up Banquo's ghost, with those that came to Richard III. the night before the battle of Bosworth. He has even gone back into the days of antiquity, and summoned that goblin grim who stood beside the couch of Brutus and said, 'Meet me at Phillippi!' Ah! it was *death* that met him there; but my familiar gives me no such welcome warning."

"Why should you wish to die, Fontaine? You have much to live for?" was the soothing reply.

"Much, much—yes, I comprehend that; yet it would be a mercy to me to die. If I could wipe this red stain from my hand, I might clasp one that could drive every evil from me; but it deepens, it darkens with every hour, Doctor. Sometimes it casts its lurid hue on every object around me. Oh! murder is a fearful crime; and he who commits it merits death. I had far rather pay that penalty than live the life to which I am doomed."

"Then you are tired of being shut up here? If you wish it, I will permit you to walk out daily. You need not go beyond your own grounds, nor see any strangers."

Fontaine slowly shook his head.

"No, Sinclair; I will not make a spectacle of myself to my own people. Besides, the phantom forbids that; he is standing between us now, and he frowns even at the proposal from you. No—these rooms shall become my living grave, for I will not go beyond them."

"We shall see when the bright Spring weather comes. It is cold now, and it is as well for you to stay within doors."

"Once I breasted the storm, and defied the wind; now I am as a reed shaken by its faintest breath. Sinclair, who is

behind that curtain? I feel a presence there that wafts sweetness and comfort to me. What is it?"

He half arose as if to approach the shaded door, but the physician placed his hand upon his arm, and kindly said:

"A friend of yours is there, but she did not intend to intrude upon you. Would it please you to see her? You are so calm to-day that I think her visit will not harm you."

Fontaine sunk back, and in an excited whisper said:

"Bring her in! I know—I know who it must be."

Dr. Sinclair went to the curtain, drew it aside, and led forward the pale woman who had watched and listened with her heart upon her lips. Fontaine advanced to meet her with his usual stately elegance, but when she offered him her cold hand, he rapidly drew her toward him, pressed her to his breast, and said:

"You have come to the lost one, Carrie. You might have saved me, if I had dared to lay the burden of my sin upon your innocent heart. But I could not—I could not; and now I am demon-haunted, while my angel is far from me. Ah! there it is now—gliding between us with its deadly breath—chilling me to the very heart!"

His arms dropped down suddenly, and he tottered as if about to fall. Dr. Sinclair hastened to support him to his seat, and after a few moments he became more composed. Miss Carleton gently asked:

"Is there no other one you would like to see, Mr. Fontaine? One you have dearly loved would be made happy by being admitted into your presence again."

He regarded her vacantly, and seemed to be considering the meaning of her words. Presently he pressed his hand to his head, and said, in a confused way:

"Yes, yes—I remember. I called her my child; I loved her as such; but the demon forbids me to do so any longer. He commands me not to look upon her, and I dare not disobey him. But *you* can take my place. Take Isola to

your heart, Carrie Carleton, and she will prove as great a blessing to you as she might have been to me but for this cruel, cruel persecution. I cannot see her again; her presence is oppressive to me; and—and—now even yours is becoming so. There stands the phantom; his wrathful face is turned upon you. Go away, I entreat, or he may gain the same diabolical power over you that he has obtained over me."

He put up his hand deprecatingly, and at a sign from the physician Miss Carleton glided from the apartment, carrying with her the painful fear that Claude Fontaine's mind was wrecked beyond all hope of restoration.

Miss Carleton wrote a brief note to Mrs. Berkely, describing the condition of affairs at La Fontaine, and requesting her to send over such articles of clothing as she might require during her stay. The carriage was sent back with this; and unable to remain within doors with the weight upon her heart that seemed crushing her to the earth, Carrie Carleton wandered out into the grounds, and sought to exhaust her emotion by rapid exercise.

She spent many hours in this bitter struggle with herself, and more than once the cry came to her lips:

"Oh, would that the right was mine to be near him forever—forever!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEWS FROM GEORGE.

As the dinner hour drew near, Miss Carleton returned to the house and went up to Isola's room. She found her sitting up in bed supported by pillows while she read George Berkely's letter. There was a faint glow upon her lately

colorless face, and her eyes sparkled with much of their usual animation.

Miss Carleton had recovered outward composure, and with her usual affectionate kindness she said:

"I see that you are agreeably employed, my dear, so I will leave you to the enjoyment of George's letter. Dr. Sinclair has promised to see you before he left. I suppose he has been up."

"Yes—he came with Mr. Summerton; but I was sleeping so soundly that they did not arouse me. The Senora was here just now, and told me that he said I had evidently been extremely ill, but I am now doing very well."

"He approved, then, of Mr. Summerton's treatment?"

"Yes, entirely."

This assurance satisfied her friend, and removed the fears she had vaguely felt in spite of the apparent solicitude of the Italian for Isola's recovery. She lingered only long enough to arrange her dress, and then left the young girl to read again and again the letter which contained so much that was precious to her.

During the months that had elapsed since the departure of George Berkely, Isola had learned to look on him as her future stay and companion for life. All his noble and true qualities arose before her in vivid contrast to the worldliness of Philip, and the warm friendship she had always cherished for George insensibly assumed the tender hue of love. She felt that she could implicitly *trust* that honest nature, and give him that entire respect without which affection can have no firm basis. His letter ran thus

"ST. PETERSBURG, November 15, 18—.

"MY BELOVED ISOLA:—Your precious little letter, enclosed in one from cousin Carrie, has just reached me. It gives me the right to address you thus, for in it I behold the pledge that my Peri will, in time, fold her wings in the nest it shall be my sweetest care to prepare for her.

"My darling, I am very happy, for I know that you would not have replied to my last letter if in your heart a spring of tenderness had not opened for me. I will prove myself worthy of it, Isola, and I feel the sweet assurance that I can make your happiness, as you will mine, in the future which looms before me bathed in the rosy hues of love.

"But I must not fill my letter with protestations which you do not need to assure you of the strength and depth of my affection for you. That, you already know, is indestructible as life itself. I have become that important personage to the home circle he has left behind him—a traveler in foreign lands; and my communications will have especial interest from a country so interesting, and so little known to 'outside barbarians,' as Russia; therefore I must endeavor creditably to maintain the character of an intelligent observer.

"I have now been in St. Petersburg several weeks, and we have weather to which our keenest mountain breezes is comparative summer. I enjoy it beyond expression. The houses are thoroughly warmed through every portion, and when we go out in well appointed sleighs wrapped to the ears in furs, the exhilaration of flying over the snow in this clear atmosphere is greater than I can explain.

"Our ambassador has been received by the emperor, and his subordinates have, with him, attended a court ball. There I had the honor of an introduction to the Czar, the grandest-looking man I have ever seen. He looks as if born to rule, which I fancy few royalties do, for if one is to judge by the pictures of crowned heads that have descended to us, nature more frequently lavishes the gift of personal beauty upon the peasant than the kaiser.

"But Nicholas is a magnificent man, and as courteous as he is handsome. He was surrounded by a brilliant group of officers who had distinguished themselves in his service, and many of whom have won imperishable renown and lavish rewards from their munificent sovereign.

"Among them was a tall, stately-looking man, who attracted me from the first moment my eyes fell upon him. I cannot tell why this was, for he was not more striking in his appearance than many others near him. He was a middle-aged man, with hair lightly sprinkled with gray, and the expression of one who has suffered wrong, hardship and disappointment; all of which had been merged in the philosophic determination to make the most of what the mercy of Heaven spared from the wrecked hopes he had left scattered upon his life-path.

"I inquired who he was, and learned that he is an Italian of the name of Fontani, who for many years has been in the employment of the emperor as an engineer. His services have lately been rewarded with the title of Baron and a large estate near Moscow; and the brilliant decorations he wore upon his breast bore witness to the triumphs he has gained. But he soon retired from the gay scene in which he only appeared at the command of his master.

"It would fill up my letter to describe to you the magnificence of the scene on this occasion. Imagine Aladdin's palace illumined with a blaze of radiance, and filled with a crowd of lovely and richly dressed women, attended by cavaliers in brilliant court costume. I danced once with a young girl, the niece of the French Ambassador, to whom I sought an introduction because she reminded me of you; but ah! Isola, her magnificent dark eyes lacked the light of love which I hope to see beaming from yours when they rest on me again.

"It was very late when we made our congè; in my sleigh was Charles Brinsley, my fellow attaché, and myself; the night was enchanting; the moon was shining with a clear lustre that rendered every object distinctly visible, and we sped over the snow-clad earth with the velocity of the wind. At a sudden turning, our sleigh came in contact with another approaching rapidly from the opposite direction.

The collision was so violent that one of our horses was disabled and fell in the traces; but the fiery steeds of the other sleigh swerved to one side, dashed madly forward, evidently unmanageable by the driver, who, as we afterwards ascertained, had been partaking too freely of the strong waters to which his countrymen are so much addicted.

"A gentleman attempted to spring out, but caught his foot in the leopard skin with which the sleigh was lined, and fell in such a position as to be in imminent danger of having his brains dashed out by the unruly horses. I sprang to his assistance, seized the reins, and, after a severe struggle, succeeded in holding them in till Brinsley and the driver could come to my assistance.

"The momentary check enabled the prostrate man to recover his footing and extricate himself from his perilous position. He spoke to the horses, and they at once ceased their frantic efforts to rush away, and stood docile and obedient to his voice. He thanked us for our efforts to serve him, and insisted that we should accept seats in his vehicle since our own horse was disabled. He said:

"I am Baron Fontani, and I am on my way to the palace to lay before the emperor some important despatches which have just arrived; but I pledge myself not to detain you many moments, and I will then set you down at your own hotel."

"Of course we accepted his offer for it was too cold to remain in the open street till assistance could be summoned to our disabled steed; and taking the reins in his own hands, the Baron bade his driver remain with ours and aid him in every possible manner.

"After a brief interview with the Czar, he returned to us, and soon set us down at our own door. On parting from me he gave me his card, and requested me to call on him on the following day. Delighted with the chance which had thus enabled me to form his acquaint-

tance, made under such auspicious circumstances, I, of course, availed myself of his invitation to visit him.

"At as early an hour as I hoped to find him free to receive friendly calls, I went to his palace. He met me with great kindness; was pleased to exaggerate the service I had rendered him, and showed as much interest in my affairs as if he had been a friend of long standing.

"The Baron informed me that in his youth he had traveled extensively in the United States. Many portions of the country interested him deeply, especially the wild mountain scenery of my native state, with which he seemed wonderfully familiar. He showed me Jefferson's Notes on Virginia in his library; and I discovered that he understands English perfectly, though at first he spoke to me in French. By-the-way, I have now acquired such facility in that language that I can both speak and understand it with perfect ease. You remember how our old teacher used to make us *parley vous* together, and how useless we then thought it.

"But to return to the Baron. He showed me several sketches, which he said he had purchased from a wandering artist; and among them I actually found a picture of the Vale, and another of La Fontaine. He pointed to the latter, and said:

"I was induced to take that because the name is so nearly my own. Do you know of such a place in your native state?"

"I told him all about the place, and the connection between its owner and my family. I cannot describe to you the vivid interest with which he listened. He inquired minutely about Mr. Fontaine—his habits, his peculiarities; and when I had finished my description, he musingly said:

"From your account of him, one would think this man a king among his peers. How is it that he has never married?"

"Of course I could not explain that, but I referred to constitutional melancholy as the probable cause. He seemed struck with that, and quickly asked:

"Is there no other cause for that sadness? It seems to me that the owner of this beautiful place, situated in a bracing mountain atmosphere, and surrounded, as you say he is, by kind and steadfast friends, should be able to rid himself of the morbid taint in his blood, to which you refer."

"He had much to sadden his youth," I told him; but the Baron was not satisfied till he drew from me the whole of that sad story about Henry Fontaine. When I had finished, he said:

"If your friend was guiltless in that affair, why should he cherish the feelings you have described? I am afraid there is a dark stain on the ermine of his robe, spotless as you would have me believe it."

"Forgive me, Isola, for repeating his words to you, for we know how pure, how noble Mr. Fontaine is—how far above any temptation to crime, and such crime as this!

"I speedily disabused my new friend of this idea; but he has shown the interest he takes in the subject by frequently referring to it when we meet, and the mystery of Henry Fontaine's fate seems to possess as strong an attraction for him as it could for the nearest friend of your father.

"I have not yet told him of you. I do not know what feeling withheld me; but I am a jealous miser, who hoards his happiness in his own heart as too sacred to be shared by others; for in this I am not expansive enough to make the idol whose shrine is in my inmost heart, visible to those around me. To the working-day world I give my energies; to you, the consecrated dreams of love and hope.

"I have a miniature of you which I pilfered from Fanny, and in my solitary hours it is my constant companion. I yearn to return to you, to claim you as my own forever, but

my friends would not approve of it just now; so I must curb my impatience, and prove myself worthy of the happiness that awaits me.

"Adieu, my precious love; let your heart rest on me in perfect trust, for in life and death I am yours alone.

GEORGE BERKELY."

Isola folded her letter and laid it upon her pillow, with a sweet smile upon her lips. She felt that her haven of rest was almost gained; that George would take her to his noble heart, and shield her from the storms of life. There was now but one shadow on her path; the sad condition of her beloved protector; but she cherished the hope that in time he would be restored to her, vigorous in mind and strong in health, as before this strange attack of illness. Again she fell into that balmy sleep which brings healing on its wings. Summerton had given her some renovating drops, which seemed to act as a veritable elixir on her exhausted system, and with every passing hour she felt its reviving influence.

So rapidly had they counteracted the effect of the poison she had taken, that when Dr. Sinclair came up to see her, he had not been able to detect any traces of the deadly potion she had swallowed. He had accepted Summerton's account of the cause of her illness as the truth, and assured him that he had done everything that the most competent skill could have accomplished.

The *soi disant* clergyman accepted the physician's compliments with an air of modest deprecation; he declared that his practical knowledge of medicine was trifling, but his skill as a chemist was great; that he understood the composition of every deleterious agent which could enter the human frame, therefore he could readily apply the antidote to the subtle poisons which are sometimes inhaled with the breath of life.

With a high opinion of his abilities, Dr. Sinclair recom-

mended Fontaine to his constant care during his own absence, and departed, glad to leave so able a coadjutor to look after his patient.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SCHEMERS AT WORK.

A MESSENGER had been despatched to Dunlora to inquire concerning Philip and the missing heiress, and when they were expected to return. As he was about to rise from the dinner table, a letter from Mr. Vane addressed to Summerton was brought in. He hastily opened it and read the following lines :

"MR. SUMMERTON—*Sir*:—I have the honor to inform you that your inference with regard to Miss Fontaine is correct. She left her home under the protection of my son, and by the time this reaches you she will doubtless be his wife. They will come to Dunlora on their return, as at present I fear La Fontaine would be too warm a place for them to find themselves comfortable in, although it is winter weather. However, I hope this event will not long cause you to think with the immortal bard, 'this is the winter of my discontent,' for I assure both yourself and the respected aunt of my daughter-in-law that my son will prove to you both as good a friend as you have ever possessed.

"*Your* course is evidently to submit gracefully to what you can no longer prevent, and to make things smooth and harmonious for the advent of Philip among you as the future master of La Fontaine. With profound respect, I am yours to command.

"JOHN VANE."

This pompous and offensive effusion was read by Summerton in silence, and then handed over to Senora Roselli. She glanced rapidly over it and then, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, read it aloud to Miss Carleton, commenting upon it as she proceeded. She finally said with a hysterical laugh :

"You see for yourself how much forbearance Mr. Fontaine has to expect; for this old stupid speaks already of his son as master here. I suppose it is his intention to rule us all right royally, and we are expected to bow submissively before the authority of the young Sultan Savella has been fool enough to make the ruler of her fate."

"This letter is certainly not that of a well-bred man, though I have hitherto regarded Mr. Vane as such," said Miss Carleton. "But you have one consolation, madam: if Philip proves a disagreeable inmate, you can leave the house which he will probably look on as his own, till Mr. Fontaine is again in a condition to assert his own authority."

"*That* I will never do!" she said, almost rudely. "This is my home, and I have at least as good a right to it as that handsome popinjay. I have had the care of Savella from her infancy, and she shall not now cast me off, even if she is wrought on to consider me a burden. I don't intend to be thrust aside, I can tell you that."

"Of course you understand your own affairs best," said Miss Carleton, rising. "I do not presume to give advice to one so competent to take care of herself as you are. I will now go up to Isola," and she left the room.

The Senora and Summerton went together into the sitting-room, which they now had entirely to themselves; but when together, they never spoke in English; if anything was accidentally overheard by the servants, that domestic police which is always on the alert, they could understand nothing. Perhaps that was one cause of the intense disgust felt by the house servants toward the "furrin trash,"

as they called them when speaking among themselves, though from this sweeping condemnation they excepted their master's niece. *She* was a Fontaine, and of course she must be vastly superior to the "Snory and dat Sum'ton," as the two were called by all the negroes on the plantation.

Summerton closed the door carefully and curtly asked:

"Have you decided to accept my advice? Does not this absurd letter clearly show you what are the expectations of these people? I shouldn't wonder if old Vane and his silly wife were looking forward to establishing themselves here permanently."

"There is no danger of that, and I will soon give Philip Vane to understand that if he is nominally master here, I am really mistress. When he revolts, it will then be time enough to drive the goad into him. At first he may have some scruples as to carrying out our plans, but after enjoying the sweets of possession a short time, I mistake him greatly if he will not concede to any terms that will enable him to retain the wealth for which he has sold himself."

"Then you will receive them with courtesy? You will not fly like a tigress at Savella when she returns with her pretty purchase?"

"No; that would be folly now. We must tolerate the airs of the new Prince till we have him in our power, and Savella may have her swing for a few weeks—perhaps longer; but if she abuses her liberty; if she turns a cold shoulder to me, I will summarily put her down. You will see."

He shrugged his shoulders:

"Yes—I shall see a regular set-to between you, for Savella has too much of your temper for her good. However, I shall be by to make peace, and dictate conditions which shall be for *our* benefit you may be sure; for now our interests are at war with hers."

"Oh! if we could only have kept her free till Fontaine

was out of the way," she said in a tone of repressed rage. "Then we could have turned the estate into money; have gone back to Italy and lived in splendor; but this selfish and ungrateful girl has overturned all our plans."

"We may be able to accomplish that yet. Leave Vane to me; I shall manage him without much trouble. He can do what we dared not attempt. I will make him sue the estate for arrears, and grasp the whole, from which he shall pay us what I may choose to demand for keeping back what would ruin him. I begin to see that, after all, it isn't so bad a thing for us that Savella has taken her fate into her own hands. He is a poor schemer who cannot turn every chance to his own advantage."

"If you make anything out of this mal-a-propos elopement, you will prove yourself a modern Machiavel," she spitefully replied. "Savella is not so near to you as she is to me, or you would not so coolly make up your mind to the fate she has chosen for herself."

"Perhaps not," he indifferently replied. "Yet, I think, a little reflection will teach you that I have done more to advance her interests than you, or anyone else. Since this marriage has taken place we must reconcile ourselves to it as well as we may. There are other means of influencing people besides fear, and if we can gain our ends without a family quarrel it will be best on many accounts."

The Senora reluctantly acquiesced in this sensible view of the case, and after some further consultation, Summerton sat down and wrote the following reply to Mr. Vane, while the Senora retired to her own room for the purpose of inditing an epistle to her runaway niece.

"SIR:—Your letter has been received, and I write to assure you that no obstacle will be thrown in the way of Savella's return to the home which is rightfully her own. Influenced by the opposition of Mr. Fontaine to the union

of his niece with your son, Senora Roselli and myself did everything in our power to prevent the marriage which has taken place in so disgracefully clandestine a manner.

"If we had known how irrevocable was the determination of Savella to become the wife of Mr. Philip Vane, we would have consented to her union with her lover, and avoided incurring the scandal which she has brought upon herself, and all connected with her, by the course she has pursued."

"Of course, both her aunt and myself feel this keenly, for we only endeavored to perform our duty by preventing Savella from disobeying the express commands of her uncle. She has baffled us. Mr. Fontaine is in no condition to oppose the reception of the young people here, and through you we tender them an invitation to come to La Fontaine as soon after their arrival at Dunlora as may be agreeable to themselves.

"Family jars are best cemented as soon as possible, and to your son personally we can have no objection. He is a very elegant and attractive young man, and I trust that he and Savella will find that happiness in their precipitate marriage which I, her spiritual guardian and best friend, daily pray the Giver of all good to shower down upon her.

"Respectfully, THOMAS SUMMERTON."

With this hypocritical effusion, Senora Roselli sent one which ran thus :

"Come back to me, Savella, for my heart is half broken by your desertion. At the intercession of Mr. Summerton I have forgiven you, and you can return with your husband to La Fontaine without dreading reproaches from me. It is now too late to utter them, and I feel that perhaps I have already indulged myself in too many.

"You know, Savella, that my affection for you must lead me to forgive everything; that I can even embrace the ob-

ject of your choice, much as I have hitherto opposed this marriage. Say to Mr. Vane that I can pardon him for taking you from me, if he will only make you happy.

"Your affectionate though deeply afflicted aunt,

"BIANCA ROSELLI."

These letters were intended to be sent at once to Dunlora, but, in a fit of absent-mindedness, Summerton dropped them into the post-bag, and they were taken to Lynchburg, mailed there, and after the lapse of several days reached those for whom they were intended.

Savella, in her new happiness, gave little thought to those she had left behind her. She was not troubled with sentiment, and if the angry image of her aunt intruded, she dismissed it with the thought that she need give herself no further trouble concerning her; for with Philip to protect her, wealth at her own command, she could surely rid herself of this incubus upon her life.

In truth, Savella was heartily weary of the subjugation in which she had been held from her earliest recollection, and the most clearly defined wish of her heart was to emancipate herself entirely from the control of both the Senora and Summerton; for since he assumed the office of her tutor, he had tyrannized over her nearly as much as her relative.

Philip waited with some anxiety for an invitation to La Fontaine. Without it he could not well enter the place as master and establish himself, as he fully intended, at his ease. Since he had sold himself for a mess of pottage, he was resolute that it should be rendered to him to the last crumb, and he greedily listened to Savella when she spoke of the accumulated debt which Summerton had assured her was justly due to her from her uncle.

Philip already knew as much from the lips of Fontaine himself, and he mentally calculated how large a sum would be necessary to maintain the master he was about to dis-

possess in a private mad house. He intended to inaugurate a style of hospitality at La Fontaine far more magnificent than anything hitherto known in the valley, and the presence of an insane man would be too great a drawback on his pleasure to be tolerated a day longer than he possessed the power to rid himself of it.

As the bestower of all this, he felt grateful to Savella, and his apparent devotion rendered her the happiest of mortals.

Philip, her best-beloved, her king, was everything to her, and his parents congratulated each other that her blind devotion to their son would induce her to yield the entire control of her fortune to him.

Cards had been sent out for a reception at Dunlora before the return of the bridal pair, and Mrs. Vane had taken the precaution to order a dress for Savella suitable to the occasion. She appeared in white lace over satin, adorned with the same pearls her mother-in-law had once designed as a gift to Isola.

Invitations were sent to La Fontaine and the Vale; but from neither house came a token that they had been received. All the other families of note in the valley thronged to Dunlora on the appointed evening, and the newly wedded pair might have been consoled for the neglect of their nearest friends by the congratulations and compliments lavished upon them.

With the halo of her new happiness around her, Savella looked almost radiant, and Philip could never be less than preëminent in grace and beauty over every one brought in comparison with him. He was in the gayest spirits, and the guests departed from the feast satisfied that the match was a most suitable one and could not fail to prove fortunate.

The next morning Philip said to his wife:

"I suppose the people at La Fontaine mean to cut us altogether. Rather a cool proceeding on their part, considering the position they hold as dependents upon us; eh, Savella?"

"She laughed as she replied:

"It's lucky that my aunt did not hear you say that, *caro mio*. She would have been tempted to fly at you, and shake you, and pull your hair, as she used to do with me till I grew strong enough to fight my own battles."

Philip was fastidious, and he regarded the speaker with a horrified expression.

"Savella! you cannot be in earnest. You have never really *fought* with your aunt?"

"Of course, I have; would you have had me submit to be buffeted at her will, when I had fingers, and nails, with strength enough to use them? But you need not look so—so I scarcely know how; for she has treated me with more respect since I have been declared an heiress. Of late, she has only lashed me with her tongue, but that has all the venom of a scorpion."

"My poor girl," he tenderly said, "I must try to make up to you the bad treatment you have so long borne, by being doubly tender to you. But if your aunt is such a female fury, how am I to get along with her? I will never bear her taunts to you, if she attempts to utter them now you are my wife; nor will I submit to be scolded by her myself."

"You may as well prepare yourself for the infliction, for you will have to bear it, Philip. I can suggest but one remedy——"

"And what is that, my angel?"

"Get rid of her. Yes—send both her and Mr. Summer-ton back to Europe, for I shall never feel that I am really my own mistress till they are gone."

"My dearest Savella, you give me new life!" was the delighted response. "I have thought of this, but I did not believe you would consent to it. The Senora has so long had the charge of you that I feared you would be unwilling to part with her."

"Before I knew and loved you, perhaps I might have been, but you suffice to me now, Philip. My aunt wishes to return to her own country; she had some absurd vision of taking me there to marry me to a nobleman, but I have found my Prince here, and I wish him to reign over my heritage without being interfered with by others. Give them enough to live on comfortably in Italy, and both she and Mr. Summerton will gladly go back again."

"I will provide liberally for your aunt, but it seems to me that the tutor has no claims on you beyond the payment of the salary agreed on between himself and Mr. Fontaine for teaching you what I fancy you seldom learned."

"His office of late *has* been rather a sinecure, but that was not as much his fault as mine. I was tired of lessons, and I evaded them whenever I had an excuse to do so. I don't understand the bond between the two, but I warn you that if you expect to deal effectively with Senora Rosselli, you must include Mr. Summerton in the bargain."

"I had no idea that your aunt is so pious as to require the services of a domestic chaplain," replied Philip, with a scarcely repressed sneer. "I will feel my ground, and if it proves indispensable to pension him too, I suppose I must do it to get you all to myself, my precious wife."

"Am I really precious to you, Philip? Do you love me as the one desire of your heart, even as I do you? Sometimes I am afraid that the very excess of my love may cool yours."

"If it does, Savella, I should prove myself the most ungrateful of men. My dear girl, I owe you too much ever to underrate you, I assure you."

"Don't speak of *debt* to me, Philip. I will have nothing like bargain and trade in so divine a thing as love. *Ours* is a thing apart from worldly considerations, and I will not have you talk of the wealth I can bestow on you in that style. What is mine is yours to do with as you please."

"You are the dearest and most disinterested creature in the world," said Philip, with enthusiasm, and Savella raised her love-lit eyes to his with an expression of perfect trust that touched him and made him think that he would endeavor to be all to her that she so confidently expected. He presently recurred to the topic with which the conversation had opened.

"I cannot understand the tactics of the Senora. I begin to think I had better ride over to La Fontaine and see how things are going on myself."

"I do not wish you to do that, for if my aunt is not prepared to receive you as my husband she might give you a specimen of her temper that would not prepossess you in her favor. Mr. Summerton has great influence with her, and he has judgment enough to comprehend that their authority over me is at an end. They both know very well that without your consent they cannot maintain their position at La Fontaine, and if you give them time to get over their first wrath, they will do what is right. I am very happy here; happier than I have ever before been in my life; if Dunlora is not as grand a place as my uncle's, it is to me a far more agreeable one."

While she was speaking, a servant came in bringing an open letter, with a message from Mr. Vane. Beside it, on the waiter, lay a second one, addressed to Savella, in the superscription of which she recognized the writing of her aunt.

Hastily tearing it open and glancing over the lines within, she exultingly exclaimed:

"The lion is tamed! See what my aunt has written to me. We can now go back in triumph, Philip."

The young man read the note addressed by Summerton to his father with a curling lip and flashing eye. He handed it over to Savella as he disdainfully said:

"The old hypocrite says we have disgraced ourselves by

running away to be married; but you and I differ from him on that score, Savella. In spite of his clerical character, he tells more than one fib in that letter, and a more cunning piece of duplicity I never read. Decidedly, I shall rid myself of the supervision of Mr. Summerton."

Savella nodded approvingly; and after some discussion, it was decided to reply to the invitation by a formal acceptance, appointing the following morning for their return to La Fontaine, with the intention of taking up their permanent abode there.

Philip felt some annoyance at the thought that he must meet Isola there, and ask her to consider his house as her future home; for he shrank from her clear eyes even more than from the surveillance of Senora Roselli.

But this fear was set at rest by the chatter of Mrs. Vane, when they appeared at dinner. She had been from home all the morning, collecting the news of the neighborhood, and the most important item of it was that Miss Carleton had publicly declared her intention to adopt Isola, and retain her under her own protection till the return of George Berkely from Europe enabled him to claim her as his bride.

Betrothed to George already! The thought wounded the all-absorbing vanity of Philip, and he listened to his mother with incredulity. He said:

"It is very likely Miss Carleton will attempt to make a match between her protégée and George Berkely, but that such an engagement actually exists, I am far from believing. In fact, I know that Berkely himself resigned all hope in that quarter before he went to Europe."

"You seem very unwilling that he shall succeed," said Savella, in a tone of pique. "I hope it is *now* a matter of indifference to you who Isola may marry."

"You misunderstand me, my love," he replied, with heightened color. "This young girl is no longer of any con-

sequence in my eyes, except as the companion of my school days. I was thinking what a misalliance it would be for my friend George; but for *her*, of course, it would be a fine thing to marry General Berkely's grandson. Come, Savella, give me some of your divine music; my soul thirsts for the sweet sounds that flow from your fairy fingers."

She arose at once, passed into the drawing-room, and placed herself before the piano. Piece after piece was called for by Philip, who scarcely listened to the strains he professed himself enraptured with. His thoughts were wandering back to those years of daily intercourse when the freedom of school-boy life was his; when his heart clung to his child love with all the truth that was in his nature. He felt that he had not sought Isola merely as the heiress of La Fontaine, though he had given his hand to her rival solely as its possessor. For the time he almost hated George Berkely; but when Savella at length ceased to play and turned to him, he smoothed his brow, bent over, and, kissing her tenderly, said:

"My darling, you have soothed me infinitely. I am the most fortunate of men to possess so charming and devoted a wife."

And Savella believed him.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER SCHEME OF VILLAINY.

As soon as Fanny heard of the illness of her friend she came over to see her, and declare her belief that in spite of the solicitude of the two plotters for her recovery, they had caused the illness from which Isola was suffering.

Fanny was preparing to set out for Richmond under the

care of her aunt, Mrs. Stuart, whose husband was a member of the State Senate; and she rejoiced that Isola would come to the Vale in time to fill the vacancy caused by her absence. If her mother would have permitted her to do so, Fanny would have given up the visit altogether, but the younger Mrs. Berkely had long ago arranged with her sister-in-law that her daughter should make her *début* in society with her cousin, Augusta Stuart, and she would not suffer her plans to be interfered with.

Mrs. George Berkely declared that since Miss Carleton had declined her annual visit to the capital, she and Isola could certainly fill the vacancy in the domestic circle made by the absence of Fanny; so it was settled that Fanny should go.

She visited her friend every morning, and rejoiced to see the rapid improvement in her health. Toward the close of the week Isola was well enough to sit up, and it was arranged that the carriage from the Vale should be sent over on the following morning in time to take Miss Carleton and her protégée thither to dinner.

In the afternoon Isola lay down to rest, and Miss Carleton went out to take her usual walk. The young invalid fell into a light slumber, from which she was aroused by the sound of footsteps in her room. Looking up, she saw Senora Roselli crossing the floor toward her couch with the air of a person who has made up her mind on some important subject, and decided on the best course of action to pursue. Celia was sitting near the fire, finishing a piece of needle-work, and the visitor spoke rather sharply to her:

"Take that away with you, and leave me with your young lady a few moments. I have something important to say to her."

The girl looked toward Isola, who made a sign to her to obey, though she was internally wondering what the Senora could possibly have to say in private to her. With some

reluctance Celia obeyed, and the Italian followed her to the door, and examined it to see if it was perfectly closed. She then seated herself near Isola, and regarding her earnestly, said:

"I think you are now well enough to bear a little excitement. I must risk it, at all events, for what I have to say cannot longer be deferred."

Wondering to what this prelude would lead, Isola merely said:

"I can bear what you have to say. I am stronger than you think."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear, for you will need all your strength to sustain you under the revelation I am about to make to you. I may as well plunge into it at once, for nothing can prepare you for it. Isola, your family—your father is known to me."

The young girl raised herself with dilating eyes.

"My father! does he yet live? who then is he, and how have you made this discovery?" she asked, in faltering accents.

"I recognized you through a singular accident. The night you were so ill I saw a mark upon your shoulder which identified you with a child I had known from its birth. Isola, you are the daughter of one of my early friends, and many times in your infancy have I caressed you as if you were my own."

Isola here sat up in irrepressible excitement. She did not speak, her agitation was too great for words; but her imploring eyes entreated the Nemesis to go on with her revelation.

"Your father was a cousin of my husband, and bore the same name. Leonardo Roselli was an artist—that is, he was a fair copyist, and he made a bare living by copying the fine pictures in the Roman galleries. But his poverty did not prevent him from making an early marriage with a girl

who was as poor as himself. After your birth, Leo found it difficult to support three persons from the scanty gains he made, and he accepted an offer from a Bavarian nobleman to visit Munich and make copies for him of some of the paintings collected there.

"He left his wife in Rome, but at the end of a few months he wrote to her to join him in Munich, as he obtained better prices there for his work than he could command in his native city. I assisted your mother to prepare for the journey; Clarie was to travel post with the courier of Count Borowski, a Polish nobleman, who had extended many kindnesses to Roselli and his wife, and she set out in high spirits to join her husband.

"Many weeks elapsed before she was heard from, and then came the dreadful news of the fate that had overtaken her. In winding over a mountain road which skirted a rapid stream, the carriage lost its balance and fell over the precipice into the raging waters below. As it fell the mother had presence of mind to cast her infant from the open window. The child's clothing caught upon the branches of some shrubs that grew on the edge of the precipice, and she was held there in safety till a stranger, who had witnessed the fearful accident, came to her rescue. You know the rest—the carriage was dashed into fragments, and the bodies of its occupants swept away. Claude Fontaine was the stranger, and you were the infant thrown upon his protection in this singular and most tragic manner."

Isola suddenly asked:

"Have you not known from the time of your arrival here how I came to be under Mr. Fontaine's care? Why then did you not at once recognize me as the child of your friend?"

She replied with truth:

"I only was told that he had found you homeless and motherless while travelling in Europe. It never occurred

to me to identify you as the daughter of Leo Roselli till the proof came to my eyes in the shape of the singular mark you bear upon your person. Then I inquired into all the particulars of your adoption by Claude Fontaine, and the story tallied exactly with the facts already known to me."

"And this mark? What caused it? I have such a thrilling horror of blood that I have sometimes thought some fatal accident must have given me this birth mark."

"Dismiss all such fancies then; for it was occasioned by a bottle of Burgundy falling from a shelf and breaking against the shoulder of your mother while she was engaged in some household duty. But you do not inquire of your father. Have you no wish to be restored to his arms? I assure you that he sought to recover you for several years, but failed to find any clue to you. He has never married a second time, but has spent his life in wandering from land to land in the hope of recovering his child. Strange as it may seem to you, he is in this country at the present time. Only two weeks ago I had a letter from him, in which he informed me that he came to New Orleans as scene painter to a company of French comedians who have had great success there."

"To be sure, it is a great fall for you, my dear, to come down from the height of Claude Fontaine's heiress to such a station as that. But your father is a most respectable man, in spite of the evil fortune that has brought him lower and lower every year, till now he is glad to get his living in any honest way."

"And I shall not respect him less for his willingness to do so," said Isola, with emotion. "If my father still loves me, still desires to claim me, it is my first duty to go to him, whether his station is humble or lofty. If I could be of use to him who has so long been a parent to me, I should feel that my place is still here; but, alas! my presence only excites and annoys him whom it could once soothe. If

Miss Carleton will consent to relinquish her claims on me, I will, if he desires it, prepare at once to join my father."

"There is no doubt that he wishes it above all things. He will be wild with joy when he hears that you are found."

"But, Madam, he may find me a burden to his slender resources. I should be unwilling to become that, even to my own father."

"He will never regard you in that light, for the most yearning desire of his heart has been for years to reclaim you. So soon as I made the discovery that enabled me to identify you, I wrote to him, and in a few weeks he will doubtless be here. You can spend the interval with your friends, but Leo will certainly claim you, and insist that you shall go with him."

Isola listened with a feeling of bewilderment, and she reproached herself with feeling no elation at the prospect of meeting her unknown father. She thought of George Berkely, and a cold fear swept through her heart that this discovery would put his love to a sterner test than loss of fortune had been to Philip. She said, after a painful pause:

"Describe my father to me, if you please, Senora. I have a great desire to learn something of his appearance and habits."

"He is a tall, dark man, rather heavy in person, for his misfortunes have caused poor Leo to indulge in wine rather more freely than is good for him. But aside from that failing, he is a very good man."

Isola shuddered, and her heart recoiled in spite of herself from this unknown parent. A drunkard! an attaché to a company of wandering players! what could she look forward to in the associations to which he would introduce her but disgust and degradation?—she who had been so carefully, so fastidiously reared? And in spite of her efforts to keep them back, tears sprang to her eyes.

Having accomplished her task, the Senora arose, and, with assumed sympathy, said:

"I see that you are overcome by the excitement of this discovery, Isola, so I will leave you to recover your composure. By the way, your name was Clarie in the days of your infancy, but I suppose you will choose to retain the one given you by Mr. Fontaine."

"Certainly, Madam; I have known no other; and the expressive name he bestowed on me is best suited to my position."

"How can that be, when I tell you that a doting father is ready to take you to his heart? You will no longer be isolated."

"I hope it may prove so, Madam; but I am afraid there will be little sympathy between my father's habits and my own. That is, if your description of him is correct."

The Senora sneered:

"I see very plainly how it is. You are unwilling to give up the ease in which you have so long lived. You are afraid that the scene painter's daughter will no longer be considered the equal of the aristocratic Berkelys; and since Philip Vane is beyond your reach, you have made up your mind to take the next best that offered. I agree with you. George Berkely will now never stoop to lift you to his level; and if he would, your father would refuse to permit you to remain with his family till he returns from Europe."

Miss Carleton had opened the door, expecting to find Isola alone, and the concluding words of the Senora fell with startling distinctness on her ear. She came forward as soon as she recovered from her astonishment sufficiently to move, and spoke, with chilling hauteur:

"You answer for the Berkelys, Madam, in a most summary manner. What am I to understand by such language addressed to the adopted daughter of Mr. Fontaine, and also to one I have taken under my protection? I am sorry to find that Isola so greatly needs a friend in this house."

The Senora turned to her quite unmoved; she calmly said:

"I have only been showing this young girl the actual position she holds in society; and in place of manifesting some feeling toward the father I have assured her is still living, she evidently shrinks from the thought of being claimed by him because he is poor, and follows an humble calling."

Miss Carleton listened in incredulous surprise

"Her father known to you! Why, then, has this important secret been so long withheld?"

"Because I was only aware of it myself a few days since. If you will give me your attention a few moments, I will explain to you all that is known to me with reference to Isola's parentage."

Miss Carleton took off her wrappings, sat down, and signified her readiness to attend to the promised revelation. The Senora then went over the same story she had told Isola without making a single variation.

At its close, Miss Carleton asked:

"Why should you infer that Isola will be less acceptable to our family as the future wife of George, even if her father is reduced to the necessity of gaining his bread by painting scenery for a theatre? You say that Senor Roselli was once a respectable artist, and associated with men of cultivation; he must therefore be a gentleman himself, and no one who knows Isola can doubt that she is a lady, not only by education but by birth. I, in my turn, will answer for the Berkelys that the scene painter's daughter will be welcome among them for her own intrinsic worth; and I insist that in her intercourse with you, Isola shall be treated with the respect due to her future position, since you have laid aside all that Mr. Fontaine's affection should have invested her with."

"Really, Miss Carleton," said the Senora, with a red

spot glowing in the centre of her sallow cheek, "your infatuation about this girl leads you to forget what is due to me in the house of my niece. I am not accustomed to be taken to task by any one, and I cannot see why such a fuss should be made about what is said to so insignificant a chit as Isola. As long as she stays here, I shall take the liberty of speaking my mind to her."

"I am happy to inform you that you will have that privilege but a few hours longer, for I shall take her with me to the Vale to-morrow morning, to remain there till this newly found father seeks her at my hands. If I find him worthy to claim such a gem, I will give her up; if not, I will make such terms with him as will induce him to surrender his parental authority to me."

"The last you will find rather difficult, I fancy. But it is as well for Isola to leave *this* house, for to-morrow Mr. and Mrs. Vane return to it to take up their abode; and after all that has passed with reference to *him*, I fancy it will be as well for the forsaken one to seek another shelter."

With this Parthian shaft she swept from the room, and Miss Carleton, turning toward Isola, took her hand in her own, and tenderly pressed it, as she said:

"Do not heed her malice, my love; she hates you, and strives to wound you in every way. What is your opinion of the story she has related to you? Do you feel as if this man can really be your father?"

"I cannot tell—my instinct leads me to doubt everything Senora Roselli says. When he comes, perhaps I shall be able to judge; there should be some intuitive attraction between those so nearly related; but all this seems so strange that I am bewildered. To tell you the whole truth, cousin Carrie, I am afraid that I was rather humiliated at the thought of my unknown father's humble calling."

"Isola," said Miss Carleton, with energy, "I believe these people have made up this story to get rid of you."

They will bring forward some low creature to personate your father, that it may drag you down to the valley of humiliation to which they wish to bring you. But there is one comfort, my dear; I have more money than I know what to do with, and I can bribe him to leave you with me. I promised George to be your friend, and I will stand by you in every difficulty."

"Oh, cousin Carrie, you overwhelm me with kindness. I can never—never repay you. But do you really think Senora Roselli capable of such wickedness as that?"

"We are told to 'judge not, lest we be judged;' but I am afraid there is too little charity in my heart toward these people to refrain from doing so in their case. I have had strange misgivings toward them from the first, and my observations since I have been staying here have only tended to confirm them. Oh! I wish, I wish that I could remove another from their influence as easily as I can remove you. But that is impossible; I have no power to do so; but now Philip is coming, I hope for the sake of other days that he will see that every attention is given to Mr. Fontaine."

"He will surely do that; and Savella has a good heart; she seems to be attached to her uncle. If I could be of any service to him I would remain here, unpleasant as it would be to live in the house of which Philip Vane is the master. But my father seems utterly estranged from me; even the sound of my voice excites him so much that Dr. Sinclair prohibits me from speaking where he can hear me. Dear cousin Carrie, you do not know how deep a wound this estrangement inflicts on me. If he would only love me as in other days—only let me minister to him—I should be almost happy again; but the strange fantasy possesses him that a voice constantly warns him not to permit me to approach him."

"I know it, my love. I have seen Mr. Fontaine since I came hither; I have talked with him, and he repeated the

same thing to me.—Alas! Isola, I sadly fear that we must relinquish all hope of his final restoration. Claude Fontaine is a ruin, but a noble ruin still."

Isola kissed away the tear that rolled over the speaker's cheek, and both remained silent many moments. Then an earnest and confidential conversation ensued, in which Miss Carleton expressed the conviction that Isola was to be made the victim of a conspiracy, from which she declared her determination to rescue her at all hazards. She ordered her supper to be brought up with Isola's, and remained with her till she saw her comfortably fixed for the night.

On the following morning the carriage came over for them at an early hour, and immediately after breakfast the two ladies set out for the Vale. At the last moment it was very hard for Isola to tear herself away, for the servants crowded around her with tears and blessings, and she could scarcely realize that she was bidding adieu to the home of her childhood perhaps forever.

As a parting favor, Dr. Sinclair permitted her to look upon Fontaine behind the friendly shelter of the curtain, and she was glad to see that his physical health seemed to suffer little, although his restless movements and the expression of his face showed her that his mind was far from being at ease. She wept many bitter tears as she tore herself away, and, as a parting shaft, the Senora said:

"Make the most of your time with your friends, Isola, for your father will doubtless soon be here to claim you. In a few days I shall look for a letter from him in reply to the one in which I informed him of my discovery. I will send it over to you when it arrives."

"Do so, Madame," said Miss Carleton, "that we may form our own judgment as to the validity of his pretensions."

And the carriage was driven away to make room for one

that had just entered the lower gate, which was at once recognized as that of Mr. Vane.

As Philip and his bride came up on one side of the wide carriage sweep, Isola was borne away on the opposite one. They did not meet; but Savella waved her handkerchief to the dethroned heiress as she drove in to take possession of the inheritance she had been taught to look on as her own.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PHILIP'S PRIDE HUMBLLED.

THERE was a faint feeling of sympathy for Isola in the heart of her triumphant rival; but it was neutralized by the jealous fear that in the depths of his heart Philip still cherished a tender weakness toward her.

His conduct on the previous day, when her possible union with George Berkely had been spoken of, had roused this serpent into life, and Savella began to feel that, where so much was given on her side, an adequate return could scarcely be expected from the object of her idolatry.

"I am glad they are gone," said Philip, "for it would have been unpleasant to meet them under present circumstances. The Berkelys slighted our invitation to the reception, and I have no fancy to have my happiness clouded by one of Miss Carleton's proud looks."

"Pooh! Philip, why should you care for Miss Carleton, or any one else beside me? You are not dependent on her, or any of her family, for prosperity or happiness. We can live as well without the Berkelys as they can without us. As to Miss Carleton, I don't care to have her keen eyes scanning everything in my house. Here we are at the door, and I welcome you, my king, to the realm you are henceforth to reign over."

"And a royal dower it is, my liege lady," replied Philip, in the same strain, as he lifted her hand to his lips.

With a flourishing bow, the black footman opened the carriage door and let down the steps. Philip sprang out and assisted Savella to alight, and the two ascended the steps of the piazza with their arms linked together.

The Senora, endeavoring to smooth the frown from her brow, and Summerton, smiling blandly, stood ready to welcome them. Savella glanced from one to the other, and flippantly asked:

"Is it peace or war between us? Your face, Mr. Summerton, says the former; but my aunt's, in spite of her conciliating letter, tells a different story. I would not advise hostilities, for I come armed at all points."

The Senora advanced toward her, opened her arms, and in a tragic tone said:

"My face belies my heart, then, Savella. In spite of all, it is still open to you. You have blighted my fairest hopes for you; but my regrets are softened by the thought that you have at least chosen a gentleman and a man of honor for the future guide of your life."

"Mercy, aunt, that sounds as if it had been prepared for the occasion. Philip is all that, and more, too; so let us shake hands and be good friends all around."

"That is the most sensible advice that could be given," said Summerton, suavely; "here is my hand, Mr. Vane, and I welcome you to your future home."

The Senora also offered hers, and the four went in together after the young couple had spoken a few gracious words to the servants, who still lingered on the piazza to witness the reception of their new mistress.

They entered the parlor, and after a few moments of conversation, Savella arose and said she would retire to her own apartment. She was soon followed by Philip, and the two, who felt so little love for them, were left together to mature

their plans for bending the exultant bridegroom to their own purposes.

"He thinks he is lord of all," said the Italian with bitterness. "His manner from the first moment, showed me that he meant to be master from this time forth. Ha! ha! how little he dreams of what is hanging over him."

"He shall not remain long under his present delusion," replied Summerton; "the sooner he knows the ground he stands on, the easier it will be for him to bend his proud neck to the yoke I mean to put upon it. Such a man as this Vane I can read through and through, and he will cringe to me at once when he knows the power I have to ruin him."

"Yes—I have changed my mind—humble him soon—make him bow down before me, for I hate his insolent face, handsome as it certainly is. Savella will let him trample on us unless he is kept in order."

"I shall avail myself of the first opening to take him into our confidence. One will not long be wanting, for I consider Savella's words as a declaration of war."

"If it comes to that we shall see whose weapons are strongest."

With this menace they parted. A few days of scrupulous politeness on the part of both belligerents passed away. The desire of Philip to carry out his wishes with reference to these unwelcome guests increased with every hour. He felt that they were acting a part both to himself and Savella, and he impatiently waited for some pretext to speak openly of their return to Europe.

Summerton himself afforded it. When he and Philip were left together, about a week after his arrival at La Fontaine, he suddenly said:

"My occupation is gone now, I suppose. Mrs. Vane will scarcely consider a tutor a necessary appendage to her new state. I think it better always to have a clear idea of one's

position, and I wish to know what mine is to be in this house under the rule of its new master."

There was an expression on his face which Philip did not like, and he coldly replied:

"I do not suppose you will desire to remain here under present circumstances, Mr. Summerton. I have no more need of a domestic chaplain than Mrs. Vane has of a tutor; but I shall be happy to recommend you in either capacity to my friends, if it is your wish to remain in this country."

"Then it is your purpose to set me adrift as soon as possible? I suspected as much; but I can say as Savella did on her return here,—I am armed at all points."

He looked defiantly in Philip's face, who replied with some heat:

"I am at a loss to understand you, sir; but I wish *you* to understand that I am not a person to be bullied into retaining the services of an individual who has no claim on me except for the sum of money that may be due him for such services as he has performed."

"No claim!" repeated Mr. Summerton. "No claim on you, when you are the husband of the child for whose sake I have made so many sacrifices? Has Savella told you that to *me* she owes her education; to me the discovery of her uncle's place of abode, and the establishment of her rights as the heiress of his estate? If such services as these merit no better reward than you propose, I am greatly mistaken."

"Make out your account, with ample interest, for all that Mrs. Vane has cost you, Mr. Summerton, and I will settle it without demur. Beyond that, you have nothing to hope from me," said Philip, decisively. "I intend to be master in my own house, and as the first step toward it, it is my purpose to dismiss those who have tyrannized over my wife from her childhood. She has told me enough of the treatment she received from both you and her aunt to enlighten me painfully as to the sort of care she has had from you."

"What! that noble, self-sacrificing woman, Senora Roselli, is also to be sent away from the petted darling of her life! I advise you to think twice, Mr. Vane, before you attempt so high-handed a proceeding as that. Believe me, it will be to your *interest* to do so."

The smooth tones of his insinuating voice irritated Philip, and he hastily said:

"I am not accustomed to be dictated to, Mr. Summerton. I do not submit to it from my own parents, and I am not likely to submit to it from you, even with the Senora to back you. I have married Miss Fontaine, but I have not wedded myself to her connections, who, to speak plainly, are distasteful to me."

The listener shrugged his shoulders with provoking coolness.

"Upon my word, Mr. Philip Vane, you have lost no time in letting me see into your mind. I must inform you, however, that it is my intention, and that of the lady to whom you so irreverently refer, to remain at La Fontaine at least as long as you do. And when you know as much as I can tell you, you will find it necessary to submit gracefully to the infliction of our presence."

Philip glared on the placid face and smiling lips of Summerton, and angrily replied:

"You can tell me nothing that will induce me to consent to such an arrangement as that. I should have tolerated your presence a few weeks, and dismissed you politely, if you had not thrust this discussion upon me, yourself. Since you will have your position defined, understand that I have made up my mind to provide handsomely for Senora Roselli, and she can return to her native land, taking you as her companion, since I am told she is unwilling to part from you. If that satisfies you, sir, it is well; if not, it is also well."

"So in your blindness of heart you doubtless think, my

son," said Summerton, in a paternal tone; "but when you are enlightened as to *all* the claims we have on her who is now your wife, perhaps you will speak differently. You will then be as glad to retain us near you, as you now are to get rid of us. Oh, Mr. Vane, a few words I can whisper in your ear; the sight of a few documents in my possession, will change your tone wonderfully—miraculously."

Philip was now trembling with anger and indignation, with which a little fear was mingled. He haughtily said:

"Show me those papers; speak the magical words which are to produce so marvellous a change in my wishes as to induce me to keep near me persons as distasteful to me as you and the Senora are."

"Come with me into my room, and I will gratify you," replied Summerton, with perfect self-possession. "The sooner we now arrive at a correct understanding of our mutual positions the better for all parties concerned."

He arose, and glided from the room with his usual stealthy step, and Philip strode after him with a storm of passion and defiance raging in his breast.

What could this insolence portend? To be defied thus on the threshold of his new Paradise was more than he had patience to bear. What could this insolent man mean by his assumption of authority over him, beneath the very roof he now regarded as his own?

The door of Summerton's apartment closed upon the two, and they remained locked up together for two long hours. More than once the voice of Philip was heard speaking in loud and passionate tones, to which his companion replied without any show of resentment; but what the subject of contention was no one knew save Senora Roselli, who flitted past the door more than once, and gazed with apprehensive face upon the blank pannels. They told her nothing, and she was compelled to wait till the interview ended to have her fears set at rest.

Philip at last came out, looking more like a man who had passed through an exhausting spell of illness than the buoyant bridegroom of a few days ago. He had scarcely passed from her sight before the Senora rushed into the room of Summerton, and rapidly asked :

"Have you conquered? Does he submit to our terms?"

"Of course he does. I knew the man I had to deal with. Henceforth I am master in this place, and Philip Vane is only my deputy."

"Thomas, you are a wonderful man! Your acuteness surpasses even mine!" was the admiring response. "At the last, I feared we might be too precipitate."

"Not at all too much so. I did not wish that young gentleman to feel too securely seated in the saddle before I put the curb rein on. He understands his true position now, and no spaniel will be more obedient to the command of his master than he will be to mine."

"But if he should betray all to Savella——"

"I warned him against that, and he seemed glad to find that she is not in our counsels."

The first dinner-bell here sounded, and the Senora hastened to her room to prepare her toilette."

Philip moodily paced the piazza till he saw Savella descending the staircase, looking very ill-pleased. He smoothed his troubled brow, assumed a smile that was almost ghastly, and went forward to offer his arm to escort her to the dining-room. She pouted, and said :

"I have been alone all the morning. What on earth have you and Mr. Summerton been talking so loud about? Celia said she heard your voices in the hall."

"We were discussing important business, and I am afraid I lost my temper, that is all."

"I think he might let such things alone, at least till our honeymoon is over. But, my dear Philip, I did not believe you could be cross."

"Oh, you don't know me yet, Savella. I am very easily irritated, but to *you* I shall always be kind. You must not mind what I may say or do to others, for I am not always my own master. However, so far as Mr. Summerton is concerned, all is fair weather between us now. He is a remarkable man in many respects, and I begin already to see that his shrewdness can be of great service to me in managing the complicated affairs of this estate."

Savella regarded him with an expression of extreme surprise. She abruptly said :

"Then both will stay, for my aunt will never go away without him."

"Yes, they will stay," he briefly replied.

"But I do not wish it. I thought you fully understood that."

"My dear Savella," said Philip, in his most ingratiating manner, "on reflection, I cannot bear that you shall be branded with ingratitude to the woman who has been a second mother to you. Therefore, Senora Roselli had better remain at La Fontaine."

"Oh fudge! I should not care for what the world might say. But since *you* wish them to remain, I will not insist on their expulsion."

The dinner was exquisite and elegantly served, but Philip Vane had never enjoyed one less. Summerton talked a great deal, and in a very entertaining manner; but the young man listened to his well-turned periods with a sick heart, and the bitter conviction that he who had never before bowed his imperious head even to the mandate of paternal authority, was now absolutely under the control of two creatures whom in his heart he termed reptiles, spawn of the earth, and every other disparaging epithet of which he could think. But amid all, he smiled his ghastly smile, and mechanically replied to the words addressed to him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ISOLA'S PRETENDED FATHER ARRIVES.

ON the second day after Isola's arrival at the Vale, Fanny set out for Lynchburg, where she was to join her aunt and proceed with her to Richmond. The strange revelation made by Senora Roselli was fully discussed in the family circle, before her departure, and they all inclined to the opinion expressed by Miss Carleton that it was a device of the Italian to humiliate the object of her aversion.

When Fanny parted from her friend, she said :

"Don't be spirited away while I am gone, Isola. Even if your true father should turn up, you now belong to us as the betrothed bride of George. If I thought you could be tempted to leave us I would write to my brother to fly back on the wings of love to oppose the authority of a husband against the claims of a parent who has never known you."

"My dear Fanny, I leave my fate in cousin Carrie's hands. What she thinks right I shall do."

"Then you're safe enough, for cousin Carrie is not going to give you up at all. She has made up her mind that this man is an impostor, and so have I. Good-bye, darling ; I wish you were going with me ; half the pleasure of my trip will be marred by my separation from you. I always expected that we would go to Richmond together, and it is too bad that I can't have you along."

"You will have Augusta Stuart ; you will scarcely miss me, Fanny."

"Gussy is a good girl, but she is not half as dear to me as you, you little witch. Somehow, you manage to make us all feel that there is nobody like you."

"I am glad you think so, dear Fanny, for the kind appreciation of my friends makes my happiness."

"Write to me every week," was Fanny's parting injunction, "and tell me everything that goes on here, even to how Dashaway and Ponto get along."

The promise was readily given, and the carriage rolled away, bearing Mrs. Berkely and her daughter.

At the end of ten days a note came from Senora Roselli in which was enclosed a letter written on coarse paper, in a sprawling, unpracticed-looking hand. The Senora merely said :

"The enclosed reached me this morning ; it is from your father, and you can see for yourself what he says. B. R."

With a faint sickness at her heart, Isola opened the uninviting looking manuscript, and saw that it was written in Italian. She had taken lessons in that language from Summerton since his residence at La Fontaine, and with the assistance of Miss Carleton, she translated the following rhapsody :

"My prayers are at last answered. God, the eternal, the beneficent ruler of the world has vouchsafed to me the blessing I have so long and earnestly prayed for. My child, my Clari, will be restored to my arms, and to you, friend of my early days, I owe this blissful discovery.

"You knew her sainted mother in days of yore ; oh, say, does my daughter bear upon her features the stamp of her lineage ? Has she the witching grace, the soul-beaming eyes of my immolated love ? Does her voice flow in silvery accents from lips of rose ? for my lost angel was the loveliest of women. The sons of light envied me the possession of this perfect specimen of humanity, and they doomed her precious body to destruction in the turbid waves of that roaring river, that they might translate her beautiful spirit to their own heaven.

"My life, my joy, my hope was engulfed beneath the

raging billows, and I was left to walk the earth desolate and alone. My child was saved almost by a miracle, and for years I have wandered up and down the earth seeking her; till now, in vain.

"As a last hope, I came to this country; for I could not discover the nationality of the noble man who rescued her from the jaws of impending fate. The people of the little village near which the accident happened, said that he was English; but after seeking him in vain in England, I concluded that he might be a native of this great country. With this forlorn hope I came hither, and, lo! it has become an ecstatic certainty!

"I fly to claim my child; she shall be my joy, my pride in all the years to come. Bianca, the gratitude I owe you is beyond expression. Tell my daughter all, that she may be prepared to receive me, for I shall swiftly follow this letter. Once more I shall behold her! Oh, joy! to clasp my recovered treasure to my heart, nevermore to be separated from her. Henceforth she is mine alone; for every other tie must sink into insignificance before the duty and affection due to the parent who has so long been defrauded of his just rights.

LEONARDO ROSELLI."

When Isola and her friend had gathered the sense of this extraordinary epistle, she looked appealingly to Miss Carleton, who seriously said:

"My dear child, after reading these lines I am only more deeply convinced that my first suspicion is correct. The writer of this absurd rhodomontade is not your father. I can see nothing genuine in this production; it is the ranting of a man who has been accustomed to stage effect, and not the outpouring of a parent's love for a long-lost daughter. How does it affect you, Isola? Has it touched your heart?"

"I do not know; I am afraid that I dread his advent too

much to do justice to his expressions of affection. Oh, cousin Carrie, I feel that I am unnatural, for my pride struggles against the possibility that the writer of this may indeed be my father. Yet he may be after all. What motive can Senora Roselli have for practising such a deception as this?"

"I cannot penetrate her motives, and I confess that the desire to humiliate you does not seem to be a sufficient cause for carrying out such a scheme as this. Yet the conviction is strong within my heart that the whole affair is a base deception which we shall some day fathom. We shall be better able to decide as to the genuineness of his pretensions after we have seen this Roselli. The fact of his connection with the Senora does not raise him in my estimation."

The next few days were spent by Isola in a state of tremulous excitement which she found it impossible to control. A heavy snow lay upon the ground, and sleighing parties from the neighborhood often called at the Vale. With every jingling sound of bells she started and grew pale, fearing that this time they heralded the arrival of the dreaded stranger; but still he came not.

At the end of a week a note came from Summerton stating that Leonardo Roselli was then at La Fontaine, and in two more hours they would come together to the Vale. Poor Isola! the intervening time was spent in a pitiable state of agitation, and when the two visitors alighted at the door she felt as if her senses must desert her.

General Berkely and Miss Carleton were both with her to sustain her in the coming interview, and, rallying all her strength, Isola sat white and rigid, her eyes fixed immovably upon the door.

It opened, and Summerton entered, followed by a dark, coarse-looking man, whose unwieldy person was thrust into a suit of fashionably made clothes which did not seem to have been originally intended for him. His coarse, rusty-

looking black hair was parted in front like a woman's, and fell in straight lines over his ears. His sallow complexion, prominent features, and deep-set black eyes, presented by no means an agreeable or prepossessing aspect to strangers.

General Berkely went forward to meet them, and Summerton presented his friend to him :

"This, General Berkely, is Senor Roselli, an old and valued friend of mine, who comes to claim his long lost child at your hands."

In deeply tragic tones the stranger now spoke. His accent was very imperfect; but he seemed to have a sufficient knowledge of English to express himself with ease.

"Which is my daughter, sir? Have pity on my impatience, and tell me if yonder fairy is my joy, my angel child."

Isola impulsively arose, and Roselli rushed toward her as rapidly as his size would permit.

"Ha! that movement assures me that 'tis she! Come to my heart—I see—I see the eyes of my long lost Clari beaming on me once more. Oh! I am blessed, I am supremely blessed! What is this! You refuse to come to my arms when they are opened to invite you to your true resting place, the bosom from which you have too long been severed!"

In spite of her efforts to control the expression of her feelings, Isola recoiled from him; and in place of accepting the proffered paternal embrace, she screened herself behind Miss Carleton.

Roselli glowered on her with his bead-like eyes, and she faintly said :

"Pardon me, sir; but if you are indeed my father you are yet a stranger to me, and—and I must learn to know you before I can be caressed by you."

"Ah, what angelic delicacy. I respect your sense of propriety, my daughter, and I will not insist on clasping

you to my beating heart. I can wait till you have learned to love me."

Then turning to Miss Carleton, he said :

"And this lady is the friend who has stepped forward to your assistance in the hour of your need. Dear lady, I thank you as only a father *can* thank her who has taken his darling to her heart."

"Pray be seated, Senor," said Miss Carleton, with dignity. "Before admitting your claims to Isola, General Berkely wishes to have some serious conversation with you."

"Before admitting my claims to my own child! Does any one doubt them? Good heavens! when I have spent my life in seeking for my daughter, it seems hard indeed to have my right questioned. Do you hear this, Summerton? My friend, how is this, that I am met with mistrust that is insulting in the house of an American milor?"

"General Berkely is unwilling to give up this young lady to a stranger, and it is just that he shall require proof of the validity of your pretensions. We can soon show him that they are genuine, if he will favor us with a few moments' private conversation."

The old gentleman bowed, and led the way to his library; when there, he coldly said :

"I am quite ready to examine your proofs, Signor Roselli; but I warn you that they must be without flaw. Even then I shall scarcely be willing to surrender Isola to your protection."

"They are here," said Summerton, who now took on himself the management of the affair. "Here are two certificates, General Berkely; one of the marriage of Leonardo Roselli and Clari Rossi, the other of the birth of their daughter, Clari Roselli, in Rome, on the fifteenth of May, eighteen hundred and thirty-five. Here is a miniature of her mother, and in it you can yourself see many traits of resemblance to Isola."

General Berkely glanced over the papers; but as they were written in a language he did not understand, they could not convey much information to him; but the miniature gave a pang to his heart, for its strong resemblance to Isola left him no room to doubt that the original was indeed her mother. He examined it carefully, and then said:

"If this lady was really your wife, Senor, there is little room to doubt that she was the mother of my young friend. I beg your pardon for questioning the validity of your claim, but my own reluctance to part from her who is pledged to become the future wife of my grandson, is my excuse."

"My heart can excuse any weakness toward my angel child, General Berkely; but I am sorry to learn that she has formed such ties with your grandson. Her fate, almost from the first hour of her life, was settled. My daughter has been dedicated to the cloister from her infancy."

General Berkely regarded him with dilating eyes.

"What can you mean, Signor?"

"Exactly what I have said. When Clari was but a few days old, she was ill unto death. Her mother prayed with me that her life might be spared, and we jointly promised that if she was given back to us, we would dedicate her to the service of heaven. She was restored to health, and I feel myself bound to fulfil the vow made by my dead wife, even if I could fail in keeping my own."

"It seems to me, Signor, that if such is your intention, you had better have suffered your daughter to remain unclaimed. I assure you that it will destroy the happiness of Isola to be separated from her lover; and George will never give her up."

"It matters not; she must submit," replied Roselli, with emphasis. "My authority over her is paramount to all others, and that of my vow over me is equally binding. I

shall, at the same time, enter a religious house myself, that I may have access to my angel child."

General Berkely could not forbear saying:

"You seem as little fitted for that calling, Signor, as any one I have ever met. If you attempt to force this destiny upon your daughter, I frankly tell you it will be committing a great wrong against her."

"She will ultimately submit. I will place her among those who will win her over to see the beauty of the self-sacrifice which lifts from her mother the sin of her unfulfilled vow."

He seemed to speak with earnestness and feeling, and the old gentleman replied:

"Your daughter is the plighted bride of my grandson; *her* promise should certainly have as much weight with you as the vow you rashly made. Better that she should have died in her infancy, than live to have her brightest hopes sacrificed to your will."

"Your views and Roselli's can never coincide on that subject, General," said Summerton. "But I agree with him that his vow is more binding than any subsequent one made by the being over whom nature has invested him with absolute control."

"Excuse me, sir, but I cannot agree with you. Isola, as a responsible human creature, has the right to choose her own destiny; and she shall exercise that right," replied General Berkely, decisively. "I also have something to say in the settlement of a question which vitally involves the happiness of my grandson. His betrothed wife belongs almost as much to me as to the father who has been so long unknown to her."

"Sir, this is a strange assumption of authority on your part," said Roselli, in a blustering tone. "My angel child will listen to me; she must fly to me as her dearest refuge on earth."

"Hush that trash and be silent, if you cannot talk sense," whispered Summerton to the poor actor, in menacing tones. "The man you have to deal with is no fool, if you are one."

Thus summarily stopped in mid career, Roselli threw up his hands, and clasping them over his face said, in heart-broken tones:

"If she refuses to respond to my love, I am lost—lost. My friend, I am too much overcome to talk; pray speak to my child, and influence her to do what is right. Summon her thither."

"No," said General Berkely. "Isola shall be spared that painful ordeal. I will send Miss Carleton in to speak with you, at her own desire. She has some potent arguments to offer to induce you to relinquish your daughter to her. I will go with Mr. Summerton into the next room, and she will join you immediately."

The afflicted father seemed scarcely to hear him, and the two went out together. To the inquiring look of Miss Carleton, and the imploring expression of Isola, General Berkely reluctantly replied by saying:

"I am afraid the claim is made good; but have no fears, Isola; I will not give you up without a bitter struggle."

For an instant she seemed as if fainting, but she recovered composure and presently said:

"Since *you* are satisfied, sir, I must believe that I am the daughter of—of——"

Her voice failed her, and kindly taking her hand, the old gentleman said to Miss Carleton:

"Go into the library, Carrie, and see what terms you can make to retain our child. Excuse me, Mr. Summerton, but your friend seems to me to be a person who will not be inaccessible to reason."

Summerton shook his head doubtfully:

"I cannot tell. So great is my interest in the happiness of this young lady, that I could wish he might be induced to change his views with regard to her."

Miss Carleton left the room, and Isola apprehensively asked:

"What are his views? What does he propose to do with me? Oh! General Berkely, keep me here; I cannot go with this stranger, even if he is my father."

"Then you shall not—I will use all my power to protect you."

She clung to the paternal hand that held hers as if it was her last stay, while Summerton regarded her with a singular expression, in which craft and exultation were blended. He seemed to have little care as to the result, for he felt secure of holding the thread of her destiny in his hands, and struggle as she might, she was powerless to extricate herself from the subtle meshes of the web he was weaving around her.

He walked the floor, seemingly in meditation, till Miss Carleton again joined them. She came in smiling, and walking straight to Isola, took her in her arms and said:

"Now you belong to me. Your father has listened to my representations, and—and he has relinquished his rights to me."

Isola could scarcely believe this grateful assurance. She still trembled and doubted, but Roselli, who followed Miss Carleton, approached her, and took her hand respectfully in his own:

"My angel child, I have consented to peril my soul's salvation that your earthly happiness may be secured. With the dross of earth, your friend has purchased the right to take my place. I will go, my child, since I see that my presence does not bring you happiness. I will seek you no more. I leave with you the picture of your sainted mother; it would henceforth break my heart to look upon it, and feel that I have been untrue to the vow we both made over your infant couch."

Isola held out her hand to receive the miniature, and after glancing at it, pressed it to her lips.

"I have no words to thank you for the concession you have made. This image shall be tenderly cherished, and for you I will seek to cultivate that feeling of affection which is due to you as my father."

"I must endeavor to satisfy myself with that," he replied with mournful emphasis. "Adieu, my angel! Come, Summerton; my heart is broken, and I must seek solitude to regain composure."

He pressed the hand of Isola to his lips, and although she made an effort to arise and offer him her cheek to kiss, she felt that it was impossible to bring herself to do so; and Miss Carleton pressed her arm around her and held her firmly to herself as if unwilling that she should do so. She whispered in her ear:

"Be still, Isola; this man is *not* your father. I care nothing for his proofs. If he really possesses parental authority over you, he would not so readily have yielded it."

With an air of profound affliction Roselli left the room, leaning on the arm of Summerton, and accompanied by the General. When the door was closed, Isola faintly asked:

"Oh, cousin Carrie, how did you save me from him?"

"By the offer of money, my love. In exchange for an order on the bank in Lynchburg for fifteen hundred dollars, he gave me a paper in which he relinquishes all right to you. There—look up, Isola; you belong now only to me, and my first care shall be to secure your happiness and that of my dear George. I have long designed the larger part of my fortune for him, for I shall never marry; and I can make no better use of a portion of it than to save his darling for him. Is it not so?" and the kind eyes that looked into hers were beaming with the most tender affection.

"I thank you with all my heart; but, oh! if I am indeed the child of that man, what a dreadful humiliation it

is to me to think that he would take money from those who have been friends to me when I most needed help."

"Isola," said Miss Carleton, in a voice of conviction, "I again repeat to you that Signor Roselli is not your father. I gave him money as the easiest means of ridding you of his persecutions, but I have no faith in his pretensions."

"But this miniature—I am surely like it."

"The original of this picture may have been your mother, for you certainly resemble it, but that she was ever his wife I very strongly doubt. I think he can tell to whom you really belong if he could be induced to do so; but that you are *his* child, I will never believe. Come to my room, and compose yourself. The agitation of this scene has made you almost ill. You must write to George and tell him all that has happened here."

"Yes—and tell him what a deliverer you have been to me in my hour of need."

Her friend kissed her, and together they went to Miss Carleton's apartment.

In the meantime Summerton and his companion had driven away. They were no sooner on the public road than the former asked:

"How much did you make out of her?"

"Only fifteen hundred; but I believe if I had held out a little longer I could have extorted more."

"That seems quite enough for a sham claim in all conscience," said Summerton, drily. "I hardly thought she would come up to such a figure as that. What did you give her in return?"

"A relinquishment of all power over the girl. She would accept nothing less."

"If you intend to remain in this country, that might be troublesome; but as you will embark at once for Italy, when you have nabbed her, it's not of much consequence. I knew they would not give her up from the first, but I thought we

would see what they would do about it. I have enabled you to make this haul, and half the spoils are justly mine. The sum agreed on between you and Bianca has nothing to do with this."

Roselli at first demurred to this arrangement, but Summerton was firm and used such arguments with his colleague as finally convinced him that it was necessary to share his booty with him.

It was settled between them that they should go to Lynchburg the following morning, draw the money, and on his return to La Fontaine Summerton would cause it to be made known at the Vale that Roselli had departed never more to return.

Isola was in the habit of coming over to her old home on every bright day to inquire after Fontaine, and, if possible, obtain a glimpse of him from the library. On these occasions she never met Philip, and only spent a few moments with Savella before returning.

It was arranged between the confederates that on her return from La Fontaine the sleigh was to be stopped and the helpless girl conveyed by force to the nearest railroad station. In a few hours she would be safe in Baltimore, where Roselli could easily find a vessel bound to some European port.

Once out of the United States, he felt confident that he could answer for the safe-keeping of the hapless girl toward whom he had undertaken to play the part of a parent.

While Isola penned her letter to George Berkely, telling him of the strange events of the last few weeks, these two miscreants matured their plans and took every precaution to prevent them from being circumvented.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KIDNAPPED.

ON the third morning after the visit of Roselli, Miss Carleton received the following note from the Senora:

"MISS CARLETON.—*Dear Madam:* My poor friend Leo has left La Fontaine never more to return. With a heart filled with gratitude to you for all your kindness to his daughter, he begged me to express what his own emotions would not permit him to do. He is sorely wounded by the indifference Isola manifested toward him, and thinks her pride prevented her from showing the natural feelings of her heart. He hesitates to call her cold and ungrateful to the author of her being, yet he cannot help feeling that she has shown herself so.

"Tell her she need no longer fear to meet him here. She can come as usual to inquire after him who usurped the place in her affections which rightfully belong to her own father. I pitied poor Leo, and tried to console him for this bitter disappointment, for he hoped to meet a rich return for the love he so long cherished for his lost child; but he left me in a state bordering on distraction, and I do not know what may yet be the result of his despair. In the hope that he will attempt nothing dreadful, I am yours, respectfully,

"BIANCA ROSELLI.

Miss Carleton read this note and quietly placed it in her portfolio, as she mentally said:

"I fancy he will soon recover his equanimity. Such a man as *that* is not going to waste much feeling on anything that does not concern his own comfort."

She did not show it to Isola, but merely informed her that Roselli was gone, and she could venture to visit La Fontaine without danger of meeting him.

Isola was glad to receive this assurance, for she had not left the house since she became aware that her pretended father was in the neighborhood. Her affectionate heart yearned to be near Fontaine for a season, even if she was aware that her presence was unknown to him and could be of no possible benefit to him.

The sleigh was ordered to be in readiness immediately after dinner, and Miss Carleton declared her intention to accompany her; but just as they were preparing to set out some friends called at the Vale and detained her.

Unconscious of the snare prepared for her, Isola took her place in the vehicle, and was whirled over the glittering road as rapidly as two powerful and high-mettled horses could carry her. The only servant who attended her was the driver, a steady, middle-aged negro, who had held the office of coachman many years. Under Pompey's protection she felt perfectly safe, and the clear, bracing atmosphere exhilarated her spirits far above their late level.

When she reached La Fontaine she was looking almost like her former self; and Savella, who met her in the hall, exclaimed:

"You are positively brilliant to-day, Isola. The winter air has brought back all the roses to your cheeks. I only wish it would have that effect on mine, for Philip thinks nothing so beautiful as a fresh color. By the way, have you seen Philip since our marriage?"

"No; when I have been here he was always absent, and Mr. Vane has ceased his visits at the Vale."

"And for a very good reason," replied Savella, with a toss of her head. "The Berkely family have treated us with incivility since our marriage. They did not notice our wedding cards in any way; but for my part, I do not care, though Philip seems to take it to heart. He has become so moody and changed from his old merry self since we came here that sometimes I am half tempted to be jealous."

"Jealous! of who pray?" asked Isola, with an expression of surprise.

"How innocent you look. Of you, to be sure; who else should I be jealous of? But if I thought Philip cared the least little bit about you, I should be tempted to do something terrible." And she burst into a hysterical laugh.

By this time they had gained the sitting-room, and, shutting the door, Isola gravely said:

"My dear Savella, it is not well to play with edged tools. Philip cares no more for me than I do for him. If we once cherished a childish liking for each other, believe me that it is dead and buried long ago. If his spirits have failed, you may be sure it is from some cause quite disconnected with his past fancies. I ask as a favor you will never again speak to me in this way."

"How very dignified you have become since you have been adopted by Miss Carleton. I suppose you intend to imitate her grand manners; but they won't set well on you, child. You are too young to attempt her style with success. Heigho! I am in ill humor to-day, for Philip would go to Lynchburg with Mr. Summerton, though I am certain he had no business there. They don't intend to come back till to-morrow night; and just think how ill used I am. I have only been married three weeks, and here I am left in this old haunted house with no one to speak to but my aunt."

"Have the noises still continued? I thought the voice said they were to cease after I left."

"So they have; but once heard, you know, one is always in dread of their return. I wonder how I could ever have consented to come back here at all. But Philip is not superstitious, and he was so anxious to make himself at home here that I could not refuse. It's very strange—but he isn't half as merry and happy as he was at Dunlora. I have sent over for Mr. and Mrs. Vane, and they will stay with me till my truant returns. Oh! I love Philip so

dearly that even his father and mother are precious to me because they are his."

"That is perfectly natural and right, Savella. Philip will be gratified by your attention to his parents. Oh! I do hope that you will find all the happiness you anticipated in your union with him."

"Of course I shall. I hope you don't doubt it because I spoke in that silly manner when we first met. Philip is devoted to me, and I adore him; so you see we have the surest foundation for happiness. Oh, dear! I feel as if something terrible is looming over me; but you have got rid of your incubus, I hear. Your father has gone for good, and left you in the snug nest you have found for yourself. In your case, the old proverb is verified—'Tis better to be born lucky than rich.'"

While Savella ran on in this manner, it was easy to see that a weight pressed on her mind of which she was anxious to rid herself. Isola wondered if Philip had already betrayed to her that motives of interest led him to seek her hand; but she could not believe that he was reckless enough to inflict this blow in the first month of their union. After a few more moments of desultory conversation, she arose, and said:

"The afternoons are so short that I have not much time to stay. I will go into the library, and endeavor to get a glimpse of my poor father. Have you seen him lately?"

"Oh, no—I cannot bear to look on him; but he must be improving, for yesterday he wished to hear me play. By Dr. Sinclair's order the piano was removed into the library, and I spent two hours there playing the wild German music my uncle likes so much; but he did not come out of his room. The doctor told me that he lay back in his chair like one in a trance, and when he was tired, he made a motion with his hand to have me stop."

"Oh, how I wish that I could minister to him in this

way!" exclaimed Isola. "I would be willing to devote my life to his service."

"Well, I must say that I found it very tiresome to play in a darkened room, with no one to listen but a stupid old doctor and a half sleeping man," replied Savella, indifferently. "It's a pity you can't transfer to your own father a portion of the devotion you feel for Mr. Fontaine. He seemed in a terrible state when he came back from the Vale, and told us he had given you up, because he saw how reluctant you were to leave your friends there."

Isola changed color, and uneasily asked:

"Did he seem really afflicted, Savella? He talked so strangely, that I thought he was not more anxious to take me with him than I was to go."

"There you wrong Signor Roselli, my dear. He speaks extravagantly, because he has lived among actors till he has caught their manners; but I think he was sincere in his anguish when he found that the hope of his life was finally broken. It cost him great suffering to give you up, Isola."

Savella really believed this, for on his return to La Fontaine, Roselli had acted a most tragic scene in the presence of herself and her aunt, with the certainty that Savella would describe it to Isola, and thus prepare the way for the subsequent acts of the drama. She stood a few moments without speaking, but Savella saw from the changes in her companion's face that her heart was deeply touched. At length she said:

"I hoped that it would not make him very miserable to leave me. He has never had me with him, and I cannot therefore be necessary to his happiness."

"My dear, your father seems to be a romantic man, and peculiar as his manners are, I think he has very ardent feelings. He seemed quite crushed when he took leave of us. He said that he should return at once to Italy, as he could not remain in the same country with you without seeking your presence."

With a feeling of self-condemnation, Isola took leave of Savella, and slowly approached the apartment of Fontaine. She cautiously unclosed the library window, and flitting past Cæsar, who was fast asleep, she cautiously drew aside the folds of the curtain and looked into the larger room.

Fontaine was reading, and the evening light fell through the window upon his face. Isola thought it looked calmer than usual, but there was an air of lassitude and extreme dejection that alarmed her for his health. Her look seemed to disturb him, for he glanced uneasily toward the curtain, and commenced muttering something she could not understand.

Cæsar was aroused at once, and starting forward, hurriedly whispered :

"Dat you, Missy ? You'd better git out'n dis here, caze de doctor'd be mighty aggravoked if he knowed dat you'd come in widout his leave. Marse Claude aint no better, an' I's feared he's never gwine to be agin. Thar ! he's callin' me, an' I mus' go in. Please git out'n de way, dat I mayn't have to tell him no lies."

In spite of this entreaty, Isola lingered a few moments, till she heard the sound of that beloved voice speaking to the old man :

"Who was there, Cæsar ? I felt as if some one beside you was near me. Is—is any one here from the Vale ?"

"Ef you mean Miss Carrie, *she* aint here, sir. Ef you heard anythin', 'twas me a talkin' in my sleep ; for it's so still in thar, dat I can't help dozin' off sometimes."

Fontaine sighed heavily, and, after a pause, said :

"She will hardly come again. Raise the curtain, Cæsar ; I wish to go into the library and get another volume ; I have finished this."

Isola hurried away, and on the piazza encountered Senora Roselli, wrapped in a heavy shawl. She greeted her with more friendliness than usual, and said :

"I must congratulate you on the settlement of your affairs. You are to become a fixture at the Vale, I hear. I scarcely think that you have treated your father well, though. A more distressed creature I have seldom seen, and it would not surprise me if he did something desperate. Such a man as Leo would be capable even of committing suicide under the pressure of such mental suffering as he was enduring when he went away from us."

Isola looked distressed, but she said :

"I did what General Berkely and Miss Carleton thought right. I am sorry that my—that Signor Roselli took it so much to heart. If I had gone with him, I should have been miserable, and——"

The Senora interrupted her with a sneer :

"Say no more, child. I see that you think more of your own comfort and happiness than of anything else. I expected nothing better of you, and I warned poor Leo beforehand how the affair must end. A daughter, sustained in her disobedience by powerful friends, can, of course, send her humble father drifting down the tide ; but I must say that your selfishness and hard-heartedness are unparalleled in my experience."

"I will bid you good-afternoon, madam," said Isola, proudly. "I acted with the approbation of as noble and true people as live on earth, and I do not choose to hear myself denounced in such terms."

The hard eyes of the Senora watched her with an expression of triumph as she seated herself in the sleigh, and settled herself comfortably among the buffalo skins with which it was lined. Her thin lips unclosed, and as the merry bells rang out on the air, she muttered :

"Go—go—meet what is on your path, and free me forever from your dangerous presence."

The sun was rapidly sinking in the horizon, but as the night promised to be brilliantly clear, with a moon that was

nearly full, Isola had no apprehensions as to her safety. The sleigh went on without obstruction till half the distance was passed over between La Fontaine and the Vale.

They had gained a deep hollow which lay between the two places, at a point where four roads diverged; there, to his surprise, Pompey found that a large tree had fallen across the road completely barring all progress in the direction of the Vale.

Giving the reins into Isola's hands, he got out to see if there was no chance to get around it; but he had scarcely commenced his explorations, when two men sprang upon him, seized and bound him fast, at the same time thrusting a gag into his mouth.

Isola shrieked, and made an effort to spring from the sleigh, that she might attempt to make her escape; but the larger of the two men grasped her arm, and in a voice that paralyzed her, said:

"Do not be alarmed, my angel child. I found that I could not give you up, and this was the only chance left to me. I have left your friend's money untouched, for I cannot give my treasure up for worldly dross. The driver shall not be injured; he shall only go with us to a point a few miles hence, and then return with his sleigh in safety."

He put his arm around her and lifted her back into the vehicle; but, by this time, all power of resistance had left her, and she was lying in a dead faint upon his breast.

Making no effort to restore her, Roselli placed her upon the seat, and gathered the reins in his own hands, for the well trained horses were beginning to show some signs of restiveness. He gave a few rapid directions to his companion, who had retained Pompey in his charge, and that individual was laid down in the front of the sleigh, with a covering over his eyes, and a stern command not to attempt to lift it at his peril.

Turning the horses' heads towards one of the cross roads,

a touch of the whip sent them flying over the frozen snow at a rate of speed to which they had never before been put. Trees, houses, fences seemed to fly behind them, and when the keen air again revived Isola, she saw that the road was one with which she was not familiar. She raised herself up, and faintly asked:

"What does this mean? What do you intend to do with me, sir?"

"It means that I cannot live without you, my precious one; that I should have died if I had not gained possession of you. I have spent three days of torture since I last looked on you; and I could no longer bear it. Oh, my Clari, give me a little place in your heart, and I shall feel myself blessed."

"And is it really your purpose to tear me from all I love?" she asked, in a faltering voice.

"You break my heart—you crush my life, by speaking thus! Who can be nearer to you than your own father? Have I not sought you with a weary heart through long years of agony, and now—now! Oh! holy mother, inspire this estranged heart with some feeling of compassion for the father who loves her as the one hope of his life."

The speaker was a good actor, and the anguish that seemed to thrill through his voice aroused in the heart of Isola a feeling of remorse that she had been so hard toward him. If Miss Carleton was wrong in her judgment of him, and this man was really her father, she felt that her conduct to him had been far from what he had a right to expect from her.

She sunk into silence, and endeavored to arrange her confused thoughts; to stifle the tumult of conflicting emotions that assailed her. But, in spite of all her efforts to control it, the repulsion felt toward her pretended father, from the first moment of their meeting, would not be silenced. She drew as far away from him as she possibly

could, and sat weeping and trembling in a corner of the seat. At length she ventured to ask:

"What is your purpose? Whither are you taking me? and what is to be my fate?"

"Your fate shall be as happy and serene as that of the angels in Heaven, for I am going to place you where trouble and worldly care are unknown. In twenty-four hours we shall be on the ocean, sailing toward the beautiful land of your birth, and there we will both find an asylum which will prove to us a foretaste of Paradise."

"And you will tear me from my home—from those I love, in this cruel manner! If you were really my father, you could not do this."

Roselli laid aside his caressing tones, and spoke with stern emphasis.

"General Berkely admitted the validity of my claim; then why shall you, wilful and perverse girl, dare to doubt my truth? You have insulted me—you have wounded my honor in a vital manner, and I resent it even to you. Be silent, and understand that henceforth I have the entire control over your fate, and you shall not escape the destiny I have awarded to you. We are drawing near the station, and I command you to conduct yourself with the respect that is due to me. However, I shall take measures to prevent any scene, without reference to your wishes."

A large wooden building, with a rude platform in front, was now in sight, and in a few moments Roselli knew that the train would be due. Relaxing the speed of the horses, he suddenly threw his arm around Isola, and placed a handkerchief saturated with chloroform over her face. The night was so cold that no stragglers were around the station-house, and when he drew up in front of it, he cut the cords that bound Pompey's arms, and imperiously said:

"Get up, and take the reins. Go back to your master, and tell him that Signor Roselli has taken his daughter

under his own protection. Stop on the road or speak to any one at your peril, and feel happy that I have let you off so easily."

As he thus spoke, he lifted the unconscious Isola from the sleigh, and, chilled to the heart, half frightened out of his wits, Pompey could only say:

"Yes, massa; I'm gwine as hard as I can."

"Be off with you, then, and see that you mind what I have said."

He gave a cut to the spirited steeds, and they sprang onward again. Pompey retained sufficient presence of mind to turn their heads in the direction of the Vale, and in a few moments the sleigh was out of sight.

Roselli carried Isola into the rude waiting-room, in which a large wood fire was blazing; the station-master was beside it, who nodded and said to him:

"A cold night, sir; is the lady sick that you have to carry her?"

"She is not well, and the cold has overcome her a little."

The man drew forward a wooden bench, on which Roselli placed Isola, taking extreme care that her veil should shroud her features from observation. He sat down close beside her, and when she showed any symptoms of returning consciousness, he again pressed the handkerchief over her lips.

In a few moments the piercing whistle of the engine was heard, then a rush, a whir, and the train came thundering up to the entrance. Amid the confusion and babel of sounds that ensued, Roselli placed the passive girl on her feet, threw his arm around her and thus carried her to her place on the car.

He found but few passengers, and to those who manifested any interest in the unhappy girl, he stated that she was suffering from partial paralysis and he was taking her

to a celebrated physician in Baltimore in the hope that she would be restored by his skillful treatment.

Isola was vaguely conscious of all that was passing around her, but she only had power to moan faintly; at the first stopping place Roselli forced her to drink a glass of wine, into which he had infused a powerful narcotic. This soon threw her into so deep a sleep that he had no further trouble with her till they reached Baltimore.

Their passage was already taken in a sailing vessel bound for Bordeaux by a faithful agent to whom Roselli had telegraphed; this man was awaiting them with a carriage, which conveyed them at once to the wharf alongside of which lay the Rowena.

From that point all trace of Isola was lost. In spite of the most strenuous efforts made by her friends to discover whither she had been taken, no light was thrown on her fate.

On the return of Pompey to the Vale with the startling news he had to unfold, everything was in commotion there. A telegram was at once sent to Lynchburg to be despatched along the line, ordering the arrest of Roselli, but the planners of this daring scheme of abduction were prepared for this, and it was found that the wires had been cut within a few miles of the town. Of course the damage could not be repaired till the following day, and in the meantime Roselli effected his escape with his prize.

The news soon reached La Fontaine, but it was carefully concealed from its master, and after the first feeling of astonishment was over, Savella almost rejoiced that a rival she regarded with a jealous heart was effectually removed from the vicinity of Philip. She believed Roselli to be Isola's father, and she thought it right that she should be compelled to go with him if she refused of her own free will.

Late on the following evening Summerton and Philip

returned from Lynchburg, both expressing dismay at the disappearance of Isola and disapprobation of the violent course pursued by Roselli.

The Senora and her accomplice availed themselves of the first opportunity to converse in private, and she gleefully said:

"We are rid of her at last! You were very clever, Thomas, and arranged everything in the best manner. Who assisted Leo to capture her?"

"I did, of course. I left Mr. Vane in the town and came to the cross-roads with Leo, so skillfully disguised that she could not have known me even in daylight. We had no trouble, for the negro was easy enough to manage, and when the girl heard the voice of Roselli she understood her position at once and fainted dead away. By this time she's safe on the ocean, and all we have now to do is to carry out our plans here. Philip is ripe for them and ready to do what we wish. He had an interview with a shrewd lawyer in Lynchburg, and ascertained that Savella's claim to the whole estate is good. It will barely pay the amount due to her. Philip wishes to live in Paris, and he intends to offer the property at private sale as soon as the necessary legal formalities have put him in possession of it. He will make a liberal provision for Fontaine, and place him where he will be well taken care of. Then we will all go to Europe with nothing to do but enjoy 'the goods the gods provide.'"

"That is good news indeed. You must possess magical power over Philip to induce him to enter into our views in so brief a time."

"The fact is, Vane is miserable here. He is not quite a villain, though he has acted in a most unprincipled manner. Having sold himself for money, he now feels that he must risk everything to retain possession of it. It's a pity that a sharper should retain any feeling of shame or honor, for

it mars his enjoyment of his winnings most confoundedly. I have rid myself of all that nonsense long ago, and now I have secured the means, I intend to live a famously jolly life. Fa—la—la!”

“Do you remember where you are, Thomas. If the family overhear you singing in that manner, they will think your clerical character badly sustained.”

He snapped his fingers, and made a pirouette.

“Why should I care now if they do? A few more months of restraint, and I will lay aside the cassock forever. It has done me good service, though, and I won’t abuse it. You have done your part well too, Bianca; but you were wrong in one thing. You should have left that girl to her fate the night she was so ill. I am half afraid that Leo will bungle the affair and let her be a plague to us yet.”

“Not he—he will obey my commands literally, for he is not to draw his annuity till she is safe beyond the reach of any one who may seek a clue to her fate. Trust me for that.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEW REVELATIONS.

WHEN every effort to trace Isola had ended in disappointment, Miss Carleton wrote a long letter to George Berkely, in which she minutely detailed every incident connected with the abduction. She entreated him to detach himself at once from the embassy, and go to Rome for the purpose of seeking some clue to the lost girl. She informed him of her suspicions as to the complicity of Summerton and the Senora in the plot, and in the place of their old residence he would probably find some trace of their agent in this nefarious transaction.

There was other information that Miss Carleton related with scarcely less pain than the disappearance of Isola. Philip Vane had lost no time in looking into the condition of Mr. Fontaine’s affairs, and it had been found that the arrears due to Henry Fontaine’s daughter would swallow up the whole estate.

Philip had taken possession of it in the name of his wife, and with the consent of Savella, the property, including the slaves, was already offered for sale. Miss Carleton went on:

“On hearing that our old friend was to be turned out of his home in this ruthless manner, and placed in a private asylum, I could scarcely believe that any one could be found capable of such cold-blooded inhumanity. I spoke with Philip myself, and tried to turn him from his purpose; but he was like ice.

“I never saw a man so changed in so short a space of time. He has lost all his old geniality, and lightness of heart; he seems to have made up his mind to his course, and I am now convinced that no persuasion will induce him to change his intentions.

“He insists that Mr. Fontaine will never recover—that he will be better off in an asylum than in his own home, and as he has the power to carry out his views he will doubtless attempt to do so without delay.

“I on the contrary, am convinced that his removal from the scenes to which he is attached, will prove Mr. Fontaine’s death-blow, and I have been making every effort to secure his own roof above his head. With General Berkely’s approbation, I have accepted the offer of Mr. Western for the place I own near Petersburg. He has wished to purchase it for years, but hitherto I have refused to sell it, because it was once the home of my parents. But in this crisis I could not hesitate; La Fontaine will be as good an investment,

and negotiations are on foot for its purchase, though it is done through a lawyer, and Philip Vane will not know who is to become its owner till the papers are signed.

"I shall keep the old servants about Mr. Fontaine, and cause the place to be carried on exactly as he has done, till you find Isola and bring her back to become the mistress of her old home.

"My fortune I shall bequeath to you jointly at my death, and during my life we will enjoy it together. Dear George, spare neither pains nor expense to recover the darling girl, and restore her to my arms. I am firmly impressed with the belief that this Roselli is not her father; and my heart sinks when I think of how much he may cause her to suffer; how difficult it will be for you to trace her.

"Go to Rome—seek the connections of the Senora; discover her antecedents, and through them, endeavor to find a clue to Roselli, and our lost darling. You love her, George, and you will be no laggard in the duty I assign to you. Find Isola, bring her back in safety, and once more happiness will reign in this disturbed household. Your affectionate cousin,

CARRIE."

When this letter reached St. Petersburg, George Berkeley was on a visit to the estate of his new friend, Baron Fontani. It was situated in the neighborhood of Moscow, and the society of a gay and brilliant capital afforded the young stranger a glimpse of Russian life that was very attractive.

It so happened that in all his communications to Fontani respecting his own family, George had never yet confided to him his attachment to Isola. That secret he kept to be banqueted on in his own heart, though, in speaking of Fontaine, he had casually mentioned her as a child he had rescued from a state of destitution, and adopted as his own. The singular circumstances under which she had been found had not been referred to.

George was becoming very anxious for news from home, when a package of letters was forwarded to him from St. Petersburg. Among them was the last one written to him by Isola, and that of his cousin detailing the subsequent events at the Vale.

With eager haste he broke the seal, and lover-like, seized on Isola's first—he uttered many exclamations of amazement while reading it, but when he turned to that of his cousin's his cheeks blanched, his lips quivered, and the friendly eye that rested on him saw that some terrible disaster must have happened in his far away home. Fontani approached him, and laying his hand upon his shoulder said:

"What is it, my young friend? I hope that nothing seriously to affect you has occurred."

For a few moments poor George was incapable of speaking. Presently he raised his head, and hoarsely said:

"The sweetest hope of my life has been wrested from me, I fear forever. My betrothed bride, the adopted daughter of Mr. Fontaine, has been traced by her true father, and he has forcibly removed her from his protection."

"But that does not necessarily separate her from you."

"Not if I can trace him, which I shall make every effort to do. But this man is a low fellow, and he has clandestinely seized on her, and borne her away, after securing a considerable sum of money paid him to relinquish his claims. Nothing certain is known as to whither he has taken her, but my cousin supposes that he has embarked for Italy, which is his native land."

"Italy is a wide country, but I will not discourage you in this moment of anxiety."

"No—pray do not, for my heart would break if I thought Isola was separated from me forever. This letter also conveys sad news of Mr. Fontaine. He is deranged, and the man who has married his niece is about to seize his whole estate, and place him in a lunatic asylum."

While Berkely thus spoke, the face of the listener became even paler and more agitated than his own; he gasped:

"Niece? what niece? To whom can you refer?"

"To Savella Fontaine, who came last summer from Rome, accompanied by her aunt, Senora Roselli, and an English clergyman of the name of Summerton. The young lady has since married an old school-mate of mine, who I thought incapable of taking the course my cousin tells me he has determined on."

Fontani seemed to listen as one in a bewildered dream. After a pause to collect his thoughts, he said:

"George Berkely, will you permit me to read your last letters from home? for they are of as vital interest to me as to you. A base fraud has been practised on Claude, and this young lady is not the person she pretends to be."

"Who then are you, who speak so confidently in this matter?" asked George, in irrepressible surprise.

Fontani turned toward a window through which a flood of light fell upon his face, and asked:

"Is there nothing in my appearance that reminds you of—of my brother? Berkely, I am that Henry Fontaine who has so long been believed dead!"

Had a thunderbolt exploded at the feet of the young man he could not have been more astonished. He slowly said:

"I have often remarked in you a vague resemblance to Mr. Fontaine, such as we often see among members of the same family. But how could I link Baron Fontani, who claims to be an Italian, with my American friend? May I ask an explanation of this mystery?"

"Perhaps. Let me see your letters, and then I can better judge of the course it will be expedient to pursue. I had thought that I would never again look upon the brother who—But no, I will not speak of that. Claude is mad; impoverished; he has been made the victim of a set of adventurers, and I could almost find it in my heart to forgive him for the past. Let me read the letters, if you please."

Diplomatist and courtier as he was, it was evident that the speaker was powerfully moved, and his hand was cold as ice as the bewildered listener touched it in giving him the letters he asked to see.

As we have said, the details given in them compressed all that had occurred at La Fontaine within the last few months, and the reader seemed to devour the pages with his eager eyes. Absorbed in his own anguish at the calamity which had befallen Isola, Berkely forgot to watch the changes in the face of his friend; even the strange revelation he had just heard faded away before the magnitude of the evil which had overtaken his betrothed.

The quick breathing of Fontani, and the rustling of the paper he held in his trembling hands, were the only sounds that broke the stillness in the room. When he had finished reading, he took several turns across the floor, and finally sat down opposite to George with a pale set face on which one might read the conflict that had passed within him. He tremulously said:

"I never thought my heart could be touched again by anything concerning Claude Fontaine. But it is—it relents—it almost forgives, since I find that remorse for a crime that was never consummated has brought him to the condition in which he now is. Yes, George—it *was* crime," for he saw the start the young man gave. "He attempted my life; he thought he had taken it, and for years I have left him in that error that he might bear his punishment with him. It has borne worse fruit than I anticipated, for I could not wish even the intended fratricide to lose the light of reason. Your cousin's letter has touched me deeply; the strange hallucination that occasions Claude's lunacy proves that he has bitterly repented; that he has not known a moment of peace from that fatal night. His punishment is sufficient; I will avow my existence; break the evil spell that enchains his faculties, and save him, not only from

the harpies who are preying on his fortune, but from the gulf of nothingness into which he is plunging. This shall be my revenge."

"Who then are these people who have attempted so daring a fraud?"

"I think I know two of them, but the man baffles me. Berkely, we must set out for Virginia as soon as I can obtain leave of absence from the Emperor. In the meantime write to your father, and without betraying that I still live, have such precautions taken as will prevent these impostors from escaping the snare I shall set for them."

"But—but," stammered George, "you have overlooked what is most important to me. My cousin tells me that I must go at once to Italy, and endeavor to find Isola. My own heart prompts me to the same course, and thither I must go without delay."

"But, my dear fellow, it is necessary for us to hasten to Claude's rescue. I shall need you, and I am unwilling to leave you behind. If this young lady is with her father, he will doubtless take good care of her; after settling with those swindlers, we will return together, and I will then give you all the assistance in my power to find your lost love."

"But, my dear Baron, do you not see that my cousin believes this Roselli to be an impostor? and he has explicitly stated his intention to place Isola in a convent. Besides, it will aggravate Mr. Fontaine's malady if he learns that his adopted child has been torn from his protection. If you knew how tenderly he is attached to her, you would see how important it is to restore her to him as soon as possible."

"But it is even more important to wrest him from the power of a set of unscrupulous sharpers. Who is this young girl, and where did my brother find her?"

"As to who she is, I cannot inform you, for she was

thrown into Mr. Fontaine's arms in a most extraordinary manner. Her mother was dashed over a precipice in the Tyrol, but as the carriage fell she threw her infant into a thicket of shrubs. Mr. Fontaine was making a pedestrian tour; he witnessed the accident and saved the infant, though he could find no trace of the unfortunate occupants of the carriage; for they were swept away in the torrent into which they fell."

While George was speaking the face of Fontani became even more agitated than before. He rapidly asked:

"In what year—in what month did this happen?"

"In the month of June, in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-six. No clue has ever been furnished to Isola's parentage till this man, Roselli, came to claim her. You read of his tearing her away from her home in the letter I gave you."

"I—I did not notice; I was not thinking of her or her affairs; but now I see that they have a terrible interest for me. And this wretch, this impostor has really taken her from those who should have protected her. Oh, my God! how shall I bear this!" and he threw his arms up as if striving for breath.

"What is it? What excites you thus?" asked George, in alarm.

In a voice that sounded as if torn from the depths of his chest, Fontani said:

"While I have sat up in judgment on my only brother; have condemned him to years of anguish and remorse for a crime that was never consummated, that man, noble, generous, gentle in nature, took to his arms *my* child; saved her from destitution—called her his own! Oh! Father in Heaven! what reparation do I not owe him!"

His face fell upon his hands, and large tears rained through his tremulous fingers. George thought he had gone mad, and he began to doubt his first assertion that he

was the brother of Fontaine. He sat staring at him, unable to believe two such astounding assertions, though a few moments before he had given implicit credence to the first.

But when the Baron removed his hands and calmly regarded him with his clear blue eyes from which the light of sound reason so evidently gleamed, he began to hope that his words were not the offspring of a disordered mind. Fontani spoke in a calmer tone :

"You are perplexed, my dear boy, but nothing can be truer than what I have asserted; and I am now as anxious as you can be to follow up this wretch, who, for some purpose of his own, has assumed the character of father to my daughter. Doubtless he is one of the gang of swindlers, and his avowed intention to place Isola in a convent explains to me that they are aware of her relationship to me."

"Still I am in the dark as to how this is so."

"Let me explain: The lady who met with so tragic a fate was my wife, whom I had clandestinely married in Rome. At the time the accident occurred I was in Russia, employed as an engineer; while at college I had paid great attention to that department of education, for it suited my taste. When my brother wounded me, as he believed fatally, and fled from Rome, I was left to the care of my wife and her sister. A large sum of money came from Claude, but no clue was given to where he might be found. For weeks I hovered between life and death—for months I was helpless as an infant—and just as life began to thrill in my frame again, the news of my father's death came to me from an American paper sent to Rome in the hope that it might reach my brother. I believed that the fatal news of my death had broken the old man's heart, and I became hard, merciless towards him who had caused it.

"I resolved to leave him in the belief that I had perished of the wound he had given me. I had industry and abil-

ity; I would leave to Claude such enjoyment as he could find in the paternal inheritance, with this load of guilt resting upon him, though I vaguely intended, at some future day, when I thought he had been sufficiently punished, to make known my escape to him. This I should possibly have done before this time, but the proofs which would have established my identity were stolen from me, and I laid aside all thought of returning to my native land. So soon as my health was re-established, I left my wife and infant daughter in Rome, and came to this country, where I was at once employed on a railroad which was in the course of construction. I found my skill highly appreciated, my reward sure, and I sent for those I loved to join me. Savella, for that was her name, was to travel with a courier, and while I awaited her arrival with the impatience of a lover, wondering what could detain her so long beyond the promised time, the crushing news of her fate came to me in a letter from her sister. Bianca had seen the account of the accident in a paper, and inquiry proved that Savella was the victim. She never told me that my child was saved, and until to-day I was not aware that my daughter lives. That Providence which is mighty to save as to destroy, threw her into the arms of her uncle, and thus opened a way for reconciliation between two hearts so long estranged. I forgive Claude; I will entreat him to pardon me in my turn for my hardness, and I will use my utmost efforts to save him. But we must first find my daughter. We must lose no time in setting out for Rome; I will telegraph to St. Petersburg, get our passports arranged, and leave without delay."

"But will the emperor permit so unceremonious a departure?"

"I have served Nicholas long and faithfully, and he will not refuse an urgent request from me. I shall write him a private letter, giving him my reasons for a speedy departure

and it will be arranged. You must also write to the American minister, and ask leave to travel. There will be no difficulty about granting it, as you are only a supernumerary on his staff of officials."

Fontani drew a portfolio toward himself, and began to write rapidly. George followed his example, and in another hour the two letters were on their way to St. Petersburg. When this business was completed, the baron said to his young companion :

"Now that we have placed matters in train for the accomplishment of our wishes, let us talk of our friends in Virginia. How is it that you have never before spoken of these foreigners who have played so daring a game in my brother's house? You have never even alluded to this niece; if you had, an explanation must have taken place before this time."

"You forget that you were concealing something yourself, and the vague inquiries you hazarded did not involve the history of what has occurred in Mr. Fontaine's family since I left the neighborhood. I could not imagine that you had any interest in his private affairs, and therefore I said nothing of this new claimant on his fortune."

"That is true; but tell me of my daughter. Is she lovely? Though of course you think so, for you are in love with her."

"She is charming, as she is good and true."

The face of Fontani seemed transfigured by the tender emotions which had found a place in the heart so long closed to everything but the voice of ambition. He grasped the hand of Berkely, and said :

"You were children together; tell me of every trait that can give me a clue to her nature. I would give much to know if she resembles her mother; I once had a miniature of my wife, but it was stolen from me with other things that were only valuable to me. If I could show you that, you could tell me if her child is her sweet counterpart."

With the enthusiasm of a lover, George described all the charming traits of Isola, and the baron listened with eager interest. When this subject was exhausted, he said :

"You have proved to me that you love her truly and adoringly, George, and I accept you as my future son-in-law. But we must first rescue her, and in order to do that, I must learn every particular about these impostors. Senora Rosselli is the half-sister of my deceased wife, there can be no mistake in that, for she was known to Claude as well as myself. She is a woman I always disliked and mistrusted, but I did not believe her to be capable of such villainy as this. She was a widow, with one child, who was kept in the country, and I do not think my brother could have been aware of her existence. That girl must have been reared to personate my daughter; but how they obtained the proofs necessary to satisfy Claude of the validity of her claim, is the mystery to me. Give me an accurate description of the fellow who represents himself as a clergyman—for of course he is not one—and I may gain a clue to his identity."

George obeyed, and Summerton arose before the mental vision of the listener a living entity, but without any salient characteristic that appealed to his memory. He mused a few moments, and then asked :

"Had this man no peculiarity? Is there no mark by which he can be distinguished from others?"

"Now you ask me, I do remember one. He has an ugly scar across the back of his right hand, which looks as if it had been inflicted by the thrust of a dagger."

A sudden light flashed on Fontani, and he exclaimed with excitement :

"My suspicion is then confirmed! It is Thomas Somers, a man I once had in my employment; the same who stole the proofs to which I have referred. He took a box containing the certificate of my marriage with Savella Savelli, her miniature, and the letters that passed between us after

my departure for Russia. No doubt the plan he has since carried out was then conceived, and these things taken to ensure its success. This Somers was subtle, astute, and well educated; he was quite capable of maturing such a scheme and carrying it out successfully. Though of great service to me, I never thoroughly trusted him; he left me abruptly, and entered the service of an English gentleman who was about to return home, and after he was gone the box was missed. I made many efforts to trace him and recover my property, but he evaded them all. I picked him up in a strange manner, and I afterward blamed myself for placing any confidence in him."

He paused as if in reverie, and Berkely asked:

"In what manner, sir, if the question is not indiscreet?"

"It is not; I have no motive for concealing how I met with him. He was the director of a minor theatre which the Emperor protected, though he never attended it. Somers himself was one of the chief actors, and I have been told that he was an incomparable clown. He got into difficulties, was broken up, and his company dispersed. He applied to me for such employment as would enable him to get his bread. I found that he had much shrewdness and intelligence, and I employed him as a valet. No doubt he peered into everything that came under his observation; he probably already knew Senora Roselli, and with his natural acuteness conceived the idea of making her and her daughter accomplices in the fraud he had so boldly attempted. He must also have been aware of my antecedents, though he carefully concealed such knowledge from me."

While Fontani was speaking a thought occurred to Berkely, and he rapidly asked:

"Among his other accomplishments, was Somers a good ventriloquist?"

"Yes—the finest I ever heard; for he occasionally exerted his talents for my amusement."

George sprang up in irrepressible excitement.

"Then the strange mystery is solved. His was the warning voice that has driven Mr. Fontaine to madness! His infernal skill produced the turmoil of sounds which have filled the old house for months past. It is all explained now, and this man is a demon."

"What can you mean? There was nothing of this in the letters I read."

"No; but previous ones, which came to me before I left St. Petersburg, spoke of the strange noises that haunted La Fontaine, and the voice which had repeatedly commanded your brother to send Isola from his house. I see through it all now; Somers is a consummate actor, and the mental and bodily health of my old friend have been destroyed by the ruthless practices of this wretch. I will bring you Isola's earlier letters, and you can yourself read the account she gives."

Berkely hurriedly left the room, and in a few moments returned with the letters. In them Isola gave an affecting picture of the condition of her guardian, and detailed the singular occurrences which were taking place at La Fontaine. Her father read them with absorbing interest; he pressed his lips upon the pages over which her hand had passed, and inhaled the delicate perfume that exhaled from them. With moistened eyes he said:

"The writer of these must be charming. I do not wonder that my brother loves her—that you adore her. I, too, feel that I shall share your infatuation, when I have been enabled to reclaim her. You are right, George. This Somers, alias Summerton, has played his rôle of juggler with fatal success in my brother's house; yet I fear we must let him escape the heavy penalty due to his crimes, because that evil woman who has aided and abetted him is so nearly connected with my lost wife. The only punishment I can inflict upon the culprits is to wrest from them the wealth

they believe within their grasp. Write without delay to your father. Tell him enough to put him on his guard against these people, and induce him to keep a strict watch upon them; but I repeat, my existence must not be revealed till I go in person to put those miscreants to confusion."

George gave the required promise, and in a whirl of feeling sat down to inform his father of the strange facts which had become known to him. He positively affirmed their truth, and promised to bring incontrovertible proof of his statements when he returned to Virginia, which he proposed to do as soon as he had visited Rome and succeeded in tracing Isola.

Fontani had already communicated a plan to him which promised success. He knew that an old servant of the Savelli family yet lived in the cottage they had once occupied; for, only a few months previously, he had caused inquiries to be made concerning those from whom he had been so long severed. He had learned that no one was left but this old creature, and his agent could ascertain nothing satisfactory of the sister and niece of his wife.

Through old Benetti the baron believed he should find a clue to the abductor of his daughter; for he felt certain of being able to deal with him either through fear or cupidity. If he had been bribed to perform this service he would be equally accessible to a larger bribe to break faith with his employers.

He argued that the necessity of maintaining his paternal character to Isola would force him to treat her with respect, and he cheerfully said to the despondent lover:

"God would never have permitted this wonderful discovery to be made if he did not purpose to bring it to a happy termination. I shall regain my daughter; you will find your bride; and, as your reward for giving her back to me, I will bestow her hand upon you as soon as we have found her. We will make a bridal trip to my native land,

and carry with us life and light to my unhappy brother; ruin and disgrace to those inhuman creatures who have brought to him so much wretchedness. My poor Claude! I forgive him with all my heart, and I feel that I can again embrace him with a brother's affection."

A momentary gleam of satisfaction flashed over poor George's face; but it was immediately clouded, for, alas! Isola was yet to be found—to be rescued from he knew not what. He shuddered as he thought of all she must have suffered since she was violently torn from her home. It was now two months since she had been heard from; and he dreaded that defeat and disappointment might meet them on the threshold of their enterprise.

But Fontani would not listen to doubts. He insisted that their quest must prove successful, and day after day he was unwearied in making his arrangements to set out for Italy so soon as permission from his imperial master arrived. At the end of ten days it came, and with it George received his congé from the embassy.

Within three hours afterwards the two were *en route* for Rome.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE TRACK.

ONCE in Rome, Fontani spent a week in tracing the career of Senora Roselli since he last parted from her; for he felt assured that she was the moving spirit of the whole conspiracy.

He employed a private spy, who every evening reported to him the progress he had made within the previous twenty-four hours; and the information thus obtained may be summed up in a few words.

Fifteen years before, Summerton had lived a few months in Rome, where he married Senora Roselli. Her daughter was then four years old, and she was taken to England, where she acquired her knowledge of the language of that country. When Savella had attained her twelfth year, they returned to Italy, for the purpose of obtaining the best musical instruction for the young girl, as connoisseurs declared her voice equal in promise to that of the finest singers.

At this time Savella was represented as the adopted daughter of her mother, and the heiress of a great estate in the United States. Summerton had returned to his old profession of mountebank, and gained a precarious living by the exercise of his various talents. Gradually it was whispered among those who knew him that he was a dealer in subtle poisons, which he knew how to prepare so skillfully that no trace was left to betray the agency of the swift messenger of death. More than one person was spoken of in whispers as having been done to death by "Summerton's Fate," as the preparation was called; but before these suspicions assumed a tangible form, the whole party secretly embarked for the United States, and all clue to them was lost.

The spy further ascertained that the man who called himself Leonardo Roselli was an old offender against the laws. His real name was supposed to be Maldonato, as he frequently visited an old woman who had formerly lived as a domestic in the Savelli family, and it was presumed that she was his mother, though there was no proof of the fact.

For several months past he had been missed from his usual haunts, but within the last ten days he had returned to Rome, accompanied by a young girl he represented as his daughter. She was certainly placed with the old woman a few days, but at present there was no indication of her presence in the cottage, and the agent had not been able to discover what had become of her.

Benetti Maldonato was very old, partially deaf, and slightly childish; there would be little difficulty in learning all she could tell; but the man was an old reprobate, and if not heavily bribed, might be difficult to deal with. Money, it was believed, would induce him to betray any one who had trusted him.

During this investigation Berkely had suffered untold agonies; he could not understand the coolness of Fontani, nor approve of his resolution to do nothing that might alarm the quarry they sought, till the clue was in his own hands. Furnished with this the two friends, with anxious faces and perturbed hearts, took their way to the spot once so familiar to one of them.

The cottage was situated among the ruins of ancient Rome, and had once had some pretensions to architectural beauty; but it had now fallen partially to decay, and of all the rooms it contained, but three were fit for occupation. Even those were in a state of extreme dilapidation, and the old white-haired woman that sat just within the doorway of the largest one, spinning flax with a distaff, fixed her dimmed eyes on the landscape without, in preference to the sordid apartment in which she dwelt.

The strangers cautiously approached, and looked into the yard, choked up with neglected shrubbery; they caught sight of the quiet figure in the door-way, and Fontani spoke to his companion:

"Walk among the ruins, George, while I speak with this old creature. I can, probably, recall myself to her memory, and induce her to talk; but in the presence of a stranger she would probably be reserved."

Berkely nodded intelligently, and took a side path which diverged from the building, while Fontani went forward, and greeting the old spinner, said:

"Good afternoon, Mother Benetti; you seem as industrious as ever. I have come a long way to see you and the old

home, but I am afraid you will not know me. I am perishing of thirst; may I take a cup and dip some water from the old fountain at the back of the house?"

She lifted her dim eyes, and intently regarded him:

"Water is the gift of God, as is the sunshine and the air. Make yourself welcome, Senor; drink as much as you will, and then tell me who it ~~is~~ that speaks with a voice that seems to come out of the past—yet I cannot call your name."

Without replying, Fontani went to the old fountain and filled a cup which he took from a shelf in passing. Old memories were stirring within him, and, stoical as he had once thought himself, he felt that his voice must choke and grow tremulous till he gained the mastery over his emotions.

After lingering so long that Benetti began to fear he had absconded with her cup, Fontani came in and sat down a few feet from her. She looked curiously at him and asked:

"Who may you be, Senor, who seem to know all the ways of the place so well? You must have been here before."

"Yes—you are quite right; I have been here before. Some of the brightest days of my life were passed under this roof; also some of the saddest."

She dropped her work and tremulously whispered:

"It can't be—it can't be. He wouldn't come back, and the other is far across the sea."

Fontani steadily went on:

"Mother Benetti, can you not remember the two brothers who came here in the days of your young lady's bright youth? Can you not recall him who secretly took her to his heart as his wedded wife? Who paid the penalty of his rash act with almost the loss of life?"

The listener clasped her hands and said with emotion:

"And you must be that one, though they told me you

were dead. You are Henry Fontaine, come back to the old place; but it's no use—they are all gone—all that you cared for. The evil one lives, but the good ones are gone to God."

"I knew that before I came hither. It is of that evil one I seek information. Tell me what you know of her."

"What do you wish to find out? She did not tell me her plans, but I suspect them. She tried to make me believe the girl was my darling's child, but I knew better. She left me here with a promise to send me money, but till lately she forgot all about me. Then she wanted a service, and she sent me a hundred scuddi."

The old woman wandered on with the garrulity of her years, and Fontani listened with a rapidly beating heart. He spoke, however, with extreme caution:

"I can tell you where Bianca now is, and the nature of the service she asked. Senora Roselli has gone to Virginia to claim *my* inheritance for her own daughter. She has palmed off Savella as the child that was lost in the Tyrol seventeen years ago. Is it not so?"

"How do you know all this? Where have you been hiding all these years, while Bianca laid her plans, and carried them out?" she vaguely asked, as if stupefied with astonishment.

"It matters not now; I am here in the flesh to undo what Bianca has accomplished. Listen to me, for I have something even more important to say. I have further learned that a young girl who was in her path has been spirited away, and brought to this city; that she was brought to this house by a man she was induced to believe was her father. I know that he is not, and so do you. The service of which you just now spoke as required by Bianca, was to receive this young stranger till a more secure asylum could be found for her. Speak—is it not so?"

Benetti trembled, and seemed greatly alarmed. She

closed her lips firmly, and again resumed her work. Fontani drew near her, took a purse from his pocket, through the meshes of which gold glittered, and quietly said:

"Here are three hundred scuddi. The gold is yours on one condition. It will buy you the comforts you need, and in addition to this I will give you enough to keep you above want if you will speak the truth. How long is it since this young lady came to you, and what has now become of her?"

"I have not said she *was* here; it was only an assertion of your own," she sullenly replied.

"Perhaps it was, but it is not the less true. I do not wish to alarm you by threats, but I must say to you, that if you will not answer me truly and fairly, I will take measures to compel you to do so; and you will then lose the reward I am willing to pay you. Think of it; I am rich; I will give you all your age requires in return for the information I seek. Besides, you will do a good deed. You will rescue a wronged child from the dark fate that threatens her."

After a pause, during which Fontani attentively regarded her, she muttered:

"How do I know that you will keep your word? *She* broke hers, but she sends me word that she will soon be able to help me. She has sent me money once; she may do so again; why should I give up a certainty for an uncertainty?" She seemed communing more with herself than speaking to her companion. He said:

"One thing is very certain, and that is, that Senora Roselli will soon have nothing for herself but what my clemency allows her to retain. You have recognized me as Henry Fontaine; I am now on my way to Virginia to unmask this woman, and prove that the girl she took with her is no child of mine."

Benetti trembled, and she hurriedly said:

"I had nothing to do with it; she fixed it all with her husband. I let them call the little girl Savella Fontaine, though I knew that wasn't her name; it couldn't harm any one, for the child that should have been so called *was* lost, so I let things go as they wished."

"You confess, then, that you were an indirect accomplice in this fraud, for which I can call you to a severe account; but it is not my wish to do so. All I ask of you is to give me a clue to the young stranger who came hither nearly two weeks since with a man calling himself Leo Roselli. He represented himself as her father, but *you* were well aware that she was not his child."

"How should I know that? Roselli is not a person to seek an old woman unless he wanted some service at her hands. What if I did give shelter to the girl a few days? anybody might have done the same for pay."

"Then you admit that she was here. That is much gained. Now tell me whither she has been taken, and where I can find the man himself, for I must see him."

"To have him put in prison, belike. No—I hadn't anything to do with his wickedness, but I knew him when he was a boy, and I don't like to do anything to hurt him now."

"It is not my intention to harm him. On the contrary, I will pay him better to undo what he has done than those who tempted him to this outrage have paid him to commit it. If Roselli will give up the girl to me, I will double the bribe offered him by Bianca, and let him escape the penalty. If not, I will set the sbirri on his track."

She nervously moved her hands, and eagerly said:

"Oh! not that—not that—it would——"

Pausing abruptly, Fontani took up her words:

"Ruin him—yes, I comprehend that. I remember now, mother Benetti, that you once had a son who was something of a scamp. I have my suspicions that he and Roselli are

one. If he is, you may be sure of one thing: I will track him, unearth him, and force him to disgorge his prey."

The excitement of the old woman increased to such a degree that Fontani felt convinced he had touched the mark. Her jaw fell, her eyes became glassy, and her wrinkled hands shook so they could no longer go on with the employment which had become almost mechanical with her. She spoke in an irritated tone:

"I don't know why you should come here to threaten me so? What is this girl to you?"

"She is my daughter: she is the child of the young mistress you loved. She was rescued from death by my brother; he reared her as his own, and when Bianca found a rival in her way, she devised this plan to rid herself of her presence. Now, will you refuse me the information I seek at your hands?"

"If it is true—if this is Savella's child, I would help you if I dared, but I dare not. I must ask *him*. He will be fearfully angry, but I have known that something was wrong ever since that poor pale child came here. But she isn't here now; no—no—he took her away."

"Are you quite sure of that? But never mind. When will you see Leo?"

"He is to come here to-night—he comes every night."

"You are certain that my child is safe?"

"Oh yes—I knew that. He does not treat her badly, and the poor thing begins to believe that he is really her father. Leo wouldn't listen to me; he has his own plans, and I don't know but he may kill me for betraying to you what I have done."

"Is he violent then?"

"Sometimes when he is angry; but then he is sorry for his harshness and tries to make me forget it. You won't hurt him, Senor? You'll buy his secret from him and let him go unpunished?"

"If he gives me back my child unharmed. If not, the law shall grasp and hold him in its iron vice. Good afternoon, mother Benetti; here is the purse which you have fairly earned. I shall return in three hours, in the hope of finding your son with you. Tell him all I have said; and say to him that flight is useless, for the sbirri are on the watch for him, and he will not be permitted to escape."

He passed out into the evening sunshine, leaving the old woman in a tremor of agitation and excitement. Berkely joined him just beyond the gate, and eagerly asked:

"What success have you met with? Your face does not look as if you had been baffled."

"Nor have I. I have accomplished more than I dared to hope. The old woman is childish and easily led on to talk freely. Isola has been with her, and I suspect that she is still there."

"*There!* and you came away without seeing her! Why did you not search the house? why did you not call on me for help? That old creature could have offered no resistance."

"Perhaps not; but I had no certainty that Isola was with her, and I am very sure that by feeling my way, I can regain her without making my private affairs the talk of Rome. Our object is to settle this affair as quietly as possible and get back to our own country. If this man is prosecuted for his villainy I do not know what detention it might cause. My daughter is safe; I satisfied myself as to that, for old Benetti will not tell a falsehood."

The lover groaned.

"But Roselli may reject your terms; he may remove Isola beyond your reach. Will it not be best to keep a watch upon the house and seize him when he goes in? Besides, if Isola is there, I do not wish to lose sight of the place."

"It is my purpose to remain on the watch; but with

Roselli I am sure of my game. He is a needy sharper, and the one who can pay best is the one he will serve. We can conceal ourselves in the ruined part of the house and lie in wait for our man. You have your pistols?"

Berkely replied by opening his coat and showing a pair of small revolvers which he had brought from home with him. He said:

"I also have a knife, though I hope we shall have no occasion to use our arms."

"I think not; but it is best to be prepared for every emergency. Follow me; I know every inch of the ground, and I can easily gain access to one of the ruined rooms, which will enable us to hear what passes between the old woman and her hopeful son."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LEO ENTRAPPED.

FONTANI and young Berkely passed through an abandoned garden overrun with weeds, and soon gained the rear of the building. That portion of it was completely dilapidated; the windows had fallen in, and the roof was rotting away.

The door yielded to the touch, and the intruders entered a room which had once been used as a kitchen. A narrow passage led from this, from which a door opened on either hand.

That on the left Fontani unclosed, and entered an apartment of moderate size, which contained a couch and two chairs. The windows were boarded up, and a faint twilight struggled into the room. He whispered to his companion:

"In this room I spent the happiest hours of my life; in

it I struggled with death, and at last gained the victory. Here Isola first saw the light, and hither she has been brought very lately. Let us sit down and watch and wait. I must think of the past."

He buried his face in his hands and sat motionless upon the side of the couch, while George peered around and endeavored to comprehend his surroundings. There was a door which opened into the room occupied by the old woman, and he could see that she had resumed her monotonous employment, though her face seemed perturbed and her hands visibly trembled.

He looked around the wretched apartment, and shuddered to think that, even for a day, Isola, with her delicate and refined habits, should have been forced to occupy so comfortless a place.

Fontani's thoughts were far away in the years that were gone, recalling the happy time when that dreary den was decked as the bower of youth and loveliness; when a girlish form flitted to and fro with the breath of flowers floating around her and the light of happiness beaming from her eyes.

The creaking of a loose board beneath the steps of Berkely aroused him, and he made a sign to him to sit down. George obeyed, and he whispered:

"It is lucky the old woman is a little deaf. If she suspects our presence here, my plan will be defeated. Be quiet till her son comes; then we will act as the exigencies of the moment seem to require."

Internally chafing at the self-command which long habit enabled Fontani to practice, George threw himself on a seat and tried to calm his anxiety by dreaming of a speedy re-union with the object of his affections; but painful doubts and fears would arise, and near as she might be to him, he feared that they might fail in rescuing her immediately from him who now held the control of her person.

Darkness soon enveloped every object, and even Fontani began to lose his patience, and fear that their watch might prove useless. At length a heavy step was heard entering the outer room, and a rough voice asked:

"Why have you no light? and where is my supper?"

"I—I forgot it," replied Benetti. "But there is bread on the shelf and a bottle of wine in the closet. You can get them yourself. The lamp is there, and you can light it."

The man uttered a curse and angrily asked:

"What are you dreaming of, you wretched old crone! that you have nothing ready for me when I come home. If this is the way you treat me, I shall go away altogether."

"Don't talk so, Leo; for you have already been from me too long. I have no one but you, and if you leave me, I shall be alone in the world. I have been thinking about other days, and it makes me forget the present. Ah, yes—I've been thinking of my pretty young lady dancing on the grass as she used to in the old times."

"Nonsense, mother; let those absurd fancies alone, and think more of my comfort. The girl's dead, and that's the end of her. What's the use of talking about her?"

"Not much, Leo. But I had a strange thought that came to me. There is a great likeness between this young stranger and my mistress' daughter. What if she should be her child?"

"What notion will get into your muddled old brains next, I wonder," he brutally said. "I can't see how you can connect *that* girl with the young mistress. Why, if she was *her* child, she'd take the shine out of Bianca's daughter, and be Claude Fontaine's heiress sure enough."

By this time he had lighted the lamp, and was busily engaged in eating his frugal supper. The old woman timidly replied:

"Maybe Bianca found out that she is the heiress, and

that is why you were paid to get her out of the way. It's very strange that she couldn't let a poor child like that stay under the same roof with her; you may be sure there is something underlying it that has been kept from you."

"What if there is? It's no concern of mine. I am paid well, and I shall do what I undertook."

"Suppose some one would pay you better to leave it undone? What then?"

The man turned suddenly upon her:

"What are you driving at? Is some one on my track already? Has anybody been tampering with you? Tell me the truth, or by—I'll choke it out of you!"

He struck his brawny fist upon the table with a crash, and strode toward her with his arm extended and his fingers working as if ready to perform his threat. She pitifully whined:

"There—I knew you would be fearfully angry. I told him so, but he gave me money, and promised more if I would bring you over. Take away your hand; it scares me. There is the money; it is all for you, so don't look so fierce."

She held up the purse, on which he pounced like a vulture on its prey.

"Where did you get this? Here is gold—gold that I need so much. Bianca is profuse in promises, but she doesn't always keep them. I brought a nice penny with me from that outlandish country, but it's nearly all gone. That girl has proved cursedly expensive to me, and now I cannot tell when she will be well enough to be taken to the place I mean to put her in. Till she's safe, I can't draw my annuity, but when the job's finished I am a made man."

"Suppose you could get more by giving her up to her father—what would you say then?"

"Don't talk nonsense, old woman. She's got no father, though she's green enough to think that I am her paternal

ancestor. But if her real father was to turn up, and ask me to let him have her, I wouldn't till the other one had paid. Then, if he was liberal, I'd tell him where to find her, and he might get her back if he could."

"Now, Leo, you are hard-hearted. If you won't storm, I will tell you the best piece of news you have heard for many a day."

It was pitiable to hear the fawning tones with which this failing, white-haired old mother addressed her son. He turned fiercely on her.

"So there *is* something to tell! Out with it! let me hear who has been bribing you to betray and ruin me."

"No one—no one can do that; but Henry Fontaine is living; he was here this afternoon, and I knew him when he spoke with his old voice. He claims this girl as *his* child; he says that she has been raised by his brother. Bianca must have found out who she is, and got her out of the way. Do you remember, Leo, that the baby had a bloody mark upon her shoulder just where her father was wounded? Do you know if this young girl has such a mark?"

"I neither know nor care. What is all this idle chatter to me? If Henry Fontaine is alive, let him come to me and tell me so, that is all."

"He *has* come," said a quiet voice behind him, and, turning, Maldonato saw that the speaker stood within a few feet of him. In the open door-way leading into the next room was a second figure of tall and vigorous proportions, holding a pistol in his hand.

"What does this mean?" asked the ruffian.

"Simply that I am on the track of my daughter, and you have her concealed in this house. Bring me into her presence, or take the consequences that may ensue."

"Prove her to be your child; for the present I call her mine, and I cannot see that your claim is any better than mine."

"Bravado is useless, Leo. I have been on your track for a week, and if I give the signal the sbirri will be upon you. You know best what that might end in. Look at me: you knew me in my youth—can you see nothing here that recalls Henry Fontaine?"

"You may be that man; but that doesn't prove that you are the father of the girl I brought all the way from America."

"Let us cut this matter short," said Fontani, sternly. "I will give you as much as Bianca has promised you, and provide for this poor old woman, who seems to have a sorry son in you, if you at once restore my daughter to me. Refuse, and I will have you thrown into prison, to lie there till full proof of your crimes, and those of your accomplices, can be brought forward to convict you all."

Maldonato looked into the firm face of the speaker, and saw that he was terribly in earnest. He faltered:

"By such violent means you would never get possession of the girl; she is where neither you nor I can reach her."

"That is false! I heard your words, and I am certain she is in this house. Shall I call the sbirri to search it, or will you accept my terms without further demur?"

The ruffian was about to utter a defiant reply, when he was struck dumb by an apparition that for an instant unnerved him. A girl, wearing a long white robe, that fell in loose folds around her emaciated person, entered the door holding up a thin hand to screen her eyes from the glare of the lamp. Long, sweeping tresses of black hair streamed over her shoulders in wild disorder, and in the centre of each cheek burned a spot of vivid crimson.

She advanced with uncertain steps, and George Berkely sprang forward with a thrilling cry, but Maldonato threw himself between them, and brutally pushing back the intruder, said:

"Get out of this! Go back—go back! you have no business here."

As he laid his rude hands upon that shrinking form, the young man sprang on the Italian with the rage of a tiger, and with a single blow felled him to the floor. In the next moment he caught the half-fainting girl in his arms, crying out:

"Isola! my darling—my darling! I have found you at last! I have come to save you from that man!"

"Oh, George, take me away! Yet, no—he is my father; and see—you have almost killed him!" was the trembling answer; and she would have knelt to assist the stunned man, but this her lover would not permit. He held her firmly in his arms, as he said:

"He is a wretch who has imposed on you—who has torn you from those who had a right to protect you. But it is a long story, Isola, and you look faint and ill."

She put her hand to her head in a bewildered manner.

"I am ill: the watcher went to sleep, and I escaped. Is it a dream, George, that you are here? I am afraid to believe it. But how did you find me?"

Fontani here approached, and with much emotion took her hand in his own. He said:

"She is indeed very ill. She has a burning fever on her now."

By this time Maldonato had recovered a confused idea of what was passing around him; and he lifted his head, and regarded the three with a baffled expression. Rising slowly to his feet, he said:

"If it's not too late, Signor, I will come into terms. I was just about to accept them when the girl came in. She's been very ill, and I found her too much for an old woman like my mother to manage; so I carried her to a neighbor, who promised to keep her safe. You see how she's fooled me; but if you are a gentleman, it will not make any difference in your offer."

"I am afraid that I shall not come up to your ideal of a gentleman, for I decline to pay you at all for a discovery you could not prevent. I will do what I promised for your mother, for she was once a faithful servant to my wife; and you may be thankful that I do not punish the villainy of which you have been guilty."

By this time Isola's factitious strength had wholly deserted her, and she lay pale and scarcely breathing in George's arms. He saw that she was the mere shadow of her former self, and shuddered to think that a few more days of suffering might bury all his hopes in her early grave.

Fontani silently removed her to his own breast, and whispered a few words to his young friend. George rapidly left the house, spoke with two men that he found keeping guard upon the gate, and one of them started off in the direction of the city. When Berkely returned he found Isola lying on the old woman's bed, in a state of complete exhaustion. Her eyes were closed, but when she heard his step, she lifted them wearily, and whispered:

"Oh, George, come near me! Hold my hand, that I may be certain I do not dream."

Maldonato made a feeble attempt to bully Fontani, but there was an expression in that gentleman's face from which he soon shrank in a quiver of fear. In reply to the remonstrances the humbled ruffian hazarded, he said:

"If my daughter recovers you will escape punishment; if she dies, as does not seem improbable, I will relentlessly pursue you and those who instigated you to commit so great an outrage against her, till the full measure of God's vengeance for such crime is completed."

His face was terrible as he thus spoke, and the man shrank away from him with a shiver. He gradually drew near the door, as if meditating an escape; but the eye of Fontani was upon him, and just as he was making ready for a dash, his voice arrested him:

"Maldonato, I would not advise you to go into the yard. Make ten steps from that door, and you will be arrested. I did not venture into this house on such an errand without having assistance at hand."

Dismayed at this assurance, Maldonato cowered behind the chair on which his mother sat half paralyzed by fright. She made no attempt to approach Isola during the half hour that elapsed before the welcome sound of approaching carriage wheels was heard. Berkely sprang to the gate, and soon returned with a large soft shawl, which Fontani wound around Isola's form, and lifted her in his arms. She was perfectly passive, for she was too ill to comprehend what was passing around her. After giving the two men directions to hold Maldonato in safe custody till further orders from him, Fontani stepped into the carriage with his precious burden, George followed him, and they were rapidly driven toward Rome.

In another hour Isola was in a comfortable bed, with an experienced nurse beside her, and the most skillful physician in the city in attendance upon her. Her wanderings on the night on which she was discovered had greatly aggravated the low fever from which she was suffering; and for three days afterward the balance hung evenly between life and death. Youth and good nursing eventually triumphed, but if Isola herself had been asked what most contributed to her recovery, she would have answered that the presence of him she now loved with all her heart—the certainty that she was safe under his care—had more to do with it than all the doctor's drugs.

So soon as she was strong enough to bear the excitement, George told her of the discovery he had made, and prepared her to receive her father. He then brought Fontani to her side, and left them together; we leave the scene that ensued to the imagination of the reader.

Isola related to her father all that occurred from the day

of her embarkation on the Rowena. The quantity of chloroform she had been compelled to inhale affected her nervous system and prostrated her strength even more than the sea sickness from which she suffered. The voyage was long and tempestuous, and the ship finally entered port almost a wreck. Maldonato had not been unkind to her, and the stewardess of the ship had taken as good care of her as circumstances permitted.

When they reached Bordeaux, Isola was too ill to sit up, and in spite of her companion's impatience to get to the end of his journey, he found it would be unsafe to travel with her in the state of weakness to which she was reduced. Three weeks he was compelled to linger there, and then he brought her on to Rome. She remained at the cottage with his mother in a state of mental wretchedness that prevented her health from improving. She was told what her fate was to be, and warned that within the next month the convent doors would close on her forever.

Remonstrance was useless, and when she found all hope of future reunion with her friends thus destroyed, she was again struck down with illness.

When delirium came on, Maldonato removed her from his mother's care, and placed her in the cottage of a strong peasant woman near his own, and left her to her care.

Oppressed with fever, she wandered out in the night, and attracted by the light in the cottage, she entered it at the most important crisis of her life.

Until Isola recovered sufficiently to embark for the United States, Maldonato was held in durance, and not permitted to communicate with any one by letter. As the price of his ultimate freedom, he made a full confession of his connection with Summerton and the Senora, and furnished some important particulars with reference to their past life.

George claimed the promise made to him by Fontani to

give him his daughter so soon as she was restored to him. He referred him to Isola herself, and the young hero pleaded his cause so well that on the day before their departure from Rome the two were united by the chaplain attached to the British legation.

After a pleasant journey to Havre, they embarked on a swift steamer bound for Baltimore. Letters preceded them, bearing the joyful news that George was coming home with his rescued bride, accompanied by a friend who had stood by him through all; but no intimation was given as to who that friend really was.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PLOTTERS FOILED.

THE Vale was in a state of joyful excitement. Fanny was to be married during the coming summer to Dr. Delamere, a young physician with whom she had met in Richmond; he was preparing to visit Paris for the completion of his medical studies, and desired to take his bride with him.

As both parties had sufficient fortune to render the medical practice a matter of secondary importance, the consent of their elders was obtained to an early marriage, and to render Fanny's happiness complete, her early friend and her darling brother were expected to arrive in time to be present at the ceremony.

Little intercourse was now kept up between the Vale and La Fontaine. Philip Vane had become bitterly incensed against Mr. Berkely for employing a clever lawyer to interpose some of the law's delays in the way of the disposal of the property; and an order of court had been

obtained prohibiting the removal of Fontaine from his own domicile till a commission of lunacy sat on his case, and decided that it was unsafe to keep him there without restraint. As he betrayed no violence, and was only melancholy mad, Philip found himself checkmated on that move.

With every passing day he was becoming more restless, and anxious to escape to a foreign land. When there, he would rid himself of his two confederates, and with Savella seek such happiness as gold, won as this would be, could purchase.

Mr. Berkely had been appointed commissioner on the part of Fontaine to settle the estate, and Philip chafed at the delay he constantly threw in his way. His object was to gain time that George might bring the mysterious stranger on the stage of action, who pledged himself to save Claude Fontaine's fortune for him; and in the meantime a strict watch was kept on Summerton and the Senora, who remained blissfully unconscious of the storm that was approaching.

A telegram at length came to Mr. Berkely announcing the arrival of his son and his bride in Baltimore, and that afternoon the carriage was sent to the station to meet them. A few hours later, Isola sprang up the steps of the well known piazza, and was nearly smothered by the caresses that were showered upon her. George, too, had his full share, and the tall stranger who accompanied them looked on smilingly. Miss Carleton's eyes fell upon him, and she started and changed color. Their glances met, and in spite of his efforts to maintain his incognito, a look of old acquaintance glinted from Fontani's. She drew near him, and softly said:

"You are Henry Fontaine—I have suspected your identity with Baron Fontani."

He rapidly replied:

"Yes—your penetration has not deceived you. I have

returned to save my poor Claude—to assure him that I forgive the past. We have both been to blame; I almost as much as he, but George will tell you all you wish to know. To-night I must maintain my incognito that to-morrow I may fall as a crushing avalanche on the wretches who have nearly destroyed my brother.”

The two were swept away in the joyful crowd, and the party sat down to supper. That night a private interview took place between the gentlemen, in which Fontani explained his position, and the motives for his long concealment of his existence.

A messenger was dispatched to La Fontaine to inform Mr. Vane that at eleven o'clock on the following morning Mr. Berkely would be ready to complete the formalities which would transfer the estate to its new purchaser. The servant from the Vale carried the astounding news that Mr. George had come back, bringing with him Miss Isola as his bride. When Philip heard this, it was noticeable that he seemed as much stunned by it as his two accomplices. The three held a hasty conference, and decided that they could not too soon get out of the United States with their booty.

Everything had been arranged for a speedy departure, and after the business of the next morning was completed, it was their purpose to embark for Europe as soon as the notes given for the property could be converted into money.

Philip spent a restless and wretched night, cursing his own blindness, and wishing that he had never seen Savella, for now he knew who Isola really was, and he almost hated George for consoling her for his own desertion. But for his mercenary heart, he might now have been the happy husband of the lawful heiress of the wealth he had sacrificed everything that is dear to an honorable man to gain.

A few minutes before the hour named for the meeting, the party from the Vale rode into the yard and dismounted. One among them was a stranger, who wore his hat pulled

over his brows, and merely touched it as he was presented to Philip as Mr. Henry. The Senora was on the watch, and she was greatly surprised when she saw Mr. Berkely take this person into the library, evidently with a view of seeing Mr. Fontaine.

Mr. Berkely left him there, and followed the rest of the party to the drawing-room, where preparations had been made for their reception. The ornamental appendages had been removed from the centre-table, and it was now covered with papers which Summerton made himself busy in looking over, and arranging.

After some preliminary conversation, Philip said

“Gentlemen, we may as well finish this business at once, as I am naturally desirous to bring it to a close. You will now inform me who is to become the purchaser of this place; an absurd mystery has been made of that person, as if I should object to any one that could pay me the sum I ask.”

“Philip Vane,” said Mr. Berkely, looking him steadily in the face, “are you perfectly certain that you possess the right to transfer this property to another? Do you believe that your wife is Henry Fontaine’s daughter?”

Philip became livid; his pale lips gasped:

“What can you mean? Has not Mr. Fontaine himself recognized her as his niece?”

“Have you no knowledge of the deception that has been practised on a man too honorable himself to suspect the fraud of which I accuse Thomas Summerton and his wife Bianca Roselli.”

Philip sunk back white and nerveless; but Summerton confronted Mr. Berkely without shrinking, and said:

“My credentials satisfied Mr. Fontaine, sir, and I fancy they can be made to satisfy any jury that may be summoned to sit upon them. What new obstacle have you now to bring forward to retard the settlement of this business?”

“I shall call on Henry Fontaine himself to present them,

said Mr. Berkely, sternly. "He is now in the library, and I will summon him at once."

"Do," replied Summerton, with undaunted effrontery. "I suppose the person who came hither with you has undertaken to personate him; but it's rather late for such a dodge as that."

A grasp of steel was laid upon his shoulder, and, turning, the speaker beheld the face of his former master flashing upon him such unutterable scorn and indignation as made him feel as if sudden doom had overtaken him.

"Demon!" said Fontani, in a tone of concentrated passion, "I have just been looking on your work. Send for your accomplice and confess the full extent of your villainy, or I will hang you on the highest tree in the yard."

Self-possessed as he ordinarily was, Summerton shrank in mortal fear before the terrible earnestness of this man. He made an effort to speak calmly as he asked:

"Of what crime do you accuse me, sir? Respect for my cloth should surely prevent you from making such an unwarrantable attack as this."

"Wretch! do you dare appeal to the garb you have disgraced by assuming it as a protection to such enormities as you have been guilty of? Call the woman, I say; confront her with me, and let me see if you will both attempt to defy me."

Philip by this time recovered voice to speak, and he haughtily asked:

"What does this mean? And who are you, sir, who thus insult my friends in my own house?"

"You make a slight mistake in the last assertion, Mr. Vane; for, during the illness of my brother, I am master here. This man, Thomas Somers, was once my valet—he knew me as Baron Fontani; and, while in my service, he stole from me the miniature of my wife, my marriage certificate, and other articles which enabled him to pass off his

step daughter as my child. Stop these proceedings, Mr. Vane, for your wife has no more claim on this estate than any other stranger."

He might have talked on much longer without interruption, for Philip had fainted. He was carried up stairs to Savella in that state, and the Senora, devoured with apprehension, rushed down to discover what had thrown him into such a condition.

As she turned the curve in the winding staircase, she saw Summerton in the powerful grasp of a strong man, dragged across the hall toward the room of Fontaine. The clear blue eyes of the stranger fell upon her, and he imperiously commanded her to join them.

A vague idea that the voice was familiar, that the face was one she had known in other days, impelled her to obey, though even her ruthless heart was quaking with fear; and when she came near enough to read the expression of her ally's face, she saw that all was lost.

Summerton's audacity seemed to have completely deserted him, and he trembled and cowered before the strong will of him who held him in his iron grip.

A few whispered words from Fontani caused George Berkely to spring up stairs on an exploring visit to Summerton's apartment. Two servants were speedily summoned to his assistance, and several large boxes were taken down and placed near the door of Fontaine's room.

In the meantime the whole party had invaded that sanctuary in which grief and remorse had so long held him captive. In some perturbation Fontaine arose to meet them; without a moment's hesitation, his brother came forward and held out his hand as if they had only met yesterday:

"Claude, old fellow, how is it with you? Come, take my hand; don't fancy that I am not flesh and blood, for I am as real as you are."

Fontaine uttered a great cry, grasped his hand, and fell upon his neck, exclaiming:

"Oh, my brother—my *living* brother. The brand of Cain is lifted. Oh, God! I thank thee for all thy mercies!"

The shock, instead of unnerving him, seemed to have restored to him all his old energy. He stood erect and asked:

"What has that man done, Henry, that you grasp him thus? Has *he* kept us apart so long—so long?"

"He has done worse than that, Claude. He is the d—l who has tampered with your reason and produced the delusion that is destroying you. He is a juggler, a ventriloquist, and his was the voice that has so long haunted you; his the skill that made an inferno of your house."

The spell that had so long chained the faculties of Fontaine seemed broken by this revelation. He looked around with all his old fire.

"Can this be proved?" he asked.

"Here are the proofs," said a voice at the door. "In these boxes you will find the implements he has used."

The boxes were quickly opened. In the largest one was an ingenious apparatus for producing the sounds which had so often made night hideous under that roof. In a smaller one was an immense magic lantern, beneath which lay the picture representing the scene of Henry Fontaine's death.

A case containing a small electric battery was next brought to light, and a medicine chest filled with vials, which Dr. Sinclair arrived just in time to examine and pronounce poisons of the most deadly character, placed side by side with their antidotes.

While this examination was taking place, Summerton was securely bound and placed upon a seat. The Senora, with looks of hate and defiance, remained by his side, conscious that she would not be permitted to escape if she were to make the attempt. All that now remained was to brave the scene out with all the audacity she could command. She whispered to the shivering wretch beside her:

"Hold up your head and show them that you have courage to bear defeat, as well as skill to weave such a plot as this. A few more days, and the game would have been ours."

"Why refer to that?" he bitterly asked, "when the labor of years has been crushed in one fatal hour? Curse that man; I wish I had poisoned him when I had the chance; then he could never have done me such an evil turn as this."

The proofs of Summerton's sleight-of-hand were brought in, the doors closed and locked, and an impromptu court organized, of which Fontani constituted himself both accuser and judge. Fontaine was in a state of great excitement; but full of joy and thankfulness at the revelation which had snatched him from despondency and threatened madness to light, life and hope. He could not remove his eyes from the face of his brother, and it was evident that the aroused mind was following all that was said and done with intelligent comprehension.

The judge addressed the two who were arraigned as criminals before him:

"You are both to understand that you are on trial for life and death before a tribunal as ruthless as your own hearts. If the whole truth is not told, I will have no mercy upon you. I will hand you over without hesitation to the authorities to be dealt with according to the law of the land. Your only chance of escape is to appeal to my mercy by making a full confession of all the villainies you have been guilty of in this house."

"And who gave *you* such authority as this?" asked the Senora, with a sneer. "How dare you thus speak to the sister of your dead wife, Henry Fontaine! That connection shall protect both me and this man, whom I acknowledge to be my husband."

"Of that I was before aware," replied Fontani coolly,

and he drew from his pocket a paper from which he read the history of Summerton and his wife, as he had gathered it in Italy. The record was brief, but it was sufficiently infamous to condemn them both to the severest punishment without any additional charges."

Summerton seemed completely crushed; such courage as he possessed had utterly deserted him, and when the terrible voice of his accuser ceased, he faintly said:

"Mercy—mercy! Only let me go free, and I will confess all."

The Senora would still have resisted, and she uttered many biting sarcasms on his want of manliness, but Fontani sternly silenced her by assuring her that the connection between them should prove no protection to her if she refused to win mercy on the terms he had offered.

Summerton, in a low, faltering voice, gave the history of the plot to rob Fontaine, from its first inception down to the present day. He stated that it had first suggested itself to him while in the service of his brother. He pried into everything, read his master's old letters, and gathered from them the facts of his past history. He also learned that the sister of his deceased wife was living near Rome; that she was a widow with a young child, near the age of the one that was supposed to have been lost with her mother. In the possibility that the articles he had stolen might be of use to him, he took them with him when he left Fontani's service.

As soon as possible he made his way to Italy, found Senora Roselli in narrow circumstances, but not absolutely poor. He soon gained her confidence, and induced her to join with him heart and hand in the plot to secure future wealth to the long-neglected child which had hitherto been considered only as an incumbrance.

Savella was too young to remember the change thus made in her position. She was taught to call her mother, Aunt

and eight years spent in England enabled Summerton and his wife to bring her forward on their return to Rome as the daughter of Henry Fontaine. No one questioned the validity of her claim to his fortune, and when her step-father applied to a few men of good position for letters of introduction to responsible persons in New York, they were readily given; for the writers believed his object was to reinstate an orphan child in her just rights.

Summerton then accurately traced the causes of the *diablerie* practised since he had been under that roof, and explained the warning Fontaine had received before his arrival in a very simple manner. He stated that he had availed himself of the excuse of visiting an old friend, to make a flying trip to the neighborhood of La Fontaine, that he might find out all it might be expedient for him to know concerning the family before he entered it. He considered it best then to commence his supernatural warnings, that suspicion might be disarmed when they occurred after his arrival. In the intervals of Fontaine's absence from the library, he arranged the wires communicating with the table at which he usually sat, the other end of which projected beneath the window-sill and could be used by him to produce that magnetic thrill which had induced Fontaine to believe that his brother had touched him. He also possessed himself of the key of the iron safe, in one of his nocturnal visits to his room, and took an impression from it, which enabled him to destroy the will Fontaine had concealed there.

The remainder of the confession embodied what has already been related. While Summerton was speaking the Senora sat with hard eyes and compressed lips, looking as if on vacancy, though at moments a scornful expression wreathed her lips. When he had finished, she abruptly said:

"Since nothing is now to be gained by silence on my

part, I will speak the whole truth, Henry Fontaine. You will then see that I had mercy on *your* child, hard as you think me; therefore you should have mercy on me and mine. I could withhold the knowledge of this crime, but since confession is the order of the day, I will not. I discovered Isola to be your child by the mark upon her shoulder; she was then in a dying state from drugs I had administered to her to remove her from my path. When I found she was my sister's child, I could not let her die, and my husband used his skill to save her life."

Fontaine started forward and vehemently asked:

"What is this? Isola Henry's child? What can you mean?"

His brother grasped his hand firmly, and said:

"It is true Claude," and he rapidly unfolded the chain of evidence by which it became known to him. With a murmur of thanksgiving upon his lips, Fontaine sank back a moment, but he presently arose with all his old dignity and self-possession. He said:

"And now, Henry, the fatal cause of that rash act, which has so long darkened my life, must be explained. The woman who sits before you induced me to believe that Savella was attached to *me*, but that some entanglement with a former lover compelled her to be very cautious in her demonstrations of affection. Bianca brought me notes and messages which I know now must have been intended for you, confessing the most ardent affection for me. I was vain and foolish enough to believe it to be so; I became desperately enamored of her, as you already know.

"One night, when I believed you to be at Tivoli, Bianca came to me in a passion of rage, and declared to me that in spite of her sister's professions, she was now in a summer-house in the shubbery with her former lover. I could come with her and see for myself how much her pretended attachment was worth.

"I followed her, with jealous anger stirring in my heart; which was increased to frenzy when I looked into the moonlit alcove, saw my idol clasped to the breast of another man, and heard her say:

"Oh, my beloved, how can I live if separated from you?"

"Blind with rage, I rushed upon my rival, stabbed him, as I thought, to the heart; as your hat fell off, the moonlight streamed upon your face, and I knew that I was a fratricide.

"I believed you died, and I fled from Rome in a state of mind which language may never describe. I believe I was deranged for months afterward, though I had judgment enough left not to betray myself to strangers. I will not describe the years of darkness that followed; you can imagine them when you see to what they have brought me."

"And I, too, was hard, unfeeling to leave this burden on you so long. But the iron is melted, my brother, and again my heart is human. We both have much to forgive."

Then turning to the Senora, he sternly said:

"And now explain your share in this deception."

She looked him firmly in the face, and defiantly replied:

"Can you not guess the key to the riddle? I loved you myself. I would have given my sister to Claude, and won you to return my affection. I discovered your secret marriage with Savella, and in the frenzy of the moment I called on him to kill the rival who held his beloved in his arms. He blindly obeyed me, but he was ignorant of who that rival was till he saw your face as you fell. That is all I have to say, and now do your worst. I do not fear you, for you will not dare to bring an ignominious punishment upon the sister of your wife. If you do, I will proclaim aloud the connection that exists between us, and the world shall know that the blood of the guilty felon flows in the veins of *your* daughter."

"That would not have saved you if you had not made a full and free confession. Having done that, my promise of mercy to you and your accomplice shall be kept. Now, I wish further to know what connection your daughter and her husband have had with the fraud that has been attempted against my brother?"

"Savella has none; she believes herself to be the heiress of the estate. Mr. Vane thought her such when he married her."

"There is an evasion in your last words, and I——"

General Berkely here leaned forward, and hastily whispered a few words in the speaker's ear. Fontani deliberated a moment, and then said:

"I am glad that your daughter is not implicated in this nefarious plot to rob a confiding and generous man. Her husband may have the benefit of a doubt as to his complicity in it since he married her; for we do not wish to be merciless in our investigations."

"I would not advise you to," sneered the Senora; "'people that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.' You know your brother would have little chance to recover if his past was dragged before a jury. I am not afraid of anything a Fontaine can do to me."

Henry Fontaine regarded her a moment in silence; he seemed to be debating a question in his own mind, but he finally said:

"Although it seems wrong to unloose two such miscreants upon society, I cannot prevail on myself to mete out to you the punishment due to your crimes. I will send you both back to Italy at my own expense, on the condition that you, Bianca, relinquish all claim upon your daughter. She seems to be worthy of a better fate than to be linked with such as you are. She has married into a respectable family, and they will see that she is properly cared for."

Summerton here roused himself and spoke:

"I accept the terms for my wife and myself; but I claim indemnity for the expense incurred by me in bestowing a fine musical education on Savella. She may yet become rich through that, and the person to whom she owes it should not go unrewarded."

"Let Mrs. Vane settle that when her musical career has brought her the means to do so," replied Fontani, drily. "I only consent to spare you; I shall not reward you for the failure of the villainy which may compel her to use her talents in such a manner."

He then pronounced the sentence.

"The prisoners will be removed to their respective apartments, and a strict watch kept over them till arrangements can be made to transfer them to the ship which will take them to Europe. The court is adjourned."

The doors were unlocked, the servants called in, and the commands of the temporary judge obeyed.

When this was done, Fontaine for the first time observed the presence of George Berkely. His heart and mind had been so absorbed in the late scene that he had thought of nothing else. He warmly grasped his hand, and the young man drew him into the library, where he gave him an account of what had happened to Isola, her rescue and subsequent union with himself. He further informed him that she and Miss Carleton were awaiting an interview. They had come over from the Vale while the trial was going on, and were now in the sitting-room.

"I will go to them," he said; and, followed by George, he hurried to greet his darling.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

WHILE this exciting scene passed below stairs, one even more painful was going on in Savella's room. Philip's swoon lasted but few moments, and when he regained control of his faculties he peremptorily ordered every one to leave the room except his wife. He said:

"Lock the door, Savella; I have something terrible to communicate to you."

She obeyed in a tremor of alarm, and then, throwing herself on a chair beside the bed on which he still lay, passionately said:

"Oh, Philip, what can it be? Nothing that can separate us? everything else I can bear."

"Poor girl—poor girl," he muttered. "She loves me now, but will she still cling to me when she knows all?"

She caught the sense of his words and eagerly said:

"Do you suppose that I will ever shrink from you, Philip? What is this terrible thing that has struck you down like a woman? Tell me—I have strength to bear it and to defy the world if you are by my side."

"Oh, Savella," he replied, with deep emotion, "till this hour I never knew the value of your affection. Through all our future I will prove to you how highly I estimate your loving trust in this dark and shameful hour of my life. Yet how can I tell you? how can I show you what a villain I have been?"

She gently caressed and soothed him, and when he was calmer she whispered:

"Tell me now, Philip; I am strong. I can bear—I can forgive all, if you still love me."

Thus encouraged, Philip gained nerve to ask:

"Savella, have you never suspected that you had no right here? that your claims were all a sham?"

Her eyes dilated and her frame trembled, as she indignantly replied:

"Why should you ask me such a question as that, Philip? Do you think I am a robber, who could be capable of carrying out such a deception as that?"

He quivered at the opprobrious word she used.

"Pardon me, Savella. I should not have thrown such an injurious suspicion upon you; but I have a painful task to perform, and I do not know how to begin."

Savella rapidly spoke:

"If there has been any villainy, it has been devised and carried out by Mr. Summerton. I have deceived you in but one thing, Philip, and that he compelled me to do. He is the husband of my aunt, though why they concealed their connection I do not understand."

"Your aunt, Savella? May not the relationship be nearer? You are not Mr. Fontaine's niece?"

She became very pale, and a shudder thrilled through her frame. She faltered:

"Is she—can she be my mother? Has she reared me to sustain a false character from my childhood? Oh! Philip, this is too infamous—too dreadful," and she buried her face in his bosom.

"Savella," he whispered, "hear the worst at once. I have known this since—since I changed in my temper so much. It made me miserable; but I could not escape from the coil they had thrown around me. I have abetted their villainy, though I scorned and detested it. Pity me; forgive me; and I promise to be all to you that the most devoted husband can be."

The form he clasped trembled violently, and Savella burst into a passion of tears. At length, calmed by this outburst of emotion, she slipped from his embrace, and bowing her face upon his hands, sobbed:

"Oh! Philip, what cannot love like mine forgive. Be to me what you were in the first days of our union, and I can still be happy. Take me far from this woman, who has been a mother in name, but from whom I have never received one token of maternal affection. This money, which has caused such sin and degradation, is little to what I can win by my own efforts. We will go to Europe, where my voice will be fully appreciated, and I will give you wealth in return for your protecting love. Only give me that and I shall be happy."

Touched, overwhelmed by such generosity, Philip lifted her to his heart, and mingled his tears with hers. For the first time he felt that he could truly and tenderly love her.

When their emotion subsided, he gradually unfolded to her the story of Isola, and after a long and confidential conversation their future plans were arranged. Savella then packed up her clothing without assistance, and prepared to depart. She had an affecting interview with Fontaine, in which she assured him of her own innocence, and entreated his forbearance toward her husband. He kindly reassured her, and pledged himself that Philip's name should not be stained by permitting his acquiescence in the fraud of her step-father to become publicly known.

Savella then entered the apartment of the Senora to bid her a final adieu. She was hard and cold as ever, and manifested no emotion when her daughter informed her that they must meet no more. She assured her that so long as she possessed any means of her own she would share them with her; but future companionship was impossible. The Senora only said:

"When you go on the stage, as you will, and make a fortune, pay my husband all he has spent on you. I ask no more——"

"I pledge myself to do that," replied Savella, and thus they parted.

Philip Vane and his wife returned to Dunlora, there to inform his mercenary parents of the signal downfall of his brilliant prospects. Their bitter disappointment was softened by the assurance of Savella that by the exercise of her musical abilities she could yet give Philip a larger fortune than the one they had lost.

This promise was in time realized; Philip could not live in the Valley with such a cloud hanging over him; he induced his parents to offer Dunlora for sale, and go with him to Paris, where Savella made a successful début as a cantatrice. Philip gracefully spent the money she lavished on him without stint, but he was not unmanly enough to recede from the promise pledged in that hour of forgiveness; he treated her kindly and put a curb upon his impatient temper where she was concerned.

Dunlora was purchased by Henry Fontaine for his son-in-law, and Isola was installed there as mistress. Her father remained in Virginia till late in the summer, and then returned to Russia, for he could not be prevailed upon to relinquish his ambitious aspirations for the quiet enjoyment of domestic life.

Before he left, the two brothers read together the letter of their father which had so deeply moved the elder one when he returned to his home so many years before.

It ran thus:

"MY BELOVED CLAUDE:—A dreary fear is pressing on my heart, for the fearful tidings that have come to me have given even a deeper stab than my poor Henry's death has inflicted."

"My son, every line in your letter breathes a depth of remorse which can only be the offspring of guilt. Yes—*guilt*; though my heart exonerates you from intentional evil. If Henry died through any fault of yours, I know it was an involuntary one, and in the sight of Heaven you are free from the crime of fratricide.

"I am about to join him who has gone from earth; but my heart yearns with inexpressible tenderness toward you, my noble and true boy. Do not think that this blow has destroyed me, Claude. My doom was written before it fell, and I am sure it has not hastened it.

"Take comfort, take peace to your heart, and become all that I hoped you would in the future: a noble, true and courageous man, bearing the heavy cross that has been laid upon you in Christian humility. May God speedily send the Comforter to you, is the prayer of your loving father.

"CLAUDE FONTAINE."

Henry Fontaine wrung the hand of his brother, and said with emotion:

"Ah, if I had been more like him, I should have spared you years of suffering. Forgive me, Claude, as I trust God will pardon me for my hardness of heart."

"I trust He has pardoned us both for our wrong-doing," replied Fontaine, devoutly. "I can never be grateful enough for the mercy He has shown to me."

Before Baron Fontani left his native land he had the satisfaction of seeing his brother restored to health and happiness; and the same evening that gave Fanny's hand to her lover, also bestowed a new mistress on La Fontaine, in the person of that faithful one who would have sacrificed her own fortune to keep Claude Fontaine's roof over his head during those dreary days of darkness from which a merciful Providence had delivered him.

THE, END.

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