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THE SEPARATION.

M. 186.

CHAPTER I.

IN a small, meanly-furnished room, in the outskirts of one of our large Atlantic cities, sat a woman apparently about twenty-six or eight years of age. Her face expressed weariness and care, and her health was evidently broken, but there still lingered traces of beauty, which, under more prosperous circumstances, would at her age scarcely have been impaired.

The fair brow was lined by sorrow, and the pale lips had drooped with an expression of hopelessness, until wrinkles had formed around the mouth; her hair, which was of a bright auburn hue, was mingled with many threads of gray, and the large blue eye had that glassy expression which betrays the frequent shedding of tears. Hers were tears wrung from nature's bitterest fount—a sense of injury and oppression, where the heart has placed its deepest trust.

Her dress was of coarse calico, but it was neatly made, and carefully fitted to the wasted figure, which had shrunk from its once rounded proportions. A coarse yarn stocking and clumsily-made shoe could not entirely conceal the symmetry of a well-formed foot, and the hand which busily plied the needle was still beautiful, in spite of its extreme thinness.

There was no carpet on the floor; and the single window had a strip torn from an old dress, hung over the lower sash, to screen the poverty within from the gaze of the passer-

by. A bedstead, constructed of rough boards, stood in one corner, and on a straw bed, with a scanty, though clean covering, lay a girl, about twelve years of age, asleep. Long curls of auburn hair hung over the coarse pillow, and a ray of sunshine, falling through the window upon their brightness, seemed to cast a halo around the sweet face of the young sleeper. Strikingly like what her mother had been in her childish days, was that blooming and beautiful girl, and as she glanced toward the placid face, she turned away with a pang, and murmured,

"Sleep, sleep, my darling. Oh! were it not for my wretchedness if bereft of thee, I would kneel and ask of God to take thee now, in thy young beauty, to that home, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

She arose and put aside the garment she had just completed, in a basket containing several more of the same description, for making which a pittance that might barely suffice to sustain life was to be paid. Comfortless and wearisome beyond expression, is the life of a woman compelled to sew for her daily bread—and how many reared in luxury have been reduced to this? They must forego the free air of heaven, the blessed sunshine; for no time is allowed for exercise, save the few minutes snatched at the close of day, to return the finished work to their employer. All the sweet charities of life are sacrificed to this incessant toil, which is rewarded by the

privilege of dragging through a miserable, blighted existence, to rest in a premature and unhonored grave. Oh! ye butterflies of the earth, who toil not, neither do ye spin, think of your hopeless sister, condemned to toil which is deprived of all hopefulness, and endeavor to render her lot less painful. Give not alms, but a just compensation for the labor bestowed on the daintily-made garments which adorn your persons, and cheerfulness will enter the dwelling of the weary sempstress.

Mrs. Fletcher had just finished the last of a dozen shirts, which had closely occupied her four weeks; for she found it impossible to complete one in less than two days, and for the whole number she was to receive but six dollars. How could such a sum pay rent, purchase fuel, and leave even a moiety to obtain food for the mother and child? The day was cold and clear, and snow lay in glistening heaps without; but the hearth was nearly fireless, and Mrs. Fletcher shivered as she drew the embers together, and laid on a few thin faggots taken from a closet at the foot of the bed. A small iron pot, containing a few potatoes, was then brought forth, and placed over the fire to boil.

"My darling Fanny must be nearly rested after last night's interruption to her usual sleep," thought the mother, "and when she awakes, it will be comfortable to have our breakfast warm, though it is only a few potatoes. He will scarcely come back to-day," and her eye glanced restlessly toward the door, as a footstep approached. It passed by, and a faint shade of color arose to her pallid cheek, while tears rushed into her eyes, as she murmured,

"How blithely I once sang,

His very step hath music in it,
As he comes up the stair;

and now it is a sound fraught with dread to the heart that still loves him. Oh William! what demon has entered your once kindly heart?"

Poor woman! A demon she may well call it, for her home is desolated by its presence. Intemperance, with all its train of evils, had entered the household, and comfort, hope, and happiness were but memories of the past.

The husband and father, brutalized by intoxication, was a constant source of dread to the two helpless creatures, who were dependent on him for protection.

When Elizabeth Haydon eloped from her father's house at the age of fifteen, with a young man of handsome exterior, and agreeable manners, she little anticipated the dark future which she was embracing. Fletcher, at the time of their marriage, was the traveling agent of a large northern house, with the confidence of his employers, and a prospect at no remote day of being taken into partnership.

It was during a tour into one of the middle states, that he became acquainted with Mr. Haydon and his only child—a willful, spoiled girl, just budding into womanhood. Mr. Haydon judged Fletcher accurately. Infirm of purpose, and easily influenced by his associates, he declared him to be; and the old gentleman refused to allow his young daughter to unite her fate with his, until time had tested the truth of his attachment, and the soundness of his principles.

Offended by his words, Fletcher sought the ill-disciplined daughter, and aided by a cousin of the young lady, who resided with his uncle, he succeeded in persuading her to abandon the paternal roof, by holding out the belief, that when they were irrevocably united, her father would not spurn his only child from his presence.

She fled with him, and from that hour had never beheld her father's face, nor had the slightest notice ever been taken of the appeals she had long since ceased to make.

The forsaken parent consoled himself for his daughter's desertion, by installing a young wife into his home, and other children filled the place in his heart which she had forfeited.

Years rolled on, and her father's worst forebodings were fulfilled. Vainly did the wife endeavor to stem the tide of ruin which she saw ready to overwhelm them. They commenced housekeeping on a scale which was far beyond their means, but she was too young and inexperienced to know the resources of her husband; and it was not until poverty began to creep upon them, and Fletcher, from being a "good fellow," fond of his glass of

wine at dinner, and a social drink in the evening, gradually degenerated into the brutalized drunkard, reckless of every tie, insensible to every feeling of honor and humanity, that his wife felt all the horrors of the fate she had embraced. Years of bitter suffering passed over her head; and of the three children born during that time, only the eldest one survived.

At length the last dollar was spent, and the inebriate could find no employment; for who would trust him? Those worthy of respect, who had endeavored to rescue him from his wretched degradation, had long since abandoned him to his wayward fate, as irreclaimable. An execution swept away even the bed on which they slept, and the wretched wife aroused all the energies she possessed, to preserve her children from perishing of want. Winter—pitiless, freezing winter—was setting in; and with much difficulty she procured the miserable room they now inhabited, as a shelter from the inclement weather. By the sacrifice of the greater portion of their scanty wardrobe, a small sum was procured, which purchased the few articles that were absolutely necessary to their humble housekeeping. In this obscure spot, she hoped to conceal herself and daughter from her debased husband; for his conduct during the past month had been such as to arouse every indignant feeling of the human heart.

The beauty of the young Fanny was of so rare and exquisite an order, that even the wretched profligates, who were now her husband's only associates, were struck with it, and one among them dared to cast his unhallowed eyes upon her, and openly boasted that her father had promised to bestow his daughter's hand on him, when she attained the age of sixteen, in return for an annuity which would secure to him the means of indulging his vices.

What added to the bitterness of Mrs. Fletcher's aversion for him who thus boasted, was the malign influence he had exerted on her own fate; for he was no other than the same cousin who had induced her to listen to the proposal of an elopement with her husband. Linton had been disappointed in the reward he hoped to reap by his treachery;

and when his uncle married a second time, and heirs were born to his estate, he obtained from Mr. Haydon the means of entering into business for himself, and removed to the same city in which the unfortunate victim of his interested treachery spent her cheerless existence. By lucky and not very scrupulous speculations, he amassed wealth in a few years, which was lavished in ministering to his own enjoyment. Though dissipated, he had not sunk to the level of poor Fletcher; he was rich, and therefore he was more respectable. A strong mind and cultivated intellect were often bowed before the intoxicating bowl; but his natural superiority to his associates only rendered him more implacable in his determinations—more ruthless of consequences to those in his power.

Mrs. Fletcher beheld his admiration of her daughter, and trembled. Sooner could she have borne to see that beloved one laying in the cold embrace of death, than wedded to the same unhappiness she had known as the wife of the inebriate; and vainly wealth held out its golden bait to tempt her poverty.

On the previous evening her husband had succeeded in tracing her to her wretched shelter, and after using coarse abuse toward her, he persisted in remaining beside her fire during the greater part of the night. By dawn of day he departed, and the mother and daughter then threw themselves on the wretched bed to obtain some repose. After a brief and troubled slumber, Mrs. Fletcher arose and resumed the toils of the day, leaving her exhausted child to sleep a few more hours, before she aroused her to share in her labors.

CHAPTER II.

The potatoes were cooked, and Mrs. Fletcher drew toward the scanty fire a small pine table, over which she spread a napkin, and after placing the plates and salt, she awoke her daughter to share the repast. Fanny sprang to the floor, and in a few moments had smoothed the masses of curling hair which floated around her shoulders. When she had completed the arrangement of her simple toilet,

the two drew near the table, and soon dispatched their homely breakfast.

"I have finished those shirts for Mrs. —, my love," said the mother, "and you must take them home this morning. She will pay you for them, and then we can purchase more wood. Last night our stock was nearly exhausted."

Fanny remembered that a week's supply had been consumed by her unprincipled father, and tears sprang to her eyes, as she said,

"Poor mother! you toil forever, and have no compensation beyond the few pence bestowed for your sewing. My father must one day repent. God will not forever permit you to be thus oppressed."

"My darling Fanny," said Mrs. Fletcher, with emotion, "I only meet the just reward of disobedience. I abandoned a kind, affectionate father, without other cause than my blind and childish attachment to one he truly judged, and it is but just that Heaven should abandon me. I bow before the decree of Providence, and all I dare ask is, that you may be rescued from the evil destiny I so recklessly chose."

Fanny wept as she embraced her mother.

"I am willing, dearest mother, to share whatever may befall you, whether evil or good. If my grandfather knew all, would he not assist you? You will not speak of his circumstances to me—is he too poor to help you in your greatest need, or is he so hard-hearted as to spurn the prayer of one so forsaken as you are?"

"Your grandfather lives far away from this place, my child. My letter he will not receive, and I am too poor to seek him in person, and make an appeal to his compassion. I know not what his circumstances now are, for I have not heard from him for twelve years. When you were born, I wrote once more, hoping that his heart might at last be softened; and in order that my letter might not be returned unopened, as all the rest had been, I got a friend to direct it, and then inclosed it to the postmaster of my native town, with a request to him to deliver it among his other letters, without comment. It was returned to me, with a few words written by my father at the top of the page, in which he said that

a sight of the writing was sufficient—he had not read it, and never would read one coming from the same source. I had chosen my own fate, and whether dark or bright, I must endure it, without hoping to regain the affectionate sympathy I had so recklessly forfeited."

"But, mother, your fault does not appear to me so great as to deserve so severe a punishment. Your father was cruel."

"My fault was such as a devoted parent rarely forgives. His pride and his affections were centered in me, and in his provident tenderness he had filled the place of the mother who died in my infancy. Rashly presuming on the strength of that love, I deserted him for the acquaintance of a few weeks—defied his commands, spoken not in anger, but with the voice of reason and affection, and in my girlish romance forfeited all title to his love. No, my daughter—cast no blame on that old man, whose heart my selfish folly wrung with the keen pangs inflicted by the ingratitude of a cherished child. There are few cases that can justify a daughter in violating the obedience due to her parents by a clandestine marriage. It is in direct violation of the command of Him who says, 'Honor thy father, and thy mother,' and the visible displeasure of Heaven seems to follow those who have thus selfishly secured what they fancied to be their happiness, only to find the fair seeming like the fabled fruit which is tempting to the eye, but filled with ashes and bitterness. No—my punishment is just."

Fanny would have continued the conversation, but her mother arose, and busied herself in more neatly arranging the work she was to take home. The young girl went to the closet and brought forth a box filled with the materials for manufacturing artificial flowers, and spread several beautifully finished bunches of roses, hyacinths, and camellias on the sordid bed. A sad and strange contrast did these bright, gay-looking gewgaws form with the poverty-stricken room and its coarsely-clad inmates; but their fresh beauty was at least in harmony with that of their youthful maker, who bent over them and arranged their leaves with delicate care, and the shadow which the late words of her mother had cast over her bright face gradually departed, as with that

love for the beautiful, inherent in persons of imaginative temperament, she arranged her delicately tinted flowers so as to harmonize their hues.

The plain sewing done by her mother was distasteful to Fanny, and as it was necessary that she should earn something to assist in their support, she had acquired the art of flower-making, and in a very short time became so expert in their manufacture, that her employer allowed her to take the materials home with her, and work beside her mother.

Fanny tied on her coarse straw bonnet with its faded green veil, and her mother carefully gathered up her luxuriant curls and concealed them beneath the crown. She then wrapped around the graceful though childish figure, the thin shawl which was her only defense from the bitter severity of the weather, with many cautions to her darling to hurry on her errand, and not to raise her veil while in the street.

It was with extreme reluctance that Mrs. Fletcher allowed her beautiful daughter to go alone on the streets of a large city, but her own health was so broken that exposure to the inclemency of the winter had once already made her too seriously ill to perform the daily labor which was necessary to enable them to exist. With a sad heart she was compelled to send forth her precious Fanny, to encounter the trials and temptations incident to one too young to have fixed principles of right; and too sensitive to the wretchedness of their situation, not to listen to any insidious proposal, by which hopes were held out of escaping from the abyss of poverty and hopelessness, into which they were plunged.

Fanny proceeded at a quick pace toward Mrs. — establishment, and in obedience to her mother's commands, kept her veil closely drawn, until she had nearly reached the place of her destination. Where two crossings met, she was compelled to linger a few moments, that a line of carriages might pass. As she thus stood, a door was opened near her which led into the bar-room of a large hotel; fires were blazing brightly within, and the sounds of music came from the open door. She was passionately fond of music, and the waltz that was wafted to her ears brought a brighter hue to her cheek, as she stood with half-parted lips

listening with eager delight. The wind blew her veil aside, but she did not heed it, until one of two fashionably dressed men, who had stopped near her, ostensibly to listen to the music, but in reality to gaze on the charming face so unexpectedly revealed beneath her shabby bonnet, exclaimed,

"By Jupiter, what a cherub face!"

Fanny caught the truant veil in her hand, and hastily shrouding her features beneath its thick folds, hurried on her way; but she was conscious that the two were following her, and accelerating her steps almost to a run, she was soon safely sheltered beneath Mrs. — roof.

She had scarcely laid her work on the counter, when the same persons also entered, and seeing the articles she had just placed before the shopwoman, the younger one advanced, and said,

"Ah, those are the very things I am in search of. I will take the whole parcel at once; they are beautifully sewed I perceive, and I shall be glad to have as many more made by the same person. Your mother, my pretty lass, or you aunt, I presume, was the sempstress."

"My mother, sir," said the abashed girl, shrinking from his admiring gaze.

"What a very melodious voice the little thing has," said his companion, in a low tone, as if speaking to himself—and Fanny turned her eyes toward him for the first time. He was a tall, well-framed man, about forty years of age; his complexion was of a deep olive tint, with a large nose, and small, deep-set black eyes, shaded by heavy brows. The lower part of the face was heavily made, and the lips very full. That indescribable expression, which even in his sober moments is stamped on the features of one devoted to the wine-cup, betrayed his debasement. A receding forehead showed a deficiency in the moral organs, well borne out by the expression of a face on which one emotion of benevolence or kindly feeling seemed never to have shed its light.

Fanny shuddered, and grew pale, for in this disgusting creature she recognized the daily associate of her abandoned father, and her own relation, Mr. Linton. That he had at once recognized her, and had made the undisguised admiration of his companion a pre-

text for following her, and, if possible, ascertaining the place of her abode, she doubted not. It was evident that he did not choose to recognize her there, and at a sign from the shopwoman, she gladly retreated to the work-room to replenish her basket.

Mr. Linton then asked for some articles, which were kept in another part of the establishment, and drew the woman aside from his companion. He then said, in an indifferent tone,

"Do you know the mother of the girl who has just left?"

"I have seen her once, sir. She is in ill-health, and usually sends her daughter for the work. A nice, well-behaved little creature she is."

"Hem—yes—her beauty is undeniable, poor thing; but I would not advise you to trust the mother too far. She once sewed for me, and I had cause to suspect her of dishonesty. A word to the wise you know."

"Dear me, who would have thought it! Well, I am sure I am much obliged to you, sir, for putting me on my guard. And she, such a baby-like looking person, too, to do such a thing!"

"Appearances are often deceitful," said Linton, sagely, as he threw down the amount for his purchases, and ordered them to be taken to his residence. He then called to his companion, "I shall be back in five minutes, Wharton. I remember a commission at the corner, which I will execute, while you are replenishing your wardrobe."

Wharton nodded, and stepping into the street, Linton beckoned a news-boy from the opposite side of the way:

"How many papers have you?"

"Two dozen, sir—Sun, Tribune, Herald—"

"Pooh! cease your crying and listen to me. Here is the price of your whole stock in trade, and a trifle over. Watch that door, and when you see a young girl with a straw bonnet, green veil, and black shawl, come out of it, do you follow her at a short distance, and ascertain the place she goes to. Then come to me at No.—, Broadway, and I will double the sum I have given you."

The boy grinned and nodded, and Linton rejoined his friend. This young man was

quite good looking, easily led, and possessed of an independent fortune. Many good impulses he had, and when none of his fashionable associates were near to ridicule his "extreme verdancy," as a would-be wit among them styled his freshness of feeling, he generally obeyed them. He had been educated in the country, but was in a fair way to get rid of the notions instilled into him by an excellent and pious guardian. According to Linton, he was rubbing off the rust of his rural education, and he now seemed to be at the turning point of his destiny. A few more months of association with the clique he had unhappily fallen into, and his ruin was sealed; but their hold on him was as yet so slight, that little effort would enable him to break from them forever. Wharton had been greatly struck with the sweet face of Fanny, and his first desire was to alleviate the poverty her dress betrayed. He would willingly have shaken off his companion, as he followed her, but that he found to be impossible. He took advantage of Linton's brief absence to make some inquiries of the shopwoman, which that person had foreseen and provided against by his insinuations; for he knew that if represented to Wharton as deserving objects of benevolence, he would not hesitate to assist them in such a manner as to save the honest pride of the mother. The woman, influenced by the falsehood which had just been told her, replied,

"That such an establishment as theirs employed so many persons that it was impossible to know the character of all; but from some things which had recently become known to her, she suspected the mother of the girl was not all she should be, and in future they should not give her work."

At that moment Linton entered, and the two left the store together—one chuckling over the discovery he was about to make, and the other wrapped in unpleasant thoughts. That charming child, the daughter of an unprincipled mother, opened to his imagination a vista of future wretchedness which he shrank from contemplating.

Fanny had filled her basket, and received a few kind words from the woman who superintended the cutting out, when the shopwoman

entered with a scowl on her brow, and throwing herself on a chair, said,

"Well, what a world this is, to be sure—filled with all manner of deceit and thievery. Now, who would have believed that that child's mother is not to be trusted? Empty your basket, little one; you get no more work here, I can tell you. When one least looked for such a trick, you would march off with my property without leave."

The blood mounted to Fanny's temples, and she quickly asked,

"What do you mean, madam? My mother is an honest woman, and has always punctually returned the work intrusted to her."

"Yes—I don't deny that; but she has embezzled from others, and may yet do so by me when a good chance offers. So I shan't trust her any longer."

"Oh, who could so have defamed my kind, my suffering mother," exclaimed the poor girl, with clasped hands and streaming eyes. "Oh, madam, it is false, I do assure you, and if you take from us the only means of support we have, we must perish in this bitter weather. My mother is scarcely able to sit up now; and without food, without fire, or the means of procuring either, what is to become of us?"

"Ah, they are slandered, you may be sure," said the cutter, in a voice of sympathy. "Poor child, see how she trembles and weeps."

The woman was a little touched. After a pause, she said,

"If your mother is honest, you can not object to this proposal. I already owe her a sum which you can suffer to remain as a deposit in my hands, to guarantee the return of my materials. When finished, I will pay her for the work you now take."

Fanny remembered that their wood was nearly out, and but few potatoes left, and she timidly said,

"It is very cold, madam, and we have very little fuel left. My mother suffers much from an oppression in her chest, and—indeed—indeed, madam, the work shall be, as it always has been, returned to you as soon as it is completed."

"You have heard my proposal," she replied, coldly, "and if you do not choose to accept it,

you can remove the things from your basket and leave them."

Poor Fanny saw that there was no alternative, and she faintly said,

"You can keep it, ma'am; but if you would give me only one dollar, I would take it as a great kindness, for indeed we need it very much, or I would not ask for it."

"Why, child, you have a box of flowers, for which you will get money."

"I have but a few bunches. I have been unable to work much for the last few days, and the money for these will be but a trifle."

"I suppose, as you've been punctual heretofore, I may trust you in one dollar," was the ungracious response. "So take it, and be sure to bring the things to the day."

Fanny took the paltry sum so reluctantly given, and with a bursting heart proceeded toward her lodgings. That Linton had been the traducer, she was convinced, and she dreaded to inform her mother that his baneful influence was again upon her weary path. She did not observe the boy who tracked her footsteps to the retired place in which the house was situated, carrying on his arm a large bundle of newspapers.

Mrs. Fletcher instantly saw, from the subdued expression of Fanny's face, that something unpleasant had occurred; and a meeting with her father was the first thought that came to her mind.

"No," said Fanny, in reply to her inquiries. "It was my father's evil genius, Mr. Linton, who encountered me in Mrs. —'s store, and—and"—

Here poor Fanny burst into tears, and it was with some difficulty that her mother drew from her the cause of her distress. The pale cheek became yet more death-like as she listened, and after a pause of some length, she drew her daughter toward her, and said,

"My dear child, would you, to escape our present destitution, consent to look on that bad man as your future husband?"

Fanny shuddered.

"I think, mother, that I would sooner die from starvation. His very presence seems to chill me into stone."

"Such is your father's project, Fanny; and

Linton has offered to complete your education in the most expensive manner, and allow me a sufficient annuity to support me in comfort, if I will consent to give you to him as his wife when you attain the age of sixteen. Speak, my child, once again; decide for yourself."

Fanny looked around their sordid, poverty-stricken apartment, and then her eye rested on the wasted form of her mother. She said,

"For myself, mother, this comfortless room would be far preferable to splendor, with that horrid man to share it with me; but for your sake, mother, I think I can accept his terms. You shall no longer linger in want of every comfort, when I can secure them to you. Four years must pass before he can claim me from your protection."

"My child, forbear," said Mrs. Fletcher, pressing Fanny to her bosom, and hedewg her forehead with her tears. "Would it not be more dreadful to me, to see you bound in your bright youth to a destiny from which you must shrink, with intolerable loathing, than even to perish of want? The bread thus purchased would be bitter with your tears. The comforts thus obtained would cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance on the unnatural mother who sacrificed her child for their attainment. No, no, my Fanny; for me you shall never so outrage your ardent and sensitive nature, by wedding a man undeserving of either respect or affection. We can still trust to the Friend of the helpless, who will not abandon the worse than widowed and orphaned in their utmost need. As to Mr. Linton's insinuations against my character, my love, do not take them so deeply to heart, for I hope yet to convince Mrs. — that her goods are quite safe in my possession."

CHAPTER III.

WHILE this interview was passing, another of quite a different character was taking place in Linton's apartment. He was seated at the head of a highly polished mahogany table, on which fruits and several different kinds of wine were placed.

Opposite to him sat a middle-aged man, in shabby-genteel attire. His coat was of the finest cloth, but rather the worse for wear, and

his flashy vest and neck-tie were visibly soiled. Few traces of the manly beauty which had once distinguished him were now discernible; the once graceful figure had become heavy and corpulent; large rolls of sallow-looking flesh were beneath his chin; his swollen and reddened features, all betrayed the habitual drunkard.

Such was Fletcher, the daily guest and pensioner of Mr. Linton. Few who now looked on him would have believed that he had ever possessed independence and energy of character; yet fair had been his opening prospects of life, and but for a fatal yieldingness of temper, he might have trod an honorable and prosperous path. Linton had drank but little that day, for he had a point to carry with his wretched tool, and while he plied Fletcher with wine, he ate olives, and talked over the events of the morning, in his caustic and bitter tone.

"So you met Fanny to-day?" said the father, in a voice thick from approaching intoxication. "My pretty Fan; it is a shame she should take work from that Mrs. —. She was not born to such a fate."

"Yes I did meet her, and sent a boy after her, to ascertain where your precious wife has concealed herself. If she was my wife, I know I'd have brought her to terms before to-day."

"Pooh! it's easy enough to talk. I know where they are, without your assistance; and a precious pair of fools they are, to poke themselves away in such a hole, when a fine liberal fellow like you would gladly pay all expenses, and make my little Fan a rich woman by and by."

"Why did you not tell me this before?" said Linton, with a fierce glance at his companion.

"Why? Because that Wharton was here when I came in, and afterward I forgot it. 'When wine's in, wit's out,' you know."

Linton spoke more blandly.

"How long do you intend to allow your wife to carry on this farce? I am wearied of it; and besides, I do not approve of the girl I design to make my wife at some future day, being seen on the street daily as the carrier of parcels. I wish to place her at once, at a suitable school, where she will lose no time."

Fletcher regarded him with a vacant stare, and after a pause, seeming to collect his ideas, said, in a muttering tone,

"Talk to Lizzy about it. She always would do what she thought right; and this stupid notion that Fan will be happier as she now is, than one day to belong to you, has taken full possession of her fancy. You can talk her out of it, perhaps. I can't."

"Fletcher," said Linton, impressively, "your wife is not to be talked out of her opposition to our plans, or she would not prefer the wretched destitution in which she lives, to the means of comfort I have so vainly offered. No, you must destroy her resources. You must go there to-night, and in a pretended passion, throw the work she obtained to day, with some difficulty, into the fire. She has not the means of repaying the woman to whom the materials belong, and can not return there for employment. Her health is such that she dare not venture out, and Fanny is too young to obtain work from any other establishment, on her own account. Thus, you see, she must submit to our terms."

"That, that's a bright idea, upon my soul! But now, Linton, don't you think the man who could execute it against his own wife and child, would be an infernal villain?"

"Not, if it is for their ultimate benefit. At all events, you must do it; there is no other alternative."

"Must! Who is to make me?" said Fletcher, making a faint effort to pluck up a little spirit.

"Your necessities," was the cool reply. "If you refuse to do my bidding in this, I stop your supplies, and order you to be refused admittance at my door. Besides, I can at any hour throw you into prison for money loaned, with the express understanding that you would use every effort to place your daughter's future fate at my disposal. Failing in that, the money was to be repaid."

The wretched creature covered before this threat, and muttered,

"I believe the devil was your sponsor, for you have put me up to more than half my villainies against my wife. I must commit this new wickedness, I suppose; but after all, it may be better to force her into our plans."

This consent thus given, Linton saw the impolicy of allowing him any thing more to drink, and he rang for coffee to be brought in. When darkness had enveloped every object, Fletcher went forth on his shameful errand; but he did not feel that his courage was quite wrought up to the "sticking point." He stopped several times on his way to stimulate it anew; and when he reached the apartment of his wife, he was in a fit state to consummate the work of destruction, on which he was bent.

Mrs. Fletcher was sewing by the miserable light of a tallow candle, and Fanny was cutting from colored cambric the leaves for a bunch of moss roses. Both were deeply depressed by the events of the morning, and pursued their respective employments in utter silence, which was at length broken by the most unwelcome of all sounds to the unhappy wife and child. This was the voice of Fletcher, singing a verse from a comic song, in a stentorian tone, as he staggered down the narrow alley in which their abode was situated.

In a few moments he entered, and threw himself in a chair, in so violent a manner, that it yielded beneath his weight. Uttering an imprecation, he made an attempt to rise, but failed in the effort; after several struggles, with the assistance of Fanny, he succeeded in regaining a perpendicular position, and unceremoniously took possession of his wife's seat, from which she had started in alarm when he fell. Fanny silently offered hers to her mother, and gathered up the fragments of the broken one, which she contrived to put together so as to bear her own light weight.

"You find it very pleasant, I dare say, Mrs. Fletcher, to stupify and stultify yourself over your needle all the time," said he, sarcastically. "But I came here this evening to inform you that if you choose to make a fool of yourself, you shall no longer have the power to control Fanny's future, and, ruin her prospects by your cursed obstinacy."

"What are we to do for a support, if we do not work?" inquired his wife quietly, though her heart trembled within her at his last words.

"Do? Nothing. You know well enough that instead of being here, and as you are,

you could be surrounded by every comfort, and my pretty Fan could be acquiring the education and accomplishments of a lady. I tell you finally, madam, that she is the destined wife of my friend Linton."

"Say, rather, your worst enemy, Mr. Fletcher. Ask Fanny what are her feelings toward Mr. Linton, and then *dare* to proceed in your unholy purpose."

"I do not choose to consult the feelings of a child. Fanny shall do as *I* will; an ungrateful minx she would be, to refuse to favor a man who can and will rescue her parents from poverty."

"I can not understand the motive of Mr. Linton's persevering pursuit of our daughter. There are many more beautiful, and nearer his own sphere, than our impoverished child, who would suit him infinitely better."

"I do not know his reasons, nor shall I trouble myself to find them out; the simple fact is sufficient for me, and shall be for you, madam. You taunt me, I suppose, with having impoverished you, when for years I had the whole charge of maintaining you as a lady, with nothing from that old curmudgeon, your father, to help to keep you in your idleness."

"You knew me to be too young to be other than a very helpless wife to you, when you married me," said Mrs. Fletcher, in a slightly tremulous tone. "As I understood my duties, I endeavored to perform them. To myself your harsh language I can bear, because I regard it as part of my allotted punishment for disobeying the kindest of parents; but I can not hear him spoken of by you in such terms, without feeling the keenest anguish."

"Fooling!" repeated Fletcher, contemptuously; "you are always prating about your feelings. I should like to know if they are so much finer and higher-toned than other people's. I came here to-night, madam, determined to put an end to all your nonsense. I shall remove my daughter, with or without your consent, and permit Linton to place her at the seminary he has already selected."

Mrs. Fletcher grew so pale that Fanny was frightened.

"Oh, father," she remonstrated, "my mother is ill; she suffers dreadfully; do not speak to her so."

Fanny had not wept, as most children of her age would have done, during this scene. She, poor child, was injured to such, and her young spirit arose in bitterness against the wretched and unnatural parent, who thus abused his power. She adored her mother, and her heart throbbed with indignation toward her unmanly oppressor. He turned his inflamed eyes on her, and said, fiercely,

"So the cub must show her claws, too! It is time, my young lady, to take you from the influence of this stiff-faced mother of yours, I see plainly. Another day shall find you separated from her."

"No, sir; do not say so; I can not leave her," she replied, earnestly. "She is ill, and needs my attention. If I were away from her, I should be haunted with the thought of her death-bed, with no one by to help her even to a drink of water. I am her child; let us perish together."

"No, not so," he replied, in a kinder tone. "You are also my child, and must save both your mother and myself from the fate that threatens us, by consenting to Linton's proposal. Come now, my pretty little girl; you would like to be mistress of a fine house, drive your carriage, give parties, and have the means of decking your dainty person with elegant attire. Wouldn't you now, my darling?"

Fanny half smiled as he thus appealed to her vanity.

"I should like all that, sir, very well, if my mother could remain with me and enjoy my prosperity; but she thinks that I should be more unhappy as Mr. Linton's future wife, than in our present destitute condition."

"Fletcher," said his wife, in an excited voice, "are you less than a man? Have you become so utterly debased that you are willing to sell your young pure child to that drunken profligate, who has in a great measure been the cause of your own ruin? Would you tempt her inexperience with his wealth, and plunge her into an abyss of misery, that I, her mother, from fatal experience, tell her, is a thousand times worse than death? No, my beloved Fanny," she solemnly continued; "the only heart that truly loves you, would sooner break over your grave than see you wedded to the inebriate. Escape the bitter humiliation

of soul, the disdain that must swell in your heart, toward him you have promised before God to love and honor, even by dwelling in utter poverty and desertion."

Overcome by her emotion, she sank back in her chair, in a passion of tears. Transported with rage, Fletcher strode up and down the small room, and blasphemed in a terrible manner. Suddenly he espied the basket of work, beside the bed, and snatching it up, with an oath, scattered the contents on the fire. Fanny sprang forward to snatch them from the kindling flames, exclaiming,

"Oh, father, forbear, and I will forgive you all that is past. You will kill poor mother. If you destroy these materials, we can not pay for them, and Mrs. — will believe what that cruel wretch said of her."

As Fanny snatched the linen from the fire, her father tore it from her grasp, and threw a portion of it back. In so doing, a piece which was completely ignited fell on the bed; the cotton coverlet instantly caught fire, and spread with lightning speed to the unplastered walls, which offered no resistance to its progress. In a few moments the room was filled with smoke and flame. Appalled at the consequences of his brutality, Fletcher made an ineffectual attempt to extinguish the fire, but finding his efforts vain, he seized Fanny by the arm, and said,

"Come with me, and leave the house to be burned. Your mother, with all her pretense of fondness for you, has already abandoned us both. See, she has fled."

Fanny tore herself from his grasp, and rushed out to seek her mother. Mrs. Fletcher had left the room, so soon as she saw the danger which menaced the miserable dwelling, to warn her neighbor in the next apartment, who she knew had retired to bed some time before, with several small children.

Mrs. O'Flanigan was with difficulty aroused, and made to understand the danger that threatened her. She was a laboring woman, and after a hard day's work was in that leaden slumber which only comes to the overtaken frame. The children were dragged from their bed, and the scanty covering wrapped around them, by the exertions of Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter, who forgot, in their sympathy

for these helpless little creatures, to endeavor to save a portion of their own scanty wardrobe from destruction.

"Oh, holy Mother Mary! what is this?" exclaimed the poor Irishwoman. "My poor children turned out this death-cold night, without a bed to lie on, nor a rag to kiver them. What is to become of us the blessed saints only knows! And you have lost every thing, ma'am, and the young lady there, too, in trying to save me and mine. May the Lord bless your goodness!" continued Mrs. O'Flanigan, with that instinctive respect for her fellow-lodger which the quiet refinement of her manner had inspired, in spite of the grinding poverty which apparently placed them on a level.

"We had little to lose," replied Mrs. Fletcher, "and the lives of yourself and children were of infinitely more consequence than possessions of much more value than ours. I wish sincerely that I could aid you, Mrs. O'Flanigan, but I believe you have friends who will not see you suffer."

"Yes, ma'am; the Lord be praised for that same. Some o' my own pable is in the next street, and they'll not refuse the shelter and the bite o' bread, until I get to the fire again. But you, honey, where will you and the bonny bird, Miss Fanny, lay your heads upon, this bitter night?"

"We must seek a place; God is everywhere, and we shall be protected. Come, Fanny, let us go; the alarm is already given, and the engines are approaching."

"Come with me," said the kind-hearted Mrs. O'Flanigan. "To-night ye can be sheltered in the cellar that Pat Braligan's family lives in, and to-morrow ye can look about ye, and find another roof to cover ye."

Mrs. Fletcher was hesitating between a sense of her destitution, and her unwillingness to invade the humble lodgings of the poor laborer, when her husband roughly grasped her arm and said,

"You have no choice now, madam, but to accompany me. Do you think I would allow Fanny to stay a single hour among those low Irish? You must be bereft of your senses to refuse Linton's offer now."

Wishing to escape a scene with her husband, in so public a place, she said,

"Certainly I will go with you—come Fanny—good by, Mrs. O'Flanigan—I am as much obliged to your kindness as if I had accepted your offer of shelter from the inclemency of the weather."

As they turned the angle of the alley that led into the open street beyond, the Irish-woman shook her fist after Fletcher and said,

"Its well for ye, ye spalpeen, that a born lady, that ye has brought to sich a pass as this, is wid ye, or I'd a gin ye your own for callin' us low Irish. Precious low we'd be any how, to be under you, ye villan."

At that moment the engine reached the scene of the conflagration, and in a short time the fire was subdued. Some of the kind-hearted among the crowd assisted Mrs. O'Flanigan in carrying her frightened, half-frozen children to the cellar occupied by her countryman, where they were soon accommodated on the straw couches of the junior O'Braligan's.

CHAPTER IV.

THE night was clear, and the sky sparkling with stars, which seemed to give additional brilliancy from the cold and lucid atmosphere through which they were seen. The pavements were slippery with ice, and with each breath Mrs. Fletcher drew, the piercing air seemed to cut into her oppressed lungs. She had no protection from the weather; for her only shawl had not been saved in their precipitate flight, and both herself and Fanny walked beside the cause of their present sufferings, with nothing to shield them from the cold but their ordinary garments, while he was protected from its inclemency by a heavy blanket coat.

Fletcher knew that his wife suffered dreadfully from asthma, brought on by exposure to which she had not been accustomed; and as he heard her struggling respiration, as she walked by his side, he took a savage pleasure in the suffering she was enduring.

"It will teach her," thought he, "to pay more attention to my wishes in future. A good cold will lay her up for a while, and then there will be no choice in the matter. Starvation does not consider consequences."

They had walked the distance of about a dozen squares, and began to emerge into wider streets, where gas-lights at intervals illumined their way, when Mrs. Fletcher declared in a faint voice that she could go no farther, and sank down on a door-step utterly exhausted.

"You must come to the next corner, Lizzy. There is a public house there, where you can remain with Fanny the rest of the night. Try to walk a little farther."

Mrs. Fletcher did not answer, and stooping over her, Fanny exclaimed,

"You have killed her! My mother is dead!"

"Phoo!—nonsense!" said Fletcher, though his voice betrayed a slight quivering, as if he partook her fears, and he hastily drew off his overcoat; "she's only cold and faint. Take this and wrap it around you both; and here is a flask of brandy—pour a little down your mother's throat, while I go to the corner and get assistance to carry her the rest of the way."

With her benumbed fingers, Fanny performed the task assigned her as well as she could, and soon felt her mother's hand grasp hers, as if consciousness was returning. Mrs. Fletcher presently raised herself up and said,

"Is he gone, Fanny? Has he left us alone?"

"Yes, mother; but he will be back directly, with assistance to take you away."

"Let us improve the time then, my child. Better to perish in the streets than—. Come Fanny, let us go—keep near me child—let me feel that you are beside me. I shall go mad if you leave me."

"Mother—dearest mother, you know that I will never leave you," said the girl, soothingly, for she began to fear that the events of the night were affecting her mind.

"But they may tear you from me, my helpless little one, and give you over to wretchedness—I am too poor and friendless to obtain my just right, even if the iniquitous sentence of the law were not against me. Oh, Fanny, that Linton is a fiend, allowed to assume a human form, to torture me for my disobedience to my old father. He has been the serpent on my path. But for him your father would not be what he now is. But for him, I would never have yielded to the persuasions of my lover, and eloped from my youthful home."

He held out the belief that my father's indignation would soon be appeased, and offered his mediation. I know—I feel assured that Linton kept alive his resentment. He has been base enough to turn my husband's weakness to his own account in accomplishing his ruin; thus verifying the predictions of my father, and keeping alive his resentment against me.

As she thus spoke, she feebly arose, and leaning on Fanny, slowly walked down the street, and turned into the entrance of a dark alley which presented itself. They had barely gained the concealment, when the voice of Fletcher, as he staggered down the street, and his curses, when he found that they had disappeared, were distinctly audible. Footsteps approached, and presently several men, guided by him, passed the mouth of the alley. They soon returned, and entered it. Cowering down on the lower steps of a short stairway leading into a cellar, their pursuers pushed past, without discovering them under the concealment of the dark-colored coat which was wrapped over them.

As their footsteps died away in the distance, Mrs. Fletcher arose and said,

"Your father will not be thus baffled. He will return with lights, and search this place. Let us go while they are away."

"Whither?" asked Fanny, in a desponding tone.

"Where Heaven wills, my love. I will seek the more respectable portion of the city, and perhaps we may find some kind person to help us in our utmost need. Await the return of your father, after his avowed determination to separate us, I will not. Better—better far to perish on this icy pavement, than trust to such a wretch as I know Linton to be."

They slowly proceeded, both wrapped in the heavy folds of the overcoat, and after many pauses for rest, reached Broadway. It was midnight, and the street appeared to be wrapped in profound repose. The intense cold had driven the robber to his lair, and the watchman to the guard-house; not a human being, save themselves, appeared to be out; the weary wanderers pursued their way with faltering steps, and the youthful frame of

Fanny began to grow faint from exhaustion.

She sustained her mother, as long as possible; but as they approached a splendid mansion, glittering with lights, from whose open door a strain of gay music was heard, she said,

"Let us stop, mother, where we are in sight of human beings. I am weary—very," and her head drooped upon her breast.

They sank upon a door-step, and rested their tired limbs, and Fanny would have slept, but her mother feared to permit her to do so in so cold an atmosphere, and exerted herself to keep her awake.

"See my love," said she, "the party is breaking up. There is a lovely girl wrapped in furs, about to come forth to her carriage. Look, Fanny, how lightly she trips down the steps. Look up, my darling—arouse yourself, sleep, in our situation, is death."

Fanny, with an effort, raised her languid head.

"Speak to her, mother," she murmured. "Ask her to give us shelter to-night—only to-night. I am so weary and so cold."

"My child will perish!" shrieked the agonized mother, as her head again dropped upon her breast, and her limbs seemed to stiffen into the rigidity of death.

Her shriek was lost amid the rumble of carriages, and the gay sounds of laughter and conversation, which attend the breaking up of a large party. Half an hour elapsed, and only a cab remained at the door. Two gentlemen descended the steps; one of them sprang into the vehicle, and a voice which reached even the failing senses of the hapless woman, on the opposite side of the way, said,

"Won't you get in, Wharton, and spend the rest of the night with me?"

"Thank you, I believe not. My lodgings are near, and I shall walk. Good night."

The cab rolled away, and Wharton crossed the street. The glare of the lamps from the doorway of the house he had just left, fell on the group, formed by the perishing mother and her child.

Fanny's pale face, slightly shaded by her disheveled hair, was turned toward the street,

and with a painful thrill of emotion, Wharton instantly recognized it, as that of the girl whose beauty had so vividly impressed him in the morning. Mrs. Fletcher's head was resting on the shoulder of her daughter, and the features were entirely concealed by the collar of the coat, which appeared to have been drawn forward as if to shelter Fanny as completely as possible from the cold.

Wharton spoke, but receiving no answer, he understood the nature of the case at a glance. He hurried back to the house he had just left, and obtained assistance to remove them where warmth and shelter might yet be the means of saving life. His orders were speedily obeyed, and within a few moments after this discovery, Mrs. Fletcher and Fanny were placed in a comfortable bed, a physician summoned, and such restoratives applied as were necessary. Both mother and daughter soon fell into a profound sleep, and leaving them under the care of the good woman, with whom he boarded, Wharton retired to rest, with the grateful consciousness of having saved two human lives.

CHAPTER V.

FANNY awoke with a start, and was surprised to find herself in a comfortable room, carpeted and curtained, with a blazing fire diffusing its grateful warmth around. When she had last been conscious, the open street and snow-laden earth were her only resting-place, and now she was surrounded by a degree of elegance she had never before seen.

Her first thought was of her mother, and raising her head, she beheld her tranquilly sleeping on a bed on the opposite side of the room, from which the curtains were drawn back. In a large arm-chair, beside the fire, sat an elderly woman, enjoying small snatches of slumber, in the intervals between the deep salaams her head made toward the fire. After an unusually low one, she suddenly recovered a perpendicular position, and looked around the room, with a peculiarly wide-awake expression. Her eye caught that of Fanny, and she said in a low voice, as if she had made a remarkable discovery,

"Bless my soul! the little one's awake. How are you, my dear, this morning? I hope none of your pretty limbs are frozen from last night's work."

"I think not, ma'am," replied Fanny, in the same guarded tone. "I feel quite well, and my mother seems to sleep sweetly. But how did we come here? I have a confused memory of suffering much, and being out in the cold."

"So you were, my dear; it's quite wonderful how you *do* remember. But a good young gentleman found you, and had you brought here, where as good a lady as ever lived lent you that blessed cap that's on your head, and that nicely-frilled gown that belongs to her own daughter, as is about your age."

At the sound of voices, a grave-looking man entered from the next room; Fanny instantly conjectured him to be a physician.

"Well, nurse," he inquired, "how do your charges come on?"

"Ah, very well—very well, indeed, Dr. Blakely. Your drops acted like a charm on the lady there. She has slept quite calmly ever since she took them; and the young girl can answer for herself."

The Doctor then approached Fanny, and, in a kind tone, made a few inquiries as to her state. He was evidently surprised at the propriety of her answers, and at hearing the refined pronunciation which is the distinguishing mark of the better classes of society.

"That voice belongs to a lady," he muttered, "and she is as pretty as an angel."

In truth, Fanny looked exceedingly lovely, with her soft, delicate skin just tinged with a faint pink, from the reflection of the fire, and her wealth of golden auburn hair lying in disheveled curls around her slender throat. The Doctor glanced at the mother, and seeing that she was in a deep sleep, he seated himself by Fanny, and said, as he kindly took her hand in his,

"Now, my pretty little lady, tell me how it happened that persons of your appearance should have been found in a state of such utter desertion? Your mother sleeps soundly, and you can tell me what may enable good friends to serve her, as I should feel a delicacy

in asking her such questions as I can with propriety address you."

Tears sprang to Fanny's eyes, and she replied,

"You are very kind, sir, and I will tell you all I know. My mother is one of the best of women, but unfortunately my father is intemperate. He came to our house last night, and acted very badly. We were forced to leave it, and would have perished in the street, but for your kindness in rescuing us."

"I did not save you, my dear. A young friend, coming from a party, found you, and had you brought hither. You are in a quiet boarding-house, kept by one of the most benevolent women I know. Here you will remain, until you are both quite recovered; you have made good friends by last night's occurrence, who will not quietly see this dissipated father of yours oppress you."

"Thank you sir," murmured Fanny. "My dear mother could not survive such another night as the last. I owe you and your friend an unspeakable debt of gratitude, for saving her precious life."

"That is right, my pretty one. Cherish gratitude and affection; they are the brightest jewels of humanity. But you have talked quite enough, for the present. Go to sleep now, and when you awake again, ask the nurse for some nourishment."

As the Doctor descended the stairs, he encountered Wharton, who eagerly inquired after the state of his patients.

"They are both doing well. By the way, Wharton, it is fortunate for you that the young girl is such a mere child, for she is one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld. If she were a few years older, such a sentimental fellow as you might complete the romance in the most approved style, by marrying her."

"Pshaw, Doctor, what nonsense for a sober man like you to talk!" replied Wharton, impatiently, though his cheek slightly flushed. "But seriously, was it not dreadful to leave such a scene of heartless levity and parade, as that party of last night, and to find two human beings perishing, within the very sound of the music to which we danced? I never before felt the responsibility of the rich to

their less fortunate brethren. In the indulgence of our own petty vanities, we forget the great brotherhood of nature, and with indifferent hearts pass by the suffering we could so easily alleviate. I have hitherto been satisfied with giving to public charities; but in a city like ours, there must be many cases of bitter suffering, which these never reach. I will endeavor, in future, to correct this, as far as lies in my power—to regard my own ease less, and the claims of others more."

"Bravo! my young friend, you are quite eloquent; but it is in so good a cause that I only hope you may continue in the same mind. Excuse me now; I am too much engaged with business to linger longer with you."

Sleep insensibly crept over the senses of Fanny, and when she again awoke, her mother was sitting up in the bed, propped by pillows, whose snowy covering was scarcely whiter than her face. She clasped her daughter to her bosom, and wept over her, as over one restored to her from the grave.

Exposure to the cold, on so severe a night, caused a long and tedious illness to Mrs. Fletcher, during which every attention and kindness were lavished on her by those so providentially interested in her situation. Fanny was the most attentive and tender of nurses to her suffering mother, and Dr. Blakely extolled her so highly, that Wharton became each day more deeply interested in her.

At length Mrs. Fletcher was declared convalescent, and Fanny was at leisure to see her benefactor. Her mother was duly prepared for his reception. As he entered the apartment, Fanny involuntarily uttered an exclamation of surprise; for until that moment she was not aware of the identity of her preserver with the gentleman she had seen in Mrs. — store, accompanied by Mr. Linton.

While her mother was expressing her thanks to him for the service he had rendered them, she had time to recover herself, though she blushed deeply, as he took her hand, and said,

"I think we have met before, Miss Fanny. Do you remember seeing me in Mrs. —'s establishment, with Mr. Linton, on the morn-

ing of that day, on which I was so fortunate as to be of some service to yourself and your mother?"

"Certainly, sir; I perfectly recollect you, but until you came in, I did not know that our preserver and the gentleman I then saw were the same person. Oh, Mr. Wharton, my mother will tell you of the gratitude I can never—never express! You have saved us to each other!"

"Say no more of it, I beg. I hope this one good action will weigh against the many evil ones I have committed. I should myself return thanks to Heaven, that I was so highly favored as to be permitted to serve such deserving objects."

"Fanny, love," said Mrs. Fletcher, "leave me alone a short time with Mr. Wharton."

Fanny glided out of the room, and Mrs. Fletcher pointed to a chair near her, and invited Wharton to take it.

"My voice is very weak," she said, "and I am easily exhausted. I wish to inform you, sir, who it is you have succored, and I sent my daughter away, that she may yet remain in ignorance of the station and fortune to which her mother was born. It might embitter her lot yet more, poor child, to know that poverty is not justly her due."

Wharton, in much surprise, obeyed her motion, and seated himself beside her. Mrs. Fletcher regarded his handsome countenance with a penetrating expression, some seconds, before she again spoke. Satisfied with this scrutiny she continued,

"I can not for a moment suppose that you are but an agent of Mr. Linton, in all that you have done for me. You spoke of seeing Fanny at Mrs. —'s with him: is he aware of our present situation, or your agency in serving me?"

"He is not, madam. I have not seen Mr. Linton since I met with you. Business summoned him to the west, on the following day, and he has not yet returned."

"To the west?" repeated Mrs. Fletcher, with emotion. "Do you know of what nature the business was?"

"The death of a relative, from whom he had some expectations, I understood, took him to B——."

"His name?" she gasped. "Quick—tell me his name!"

Frightened at her violent agitation, Wharton hastily poured out a glass of water, and offered it to her, as he replied,

"I think it was a Mr. Flays, or Haydon, I can not now remember which; but I rather think it was a wealthy merchant there, known as the rich Haydon."

"My father!" she murmured, as she sank back in her chair, and wept convulsively. Wharton listened in astonishment. He could not divine the chain of circumstances which had reduced the daughter of a man of almost princely fortune to such a state of destitution as that in which he had discovered her.

Mrs. Fletcher presently recovered sufficiently to speak.

"The first news I have heard of my father, for more than twelve years, is the announcement of his death. Am I not, indeed, an outcast from the parental roof? alas! deservedly so. A dissipated husband wedded against my father's will, explains all, Mr. Wharton. I am a disowned child."

"And Linton, then, is a relative of yours, madam? Are you a connection of the Fletcher I have occasionally encountered at his house?"

"I am his wife. Yes—he is the husband who caused myself and my daughter to wander forth on the night you found us. Linton is my cousin, and we were reared together beneath my father's roof. He is several years older than I am, and no sooner had I attained the age at which flattery is pleasing to a girl's ear, than he became my ardent admirer. I was then an only child, and was considered as the future heiress of my father's large estate. Vanity was the ruling passion of my nature, and I accepted the offered homage, without a thought of the future resentment I was preparing in a mind too relentless ever to forgive a wrong. Linton flattered himself that he had created an interest in my heart, which would lead to a union between us, when I was merely amusing myself at his expense. It was wrong and heartless you will say, but I was a mere child; and bitterly has he avenged himself for my levity."

"I was scarcely fifteen, when Mr. Fletcher

visited the west, and brought letters to my father. He was invited to our house, and I, attracted by the assumed blandness of his manners, and his fine person, gave my cousin to understand that the tacit engagement heretofore existing between us must be annulled. He acted the despairing lover, and I laughed at him. I can now recall the terrible paleness that overspread his features, as he said,

"You mock a heart that loves you to distraction. It is well, Elizabeth; I shall not forget. But my revenge shall be to aid you in your present views. I know that Fletcher has clandestinely made love to you, and it is useless to hope for a union between you, if his advances become known to your father. My uncle would sooner pitch you over a precipice, than give you to this poor Yankee. Elope with him, and I will use my influence in your favor, to bring about a reconciliation."

"I was startled at the suddenness of this proposal, and refused to think of such a thing as an elopement from the kindest of fathers. I loved him with great fondness, but I foolishly fancied that in his exceeding affection for me I was secured from the just punishment of my disobedience. As Linton foretold, he refused his sanction to the proposals of my lover, and in an evil hour I listened to the persuasions of Mr. Fletcher—to the insinuations of Linton, that I might follow my own inclinations with impunity, for I was his only child, and my father could not exist without me."

"I followed my own headlong impulses, and sealed my wretchedness for life. From the hour I fled from his roof, I have never beheld my father—have never held communication with him. In proportion to his former doting affection, was his resentment. He never forgave me, but found happiness in a new union, and other children, more grateful than his spoiled daughter, sprang up around him."

"And Linton?" said Wharton, who had listened with deep interest.

"Linton, I am convinced, kept alive the anger of my father, by his misrepresentations of my husband's conduct; for in the first years of our marriage he was not unkind. His revenge was, indeed, to aid me in my views; for

gradually the wine-cup sapped the foundations of all that was noble or generous in Mr. Fletcher's nature, and through the influence of Linton, who, after my father's second marriage, came to New York to reside, he became a habitual drunkard. Linton shared the same failing, but he possesses a strength of character which prevents him from becoming utterly debased in his habits of intoxication. When an heir was born to my father's wealth, he provided handsomely for his nephew, and allowed him to seek a home suited to his own inclinations."

"And was he base enough to enjoy this fortune lavished on him by your father, and see his daughter pine in the poverty to which he was instrumental in reducing you?"

"He was, and his motive I fathomed. You have seen my daughter, and in the faded features before you, you may trace a strong resemblance to what she now is. All Linton's endeavors, for two years past, have been directed toward inducing me to consent to consider Fanny as his future wife. He offers to provide handsomely for her parents, and educate her in the best manner. I have had strong reasons to distrust and abhor him, and the idea of seeing my darling child become his is absolutely loathsome to me. I can not account for his conduct, without he really loved me, and finds his passion revived in another, who resembles what I was, so nearly as to seem almost the same. Since he has found my consent withheld with firmness, he has used his influence with my husband, to abuse the power the law places in his hands, by taking my daughter from my protection."

Mrs. Fletcher stopped, quite exhausted, and after a pause, Wharton thoughtfully said,

"I thank you, madam, for this revelation. It will enable me to serve you more effectually than if I had remained in ignorance of your connection with Linton. He is expected home in a few more days, and I shall then learn whether your father's resentment continued beyond the grave. If he could once have beheld your charming daughter, his heart must have relented toward you for her sake."

"I have no hope that I was forgiven. If my ill-health and destitute condition were made known to my step-mother, she probably

would allow me a pittance from the estate of her children."

"Permit me to write and obtain such information from your family as you desire. In the meantime, suffer no uneasiness of mind to retard your recovery, I beg; I am rich, and have no claims upon my fortune except those of my own prodigality. Providence has kindly thrown in my way those whom it is a pleasure to assist. Consider me in the light of a relative, my dear madam, and as such command my services."

The tone of delicate kindness in which he spoke expressed even more than the words themselves, and Mrs. Fletcher warmly thanked him.

"I will not refuse the assistance of the friend whom Heaven seems to have raised up for me, when hope itself had nearly deserted me, and I had resigned myself to perish in the street."

She then gave Wharton the address of Mrs. Haydon, and Fanny was recalled to the apartment. He drew her into conversation, and young as she was, he was surprised and charmed with the intelligence and spirit of her remarks. Gifted with fine natural talents himself, he was pleased to discover gleams of a kindred nature in his young protégé, and to see that even amid the poverty and wretchedness of their circumstances, Mrs. Fletcher had not neglected the opening mind of her beautiful daughter. Though books were often beyond her reach, a well-stored mind, and retentive memory, enabled her to instruct her docile pupil orally, and the lessons thus imparted were fondly treasured by the young listener. It was surprising to find how much Fanny had thus acquired: she was an excellent historian, and the sacred truths of revelation were familiar to her, while she daily beheld their influence exemplified in the meek endurance of her suffering mother.

Wharton pleased himself by lavishing upon her the means of gratifying her love of reading; and each day some new treasure, from Parley's inexhaustible library for children, were laid upon her table. Books of higher pretension not unfrequently found their way there, and many an hour did Wharton while away in reading aloud, ostensibly to Mrs.

Fletcher, but really looking into Fanny's clear eyes for answering sympathy, when a beautiful thought or well-turned expression peculiarly pleased him.

It is a dangerous employment for a young man of four-and-twenty to look daily for sympathy in intellectual enjoyment from a lovely and intelligent girl, although she may only have numbered thirteen summers; and Wharton began to feel that Fanny Fletcher was becoming very dear to him. A few years hence, she would make a charming wife, and in the meantime he could bestow upon her such an education as would render her the very *beau idéal* of his imagination. Of what consequence was it to him, if she failed in gaining a portion of her grandfather's estate? She was sufficiently lovely to tempt an older head than his, to marry for true love alone.

CHAPTER VI.

SEVERAL weeks passed away, and no letter came for Mrs. Fletcher. Her health had gradually improved, and a faint shade of color once more gleamed upon her wasted cheek. The natural delicacy and independence of her mind caused her to shrink from remaining a burden upon the bounty of her new friend, longer than was absolutely necessary, and she at length spoke to Wharton on the subject of her future exertions to obtain the means of living.

"I am now quite well enough to make some effort for my own support and that of my daughter. The silence of my connections convinces me that my appeal has been vain. Can you assist me, Mr. Wharton, to obtain the situation of housekeeper, in some respectable family? I feel that I can not return to the employment which has already injured my health irreparably; and in my new sphere I would have the protection of my employers, should an attempt be made to tear my daughter from me."

"Would you not prefer the country to the town?" he inquired.

"If I can choose, I certainly shall. Do you

know of such a place as will suit me in the country?"

"I am happy to answer you in the affirmative. My late guardian is quite stricken in years, and requires the care of some kindly woman, who will remove from his mind the burden of an establishment which needs constant attention. Mr. Dale is a man of studious habits, and little fitted for such duties; his wife, who was many years younger than himself, died several years since, and left him with an only child, a son, some two or three years older than your daughter. Mr. Dale has long wanted, not exactly a housekeeper, but a lady who would take entire charge of his household, as its mistress. He is one of the best of men, and his home is emphatically one where peace has taken up her abode. I spent the years of my boyhood beneath his roof, and to him I owe all that is good in my character."

"You describe a situation which will exactly suit me," said Mrs. Fletcher. "Seclusion and peace are all I now covet."

"Then, consider the arrangement is already concluded. Mr. Dale will be happy to welcome you on your own account, as well as on mine. I will write to him this evening."

"You must state my exact position to him," said Mrs. Fletcher, mournfully. "Say to him that I seek an asylum from a cruel husband, in which to seclude myself and child from his knowledge. I do not wish this concealed; because I know that a prejudice exists in the most candid minds against a woman who is at last goaded into breaking the most sacred of all ties. Mr. Dale must admit me beneath his roof, with a full knowledge of the truth, or I go not at all."

"His heart is the very temple of benevolent feeling, Mrs. Fletcher, and he will welcome you only the more kindly, for knowing how severely you have been tried in the furnace of affliction."

The letter was written, and the answer to Wharton's application was all that Mrs. Fletcher could desire; and with a lighter heart than she had known for many months, she made her preparations for departure. On a bright evening in early spring, his barouche

stood at the door, ready to convey the mother and daughter to their new abode.

Fanny could not remember ever being out of the city before, and to her every thing was new and delightful. The country yet wore the sombre appearance of winter, for the buds on the forest trees were only beginning to swell, and occasionally a patch of verdure might be seen in some secluded nook, sheltered in a measure from the wintry frosts; but the air was mild and pleasant, and to those who had been so long dwellers in the heart of a great city, there was a keen sense of enjoyment in merely breathing so pure an atmosphere.

The birds appeared to have waked from their winter's silence, and hopped about, chattering merrily, as if they were congratulating each other upon the bright sunshine. Occasionally, one more frolicsome than the rest would practice gymnastics, by swinging from a bough with his tiny claws, while he poured forth the joy of his soul in glad notes, which might have rebuked the sorrowful human heart for yielding to its griefs, while God's sun shines alike on all his creatures. Alas! why can we not, like the birds of the air, rejoice in the brightness of the present, without sending our thoughts back upon the track darkened by our own wrong-doing and false estimate of life? Look to the future: that belongeth to thee; upon it thou canst write characters of living light, or thou canst darken it with "hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness;" but the past is an immutable record, which tears may not efface, nor alter. Mournful is the experience of all the sons of men; for there is not one who bears within him a spirit touched with the finer sympathies of our nature, who could truly point to his past experience, and say, "I would willingly live over again the years through which I have passed, with all their varied woof of smiles and tears—the transient joy, keen though it might have been, followed by the heart-anguish, which seared and blighted as the lightning's flash."

Mrs. Fletcher endeavored to chase sad thoughts from her mind in listening to the sallies of her two companions, and when Dale Cottage came in view, she looked more animated than Fanny remembered to have seen her for many weary months.

The cottage was removed from the road, and a miniature lawn, shaded by some fine trees, surrounded it. It was a substantial stone building, rising two stories in the center, with wings on either side, and a handsome portico in front, supported by massive pillars.

As the carriage drove to the door, Mr. Dale appeared to welcome them. He was a venerable man, whose white hair and venerable expression were extremely prepossessing. He was accompanied by a handsome youth of fourteen, whose slender figure, dark eyes, and curling hair, with a complexion of clear olive, through which the eloquent blood mantled in the brightest shade of red, rendered him as fair a specimen of one of his years as could be found.

They both warmly greeted Wharton, and in their welcome to the strangers there was so much friendliness that they at once felt at home. Half an hour had hardly passed away in a social conversation, when George Dale proposed to Fanny to visit his rabbit warren, his birds, and his flowers. She was delighted to accompany him, and together they roamed over the garden, prattling with as much freedom as though they had been friends for months, instead of acquaintances of an hour.

"I am glad you are come to stay with us, Miss Fanny," said the boy, "for I have been so very lonely since Mr. Wharton left us. He lived here until about a year ago, and my father grieves every day over his estrangement from us, and the associations he has formed in that wicked city. But now that you have come to remain with us, I hope he will visit us oftener."

"He spoke of your father as if he loved him very dearly, Master George. Something may have happened to prevent him coming to see you when he wished to do so."

"That may be; but he is rich; he is his own master. But, pray, Miss Fanny, call me George, and if you will permit me, I will call you by your pretty name, without the Miss before it, which sounds so formal. Let us now go into the library, where you will spend many hours with the books I can promise you, if my father has any control over you."

"Oh, we shall study together," said Fanny,

eagerly; "that will be charming. I shall do my best to rival you, I warn you."

"You will not find that very easy," said George, with all the conceit of a young scholar. I have been through my Latin grammar, and I can tell you all the botanical names of the flowers that grow in the garden."

"Pray, teach them to me, George, and you will find what an apt scholar I shall be," said Fanny, sweetly, and her reply disarmed the incipient pride of the young student.

"Oh, certainly," said he, with an air of importance. "Any thing that girls need learn, I will teach you; but, then, Latin, you know, is useless to them."

"I do not know that, and I shall study it, if your good father will permit me so to do."

"I shant say no, you may be sure, for you'll be obliged to come to me to assist you with your lessons; for father is very strict, I assure you."

They entered one of the wings of the building from the yard. It was in the shape of an octagon, with a window and a book-case, alternately, around the eight sides. A circular table stood in the center of the floor, with a reading lamp, writing apparatus, and paper folders on it. A thermometer hung against the wall, by which the room was kept at an even temperature by means of tubes communicating with a furnace beneath the floor.

The boy took from one of the book-cases a large portfolio filled with colored engravings of every flower that blooms, with a short description of each beneath its pictured representative. The two were busily engaged in looking over them, when they were summoned to supper, which was spread by a neat, rosy domestic, in the large hall they had first entered.

After the meal was over, Mrs. Fletcher seemed desirous to sit quietly and indulge her own reflections, and Wharton challenged Mr. Dale to a game of chess. Though apparently absorbed in his employment, he was not unmindful of the efforts of George to amuse his young companion, without interrupting his father by his prattle. He brought forth a set of geographical puzzles, and they were soon absorbed in their endeavors to piece them rightly together. Fanny's knowledge of the

science was trifling, but she was so quick at learning, that George had fair opportunities of showing his superior skill.

Wharton knew the habits of the household, and he contested his game until the clock struck ten, when he allowed the old gentleman to come off triumphant. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, the maid entered with chamber candles, and Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter followed her into a neatly-furnished bedroom, in the wing of the house opposite to that occupied by the library.

"Oh, mother, we must be very, very happy here!" exclaimed Fanny, as she drew back the curtain and looked out into the yard. "See how beautifully the moon shines on the grass; and here is a vine outside of the window, and a tree on which the birds will perch to wake us with their morning songs. How very good of Mr. Wharton to find so sweet a place for us to live in!"

"Yes, my darling, we have been mercifully delivered. Let us return thanks to Heaven for all its goodness in giving us such friends in our adversity;" and Fanny knelt beside her mother, and joined her fervent thanks with hers, in such a prayer as angels bend toward earth to hear.

CHAPTER VII.

THE benevolent feelings of Mr. Dale were strongly aroused in favor of his new inmates. The presence of the beautiful and playful Fanny was as a sunbeam to the household, and the habits of order enforced among the domestics, by Mrs. Fletcher, afforded him a welcome respite from the heavy cares which had long been a burden to him. A man of studious habits and literary taste, and with a lover of order; since the death of his wife, he had found it almost impossible to keep his establishment as he earnestly desired it should be, and enjoy that leisure so indispensable to his happiness.

Fanny shared the lessons of George, and he was compelled to practice an unwonted degree of industry to prevent her from outstripping him in his studies. Attracted by the rare endowments of this young girl, Wharton often

came to the farm, and would frequently remain several days together, joining in the sports of the two children with as much zest as either of them, and many were the tricks played at his expense by the two merry-hearted companions. Spring deepened into summer, and the wild gipsy was never weary of exploring the surrounding country, accompanied by the attentive George, who never permitted her to walk alone. A perfect sympathy appeared to exist between these two young beings thus thrown together as if by fate, and Wharton began to fear that his half-formed scheme of educating this fair blossom for his future wife would be thwarted by the first steps he had taken toward its accomplishment.

In the meantime Linton returned to the city, and it was known that the recent decease of a wealthy uncle had considerably increased his fortune. His first inquiry of Fletcher was for his wife and daughter, and terrific was his anger when Fletcher acknowledged that he had lost all clue to them since the night they had so mysteriously evaded his search. Linton appeared more eager than ever to gain the control of Fanny's destiny, and every engine was put in motion to discover the abode of Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter, but in vain.

As a last resource, an advertisement was inserted in the city papers, stating that if Mrs. Fletcher would apply to the firm of Dolson and Sons, in New York, she would hear something greatly to her advantage. The paragraph escaped her notice for several weeks, but at length it accidentally caught her eye. Fearful that it might be a snare laid by her persecutor, she showed it to Wharton on his next visit. He promised her to have it attended to himself, and on his return to town, he employed a young lawyer of his acquaintance to make the necessary inquiries, without informing Dolson and Sons who instigated the inquiry. He was at once referred to Linton, and Wharton immediately wrote to Mrs. Fletcher, informing her that it was only a new device of the enemy to discover her abode.

Wharton had entirely withdrawn himself from the society of Linton, since he had become aware of the utter want of principle in his former associate; but in the course of the

summer, some trifling circumstances which become known to that acute person, suggested the idea that the whereabouts of the lovely child they had encountered in Mrs. — store was not entirely unknown to his former dupe. He set a watch on the steps of Wharton, and his emissary soon informed him that the residence of his late guardian seemed to possess some potent attraction for him, for he usually visited Dale Cottage twice every week, and frequently remained more than a day at a time at each visit.

Linton resolved to make his own observations, and on a bright evening in the latter part of August, he mounted a magnificent black horse which brought him within sight of Dale Cottage within an hour after his departure from his own door. He slowly skirted the fence, and seeing no one, he dismounted in a little coppice and fastened his horse securely to a swinging bough. A few steps brought him to a hawthorn hedge, surrounding an orchard, and the distant sounds of laughter guided him to the spot occupied by Wharton, George, and Fanny, and a smile of exultation lighted up his saturnine features as he looked on the group, and felt his power to destroy the innocent happiness they were enjoying. They were gathering apples, and Fanny stood beneath the tree with her bonnet thrown back, her bright hair curling in disorder over her flushed cheeks, while her eyes sparkled with merriment, health, and happiness. She had grown taller and more womanly since he had last seen her, and thus flushed with health and exercise, he thought her more beautiful than ever.

His bad heart triumphed in the thought that once more she was within his power; and this time he would force her wretched father to tear her, in despite of every feeling of humanity, from the mother who loathed and despised him. He threw himself upon his horse, and galloped back to town; immediately on reaching his house, he sent an imperious summons to Fletcher to join him without delay.

When he arrived, even Linton was shocked at the change in his appearance. Fletcher had been ill, and looked emaciated and wretched enough to play the part of the disconsolate and abandoned parent to perfection.

When all hope of discovering the abode of the wife and daughter of his wretched victim had been nearly abandoned, Linton had refused to furnish him with the means of pursuing his debasing course. The want of the stimulus which had degraded him to his present condition brought on a violent nervous disorder, through which he struggled, nearly destitute of the means of subsistence. Pale, bowed down, and trembling, as one palsied, he presented himself before his tempter.

"Ha! my dear fellow," said Linton, with some show of sympathy, "I really am concerned to see you look so infernally pale and miserable—that is, I should be vastly sorry if your appearance did not command sympathy which we can turn to glorious account. Come, be seated—take this glass of wine; it will act like a charm upon you."

The drunkard clutched the glass with fearful fervor, and drained the contents eagerly.

"Ah, it is life—it is hope to me! Give me more—more, and then tell me why you have sent for me. What your words mean?"

With an expression of mockery which one might suppose the face of a demon to wear as he pours his liquid fire into the throats of the lost, Linton plied him with glass after glass, until he was in a fit state to listen to his proposals.

"I have discovered your wife and daughter," he at length said.

"A-a-h-h—that's good—very good. My cursed wife has nearly been the means of killing me—the cold I took that infernal night is in my bones yet, and I have nearly died from its effects. I will pay her for it—yes, yes—she shall repent it."

"Right—a woman has no business to rebel against her master; make her feel your power."

"No need to tell me that," said Fletcher, sullenly,—"but now I think of it, you too refused me all assistance. I might have died for want, for you turned me from your door because my pretty Fan had escaped you; and in all that freezing weather I had nothing to comfort me."

"It has been hot enough since to thaw you before this time," said Linton, sneeringly. "No, it was not the cold that made you ill, Fletcher, but want of steam—ha! ha! a strange thing

to need in August; but you are like an engine, old fellow—it's no go without it. Listen to me now, and you shall never need it again."

Fletcher turned his lack-lustre eyes upon him, and said,

"I hear—what have you to say?"

"I have a deed prepared, which only needs my signature, that entitles you to an annuity that will make you independent."

"How very generous you are all at once! And what am I to do to obtain this precious signature?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"Implicitly obey my orders," replied Linton, haughtily. "Unless you do so, you may die in a ditch, for there is no one else to help you."

"It is true," said the drunkard, sinking his voice to a tone of feeble despondency; "I must starve, or do your bidding. What new wickedness have you contrived against Lizzy, now?"

"Oh, nothing new—I am only bent on removing Fanny from her protection. I have discovered that she is living in the family of an old gentleman whose residence is about four miles from the city. She is his housekeeper, I fancy; for his wife is dead, and Mr. Dale has hitherto lived there, with a young lad who is his only child. I saw Fanny myself, in the orchard, this afternoon, and she is growing into a rustic hoyden; you must take steps at once to separate her forever from her mother."

"I am quite willing to do so; but will any court give the guardianship of my daughter into the keeping of such a miserable devil as I am?"

"Backed by my purse, and your present ghastly appearance, there is little fear of failure. You shall act the part of the forsaken, heart-broken husband and father. You have a good idea of the pathetic, Fletcher, when your head is tolerably clear; so no more wine to-night, and to-morrow only enough to string your nerves to the proper pitch—after that, you may swallow a sea of drink if you choose."

"And kill myself out of your way as soon as possible," he growled.

"Just as you choose about that, old fellow. I could manage to live without you, though I

am not willing to live without your pretty little blossom of a daughter."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. DALE had gone out to take his morning ride. Fanny was busily employed in the library, listening to a fairy tale George Dale was reading aloud to her, in place of studying his Latin. The Princess Scheherazade and her interminable legends were suddenly put to flight by the sound of an arrival; and hearing her mother inquired for, the two darted through an open window and ran toward the dairy, where Mrs. Fletcher was just then employed, to inform her of the unusual circumstance of a call being made upon her.

"Well, madcaps, what is it," she asked, with an indulgent smile, as they drew near, quite out of breath; but she trembled and grew pale at the unwonted summons. Just then the servant came to inform her that two gentlemen were in the house, and desired to see her. They were entire strangers, the girl said, and one of them was a very dark, tall gentleman.

"And the other?" inquired Mrs. Fletcher.

"He is a stoutish man, but looks as if he had been sick lately. He was in a kind of tremble all over when he came into the house."

The unhappy mother turned to her child, and clasping her firmly to her side, said,

"Fanny, it is your father, and—and Mr. Linton. Mr. Dale is not here—we are alone—they will tear you from me—my God—my God! what shall I do?"

"Dearest mother, do not be so alarmed. I will not go with them, and they will scarcely force me from you."

"Oh, my child—my darling child, they will do any thing to torture me. You are too young to have the power to choose between your parents. Your cruel father knows he has the right to take you from me, and he will not shrink from using it."

George Dale drew near, with a flushed face and clenched hands.

"I wish I were only a man, Mrs. Fletcher, and it would be at the risk of my life, that any

one would dare to take Fanny from you. But I am only a poor, helpless boy."

"And I a no less helpless woman, George—but you can aid me. You know every nook and hiding-place about the farm. Conceal Fanny in some spot where they will not be likely to seek for her, then mount your pony, and hurry for Mr. Wharton. In an emergency of this kind, he told me to send for him with all speed, and he had a plan for effectually delivering me from the future persecutions of Mr. Linton."

George hurriedly drew Fanny away, and sped toward the forest, where he placed her in the shelter of a cluster of bushes about half a mile from the house. A servant had been ordered to follow with his pony, and he mounted and dashed away in a perfect fever of excitement. Poor boy! had he for one moment surmised the means by which Wharton designed to secure his young love from the power of her father, he would sooner have trusted to the prowess of his single arm to defend her from the threatened danger.

In the meantime, Mrs. Fletcher summoned courage to encounter the presence of her husband and his companion. Her heart melted within her, in spite of all her wrongs, when she looked on the emaciated and pallid face of the man she had so fondly loved, but the bitter sense of injury and oppression again arose within her, as she returned Linton's salutation. There was a cold triumphant expression in his glittering eye, which plainly said, "Again my grasp is upon your writhing soul, and before me shall you humble yourself in vain."

Fletcher's face flushed deeply, and he abruptly said,

"Where is my daughter?"

"What would you with her, William?" asked the trembling mother.

"I might tell you that I can't live without seeing her—I might say that I have only called to satisfy myself that she is well and happy; but I prefer telling the plain truth at once. I have come to take Fanny under my own protection. You have voluntarily left me, and I only assume the privilege allowed me by the laws of my country, in claiming the custody of my child."

"She prefers to remain with me, William. I can now give her a more comfortable home than you possess, and Fanny is unwilling to be a tax on Mr. Linton's bounty."

"My will on that subject was made known to you the last time I had the pleasure of conversing with you, madam," replied Fletcher, with an assumption of great courtesy. "It is my irrevocable determination that my daughter shall leave your protection and accept such as I can give her."

Mrs. Fletcher saw the uselessness of remonstrance.

"You must find her, then," she coldly replied. "Fanny is not in the house, and she will not willingly be taken by your emissaries."

"We shall seek her at all events," said Linton, speaking for the first time, in tones of measured determination. "You are blind to the best interests of your child Elizabeth—but her father and I will force you to yield her to a better destiny than you can give her."

"Such a fate as you have given her mother before her, base-hearted man!" said Mrs. Fletcher, in irrepressible bitterness. "My fate has been marred by you, to avenge the slights of inexperienced youth; and now you would tear from me my last hope, my innocent, my affectionate child. Sooner would I weep above her grave, than see her shine in all the splendor of your ill-gotten wealth as your wife. I, at least, possessed a brief dream of happiness, while my confidence in him I had wedded remained unimpaired; but for her, there would be no such illusion. Your heartless, soulless nature has been laid bare before her in her childhood: she has seen her father rendered an outcast from all social influence and happiness through you: her mother reduced to beggary, and every indulgence in which those of her age delight, denied to herself, and all through the evil blight you cast upon her father's fate. And yet, oh monstrous, atrocious sacrilege! you dare to look forward to the day when you can ask her pure and beautiful spirit to mingle with yours in the sacred bond of marriage. Never—never, while I live, shall such profanation be accomplished."

Linton listened with a sardonic expression. "I must confess, Mrs. Fletcher, that you have become an adept in scolding. Fanny

shall have her choice either to accept or reject me, when she is old enough to decide: in the meantime, I beg that you will put off the character of the shrew, for it is not becoming to you, and inform us where you have concealed your daughter."

"I do not know where she is. You must seek for her if you would find her."

"That will not be difficult. We have brought officers in the carriage with us, who are authorized to seek for and deliver her into her father's hands. We are sorry to be forced to this, but there seems to be no alternative."

"Do as you please," said Mrs. Fletcher, who made no further attempts to appeal to her husband. She saw his abject dependence on Linton, and felt that it would be vain to do so.

Linton stepped to the door, and gave his orders to the men. They instantly came forth, and commenced the search. Every portion of the house was vainly examined; and then the officers turned their attention to the grounds. Mrs. Fletcher sat with clasped hands and bowed head, endeavoring to pray, but her poor heart was so torn by alternate fears and hopes, that only the ear of Omniscience could have heard and understood the incoherent supplications that arose from her soul.

More than one hour passed thus, and she began to hope that the search would prove fruitless, or Wharton would have time to arrive to her assistance, when a shout announced that Fanny's hiding-place had been discovered. A small dog, which was a great pet with her, had followed the men during the latter part of their quest. Fido's joyous bark, as he bounded through the copse-wood to his playmate, betrayed her place of concealment. On finding herself discovered, Fanny instantly arose and accompanied the men to the cottage.

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE DALE fortunately found Wharton at home, and he lost no time in making his arrangements to return with him. Ordering his carriage to be got in readiness as speedily as possible, he hurried to the residence of a neighboring magistrate and requested a private

interview. In a short time he returned, accompanied by Mr. Lansing, and taking George with them in the carriage, they drove off at full speed. His spirited horses soon accomplished the distance, and just as Fanny's place of concealment was discovered, they drove through an entrance in the rear of the yard, and alighted without being heard by those within the house.

After a few words uttered in a low tone to his companion, Wharton ushered him into the library, and desired him to await his return. In the meantime, Fanny entered the parlor where her father and Linton sat. She left untouched the proffered hand of the latter, and hurrying toward her mother, cast herself on her bosom, as she said,

"If they take me from you, mother, they shall use force. Never will I consent to be parted from you."

"We shall see to that," said Fletcher, savagely. "Here am I, your father that you have not seen for months, and you do not even look toward me once, while you throw yourself upon the breast of the parent who is willfully blind to your best interests. Come, miss—make yourself ready at once to accompany me; for with me you go, never to return to her who has fostered this disobedient spirit in you."

"Have mercy, father—I can not—I dare not go," pleaded the poor girl, with pale lips, and eyes distended by fear and excitement.

He approached, and roughly grasped her arm. Fanny shrieked, but regardless of her cries, he tore her clasp from her mother's neck, and turning to a servant who stood at the door, an amazed spectator of the scene, he said,

"Bring her bonnet, quick, my girl, and here is something to pay you for your trouble."

The girl did not heed the piece of silver he threw toward her, as he spoke, but rushed away as if to obey his command. In a moment she returned, and as she drew near Mrs. Fletcher, she said, as she furtively offered her a slip of paper, concealed in her hand.

"Miss Fanny's bonnet is locked up, sir, and Mrs. Fletcher has the key of the closet."

A few words traced by Wharton were on the paper, and after glancing at them, Mrs. Fletcher said to her husband,

"It is true—I had forgotten. Let Fanny accompany me to my room, and I promise you that in ten minutes she shall return, and you may then act as you please."

"You had better not suffer her to leave your sight," whispered Linton; "she may baffle us yet."

"Lizzy always was a woman of her word," said Fletcher, in the same tone. "If she says Fanny shall return, she will do so."

Linton turned impatiently away. Fletcher took out his watch, and said to his wife,

"I do not wish to be too hard on you. In ten minutes let her return, then."

As Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter crossed the hall, they were intercepted by Wharton, who hastily whispered,

"Come with me into the library."

They followed him, and closing the door after them, he rapidly said,

"Under no other circumstances, Mrs. Fletcher, would I make the proposal I am about to utter. It seems to me the only resource to save your daughter to you; and you must decide upon it instantly, or it will be too late."

"Name it—any thing—any thing, to keep her from that terrible man. Oh, Mr. Wharton, it will kill me to resign her to his influence!"

"In a few weeks I shall set out for Europe to make a tour of three or four years. I will this instant marry your daughter, and after making such arrangements for your comfort, and her education, as my fortune demands, I will leave her under your guardianship until I return. It is your only chance to retain her. Speak—shall it be so?"

"I could scarcely have hoped for so happy a termination to all my fears; but Fanny must decide for herself."

Wharton turned to the pale child.

"I do not ask for your love now, my dear Fanny. I only desire you to consent to be saved from the power of Linton, by one who has proved himself your true friend. All I ask is the kindly remembrance of such good qualities as I possess; and on my return, such memories may incline you to be won to regard me with affection. I merely desire this

ceremony as the means of providing for your safety. On my return, if your heart refuses to sanction the tie, it shall be broken."

A brief struggle seemed to agitate the heart of Fanny, her eye fell upon her mother's anxious face. She extended her hand to Wharton.

"No—the tie shall be sacred. Once yours, forever yours. You have saved us, Mr. Wharton, when all others had forsaken us, and such poor return as I can make, I will cheerfully endeavor to render. I accept your offer."

"It is well; you shall never repent your confidence. Mr. Lansing we await your services."

He drew the agitated child toward him, and in a few moments the brief ceremony was completed, which made Fanny Fletcher a bride, at twelve years of age. It was barely concluded, when the impatient voice of her father was heard, calling on her.

Wharton clasped her hand within his, and throwing open the door, communicating with the parlor, he entered, followed by the magistrate and Mrs. Fletcher. The two confederates gazed on the tableau thus presented in blank amazement. Linton then said,

"I hardly expected to see you here, Wharton. You must be aware that your power, aided even by magisterial authority, can not avail to withhold a daughter from her father. The ten minutes have expired. Are you ready to accompany us, Miss Fanny?"

"No sir," replied Wharton, "and neither do I intend her to get ready to go with you."

"You!" said her father sneeringly; "and by what right do you speak thus, young man?"

"By an authority, even more indisputable than your own, sir—that of a husband."

"How? what?" exclaimed the two.

"She is but a child—this is a mere pretense—a mockery," said Linton.

"It is a reality," replied Wharton, firmly.

"Mr. Lansing can testify that he has just performed the ceremony, which gives me a legal right to control her destiny. It was the only means left to save her to an injured and oppressed mother. To you, Mr. Fletcher, I can make the union of your daughter with me

more desirable than her dependence on Mr. Linton; and to him I have a few words to say concerning the source of his anxiety to obtain the control of Fanny's destiny."

Linton changed color, but he replied, with composure,

"She is nearly allied to me, and I was unwilling to see her growing up in ignorance and poverty, while the wealth bequeathed to me by her grandfather contributed only to my own enjoyment. Her mother was obstinate and unreasonable; and would not accept my offers of service. Through her father's authority alone could I hope to make Fanny the recipient of my bounty."

"Truly you have a strange way of conferring benefits," said Wharton, sarcastically.

"Such men as I know you to be, rarely commit an act of benevolence, without some ulterior object in view, by which they expect to benefit themselves. I shall inquire minutely into the provisions of Mr. Haydon's will, and ascertain for myself the disposition of his property."

Linton's eye glared on the young man as he thus spoke, and he ground his teeth with rage.

"Do you know that for such insinuations I can hold you accountable with your life?"

"I feel myself accountable to a much higher tribunal than any you can erect, Mr. Linton. I will not fight you for uttering what I believe, and will yet prove, to be the truth."

Linton grew pale as death, but he spoke in a firm voice,

"I avow, it then, and save you the trouble of proving it. The face of that girl, though pretty enough, would not have goaded me on in pursuit of her, were my own interests not to have been served by gaining power over her. For aught I cared, she might have perished in the street; but my uncle, Mr. Haydon, left thirty thousand dollars to his granddaughter, to be paid over to her when she completed her twentieth year. Until that time, I am sole trustee, and not one penny shall she touch, until she can legally claim the whole."

"How? is this so?" asked Fletcher, furiously; he had listened, as one stupified, to the

foregoing conversation, but this avowal of Linton aroused him completely. "And we have believed ourselves destitute! Black villain, how dared you act thus? How have you contrived to keep this information from me?"

"It was easy enough to keep any thing I did not choose to be known, from a man who was so besotted with drink that he could scarcely ever understand what was said to him, and from a woman who believed herself forsaken of God and man," replied Linton, sneeringly. "I wish you all a good morning, with the comfortable assurance that for eight years to come Fanny's fortune is in my hands, and I defy all the legal quibbles in existence to wrest it from me."

He hurriedly left the room, and Wharton turned to the father of his bride.

"It is a matter of little consequence, Mr. Fletcher. I am rich, and the parents of Fanny shall be to me as my own. Now the evil influence of Mr. Linton is removed from you and yours. I hope that peace may once more become an inmate of your household. I hope from this day you will commence a reformation which shall become permanent."

Fletcher shook his head. He held up his white and trembling hand.

"See," he said, "the effects of abstaining from the stimulus which is destroying me. Some insatiate demon within me forever cries, Drink, drink, and drown the sense of your degradation. No; I believe that another week passed as the few last have been, would drive me to suicide."

"Unhappy man! Can nothing snatch you from the brink of destruction on which you hover? Your wife will receive you once more; your daughter will cherish you. Arouse your better nature, and again resume your proper station in life. If you refuse, it becomes my duty to remove your wife and child where they will not behold your degradation."

Fanny rushed forward, and threw herself on her knees before him, while her mother approached and joined her entreaties to those of Wharton. Fletcher burst in tears, and clasping his daughter to his heart, exclaimed,

"You have conquered. I will make an effort, even if life should be the sacrifice, to abstain from that which has been the bane of

my life. Forgive me, Elizabeth, pardon me, my darling Fanny, for all I have made you suffer. I have been a miserable wretch, but I will endeavor to atone for the past."

As Fanny arose from her father's embrace, her eye encountered the pallid face of George Dale; his eye was fixed immovably on her, with an expression that froze her very soul. She sprang toward him, and placing her hand confidently in his, said,

"Are you not glad for me, dear George? then why look so strangely on me?"

The boy flung off her hand almost rudely, and hurriedly said,

"I thought you loved me, Fanny, even as I love you, and now you have given yourself to another. Oh, Fanny, Fanny, you have broken my heart!"

He could control his emotion no longer, but burst into a passionate fit of weeping. Fanny shrunk back; child as she was, she felt every word of that passionate outbreak of sorrow, in the very depths of her heart; its echo haunted her through many, many years of her young existence, though she sedulously endeavored to drive it from her thoughts; for she intuitively felt that the affliction which had grown up between herself and her young companion was a wrong to the new duties she had imposed upon herself, in consenting to her extraordinary nuptials.

Wharton spoke kindly to him.

"There was no other alternative, my dear George. Fanny had no choice but to accept my offer: remember, it was to fulfill a higher duty that she gave herself to me—the duty which she owes to a mother, who for her sake has suffered much. You will forget this boyish affection, and regard her as a dearly-cherished sister."

"No, no," replied the boy, impetuously. "Take her away; I will have her whole heart, or none. I do not choose to share it with you."

"Oh, I am quite willing that it shall be so, for I can fancy that in years to come, you might be a dangerous rival."

The boy's eye flashed, and his lip curled in scorn, but he made no reply. He approached Fanny, took her hand, and raised it to his burning eyes; he then pressed it to his lips and heart, and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER X.

THE town of L—— contained about five thousand inhabitants. It was situated on the picturesque banks of a small stream, and the undulating surface of the country was dotted with handsome villas, surrounded by highly-cultivated grounds. The streets were shaded by ornamental trees, and in front of the humblest cottage might be seen a vine or shrub of some kind, offering its fruit or flowers in return for the care bestowed upon it.

The town was not a place of much commercial importance, for the stream on which it stood was too shallow to be navigated by crafts of large dimensions; but it yielded the finest fish to those who were fond of the sport immortalized by old Izaak Walton, and its banks abounded in romantic spots, sheltered by overhanging boughs—fit temples for the resort of lovers. The passion for gain, which among the denizens of a large city seems to become epidemic, here found little to encourage it, and the majority of the better classes were people who were contented with a comfortable independence which allowed them leisure to cultivate the pleasures of intellect and taste. The society of L—— was, consequently, of a very superior order, and this was the chief inducement to a youthful and lovely widow to choose it as her place of residence. There was also another reason which influenced her: L—— was far from her former place of abode, and there were circumstances in her history of a romantic and painful character, which induced her to cast her lot among those to whom they were entirely unknown.

She came accompanied by her mother, a pale, delicate woman, on whose features was stamped the impress of deep suffering; but she now appeared to enjoy a tranquil species of happiness, and the devoted care of her daughter was returned by a love bordering upon idolatry. A handsome residence in the outskirts of the town, which was most beautifully situated, had been purchased by Mrs. Wharton, and embellished with fine taste. During the first year of her residence in L——, she had gone little into society, for she was in deep mourning for both her husband and her father, who were understood to have

died within a few weeks of each other; but of late, her doors had been unclosed for the admission of company, and rumors of her beauty, elegance, and accomplishments had gone forth into the little world around, until she was considered the brightest object of attraction in the vicinity.

The mansion of Willow Glen was indeed a temple of elegance worthy of its fair mistress. The richness, comfort, and taste displayed in the adornment of her residence indicated the refined pursuits of her who found delight in collecting around her the most beautiful objects in nature and art. The house was a cottage building, of exquisite proportions and elegant structure, situated in a romantic hollow, formed by hills of such height as in a level country would have been dignified by the name of mountains. To watch the bright sun quivering on the hilltops, as his last golden glories faded into twilight, and then to behold night's radiant watchers glimmer from the azure depths of infinity, was to the poetic and religious soul of the young widow a source of pure and elevated delight. The yard sloped downward into a deep, natural dell, covered with green sward, and shaded by groups of oaks, interspersed with several immense willow trees, whose graceful foliage swayed to every breath of wind.

We will enter the apartment peculiarly appropriated to the presiding spirit of the scene. The walls are covered with paintings, copied from the rarest gems of ancient and modern art, many executed by the fair owner herself. In the four corners of the room stood marble tables supporting vases of exquisite shape and finish, containing flowers in full bloom, moss and ground ivy covered the earth in which they were embedded, and beneath this verdant coronal the sides of the vase represented, in bas relief, some scene from the Greek mythology, finely sculptured. The room was lighted from above by a dome of ground glass, which admitted a soft and mellowed reflection upon the objects of art beneath. A painter's easel was placed where the light fell best for the purpose of the fair artist, and before it stood the young widow herself. She was dressed in half mourning, and the sad-colored

robe harmonized with the delicate fairness of her complexion, and the regularity of her features. Her form was beautifully rounded, and had that air of grace and elegance which is the distinguishing charm of the highest order of beauty. Over the finely-moulded brow, intellect threw its glory, and around the freshly-colored lips lingered the sweetest of smiles, while the dark, full-orbed eyes flashed with arch merriment, or softened with aroused feeling. Her hair, which was of a rich brown tint, hung in long curls in front, and at the back of the head was wreathed in one heavy braid around a plain comb. Our sweet Fanny, at twenty years of age, was the most captivating of women. She now stood in thought before the easel, on which was placed a picture designed by herself; it was her first attempt at original composition, and she was deeply interested in its completion according to the ideal in her own mind.

The scene represented was that of the leper's return to his family, after the decree of Christ had cleansed him. There was *one* who returned to give thanks to him who had performed the miracle. The interior of a Jewish palace was seen, and three figures occupied the floor; the man who had been restored to life and happiness, with his wife and daughter clasped in his arms, while his lips seemed to move in a prayer of thankfulness for his delivery from so dread a curse. In the background were grouped friends and servants in various attitudes of reverence, fear, and astonishment.

The outline was merely sketched, but the drawing was done with great skill. While absorbed in reverie over her own creation, her mother entered, and drew near, unperceived.

"It is beautiful," she said. "Are you still dissatisfied with your work, my love?"

Fanny shook her head.

"The face of the principal figure does not please me. It is not sufficiently expressive. That brow, on which the Savior of men had so lately gazed, should be radiant with glory that form, which he had rescued from so fearful a fate, express every elevated and noble feeling which poor humanity may know. No, I can never represent the ideal in my own mind. To do justice to such a subject, some-

thing of the superhuman should mingle with the actual. I am afraid I have attempted too much."

"Darling, I think it beautiful," said the mother, gazing upon it with fond pride. "I hope you will complete it."

"Oh, yes, I certainly shall," replied Fanny, with vivacity. "Do you know, mother, a thought has just occurred to me? If I could get the friend of my childhood, George Dale, to sit for my leper, his fine dark countenance and noble expression would just embody the idea of what I think my Jewish prince should be."

"True, Fanny, but that would be accomplishing what seems an impossibility. You know that George has never willingly visited us since the morning he poured forth his boyish sorrow at your union with Mr. Wharton. He was different from other boys of his age, and I believe that he really loved you too well to trust himself near you. His father, too, seems always to have been anxious to prevent any intercourse between you."

Fanny blushed, and a smile parted her rosy lips.

"Ah, yes, and once I did not wish it either; but now I am differently situated. What then would have been treason to the best of friends, can now be no wrong to his memory. I will frankly own, mother, that I look forward to a meeting with George Dale with deep interest; for that meeting I will keep my hand free, my heart unscathed."

Mrs. Fletcher regarded her daughter inquiringly.

"Did you love George Dale when you gave your hand to Mr. Wharton, Fanny? Yet what folly it is to ask the question. A child of your years could have had no preference which would influence her life."

Fanny answered with a smile.

"I loved him very dearly, mother, but not with that love which makes or mars a destiny. It is only since I have been old enough to reflect, and recall to mind all the delicate and noble traits of character which the boy displayed, that my imagination has pictured the man in full development, and I must meet the original of my fancy sketch, to see if he falls

below, or comes up to, the standard I have erected for him."

"And if he comes up to it?"

"Oh, I shall leave that important *if* to be answered by time and fate," replied Fanny, with a gay laugh.

Mrs. Fletcher gazed earnestly upon her for a few moments, and then turned to the picture.

"Those two female figures bear a strong likeness to yours and mine, my daughter. Ah, my love, I now see the veiled design of your picture: the leper cleansed, was suggested by the reformation of your father, which was at last granted to our earnest prayers. My dearest girl, this is indeed an invaluable memorial of the great mercy vouchsafed to us through the kindness of Heaven."

"You have penetrated my design, mother. I intended this, when completed, as a present for you; as my first original effort, it will always be more highly prized by me than any subsequent picture I may execute."

"Thank you, my love; and in this family piece, for such I may call it, the portrait of George Dale you wish to have a place? Beware, Fanny; a lively imagination and warm heart may place you in a false position toward your boy lover. Men do not cherish their childish fancies: theirs is not the romance of life, and you may be preparing for yourself much future suffering."

"Dear mother, how needlessly grave you are! You speak as if I were already hopelessly in love with George Dale, although I have scarcely exchanged a dozen words with him in the last eight years. But I will confess the truth—I have a strange presentiment that my future life is linked with his either for good or evil. I have tried to shake off this belief, but it will not be driven from me. You will think it folly, and perhaps it is ingratitude to the memory of one who was the kindest and best of men, to suffer any other image to arise before him; but I feel that such will be my fate."

"We generally make our own fate, my daughter, and then, if it proves evil, we throw the blame on destiny. But, situated as you are, I am not disposed to condemn a rational attachment to a good man, whose education and endowments render him worthy of you—

Yours has been a peculiar lot, Fanny—a child-bride, parted from your husband almost within the hour of your union, never more to meet. The fate of Wharton is a mystery; his death so long a doubt upon our minds. Truly, fact sometimes transcends fiction."

Fanny threw herself on her chair, and covered her face with her hands. She had grown pale as her mother recalled the past, for with it came the memory of much keen suffering, much weary uncertainty as to the fate of him, who, though absent, did not cease to urge his claims upon her affectionate remembrance, by letters filled with eloquent appeals to her childish heart.

Within a very few days after his sudden marriage, Wharton completed his arrangements for leaving his native shore. Mr. Fletcher promised amendment, but the young man took care to place his bride and her mother under the protection of friends who had power to save them from future annoyance. Liberal arrangements were made for their support, and the completion of Fanny's education, and he departed.

Mr. Fletcher, removed from Linton's influence, endeavored to reform, and after many relapses, finally returned to the paths of sobriety, but with shattered health and impaired intellect. His wife watched over him tenderly and affectionately until death released her from the sad office.

Letters from Wharton were constantly received. He addressed Fanny as the beloved of his soul, and fondly anticipated the hour in which he could claim her in the full maturity of her charms, as the companion of his future life. Flattered by his preference, grateful for all he had done for her, Fanny felt a sincere affection for him, which might eventually, beneath the influence of kindness and association, have become ardent love; but it was impossible that it should partake of that feeling in the bosom of a girl who had given herself to him before she knew what the name of love meant.

Mr. Dale constantly visited Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter, and appeared to take a deep interest in all that concerned them; but he held George aloof, and rarely permitted him to meet the companion who had made one

summer of his life the bright spot in his young existence. The father understood the sensitive and high-toned temperament of his son, and he would not expose him to the temptation to cherish his boyish love for a being so fair and fascinating as the young Fanny.

And George acquiesced; for no one, save the youth himself, knew how deeply, how truly, his young heart had loved this playmate of a few months. We laugh at the loves of children, and often they are puerile enough; but occasionally a deeper cord is struck, which vibrates to that mystic existence within us that we call soul, spirit—an impression is made, which death itself can only erase; and children though they may be, who receive this quickening power from the divine influence of love, it remains with them to the last. Thus had George Dale loved Fanny, and a bitter and determined dislike to Wharton usurped the place of his former affection for him.

In the meantime, Wharton had been a wanderer in many lands. He had traveled through Europe, thence into Asia—had visited Palestine, and from there joined a caravan going into Arabia. At one of the ports on the Red Sea he embarked upon an English ship bound for Calcutta. The last news ever received from himself was a letter written on the eve of his departure for his native land, by the way of China, and across the Pacific; he expected to arrive in the United States by the time Fanny completed her seventeenth year, when he would claim her as his own for life.

As the voyage was known to be extremely tedious, no uneasiness was felt until the time of his expected arrival had actually passed—the ship might have been accidentally detained: doubling Cape Horn was known to be dangerous, and vessels were often detained there many days. Finally weeks lapsed into months, and still no positive tidings came. At length an end was put to all doubts, by a paragraph from a Liverpool paper, which stated that the *Endymion*, a homeward-bound vessel, had picked up two men clinging to a portion of a wreck which they stated to be that of an American ship bound for New York. On the first night out, she struck a sunken rock in the China sea, and went down, carrying

every soul on board except themselves. There was but one passenger, an American, who was in the cabin at the time the accident happened. And thus in the prime of life had perished Wharton. Fanny was shocked at his sudden death—in her dreams her imagination conjured up all the incidents of the fearful tragedy; for surely no death can be more awful than that of drowning—than to be whelmed in the surging waters with life, health, and consciousness strong within the body, so soon destined to pass into that deepest deep of oblivion, the caverns of the ocean, or more fearful still, into the jaws of some terrible sea-monster. But that Fanny mourned his death with that heart-sorrow which waits over its best beloved, and finds no comfort, no joy in any thing the world may offer, can not be said. It was rather a severe shock to her sensibilities, than an affliction to her heart.

After the first sorrow had passed, she felt like one relieved from the consciousness of a heavy burden, and in her secret heart she acknowledged that she had rather dreaded the return of her strangely-wedded husband. She had liked him—felt gratitude to him for all his kindness; but that is not love, said the young girl to herself—at least it is not such love as I can bestow on him I would choose from all others. She began to understand the mystery of her own heart, and every pulse refused to hallow an affection thus compulsively demanded. She felt that human love is not "the growth of human will," and when the horror of his fate had passed away, she went forth upon her path like a freed bird.

Mrs. Fletcher left the room, and Fanny arose and opened a cabinet, from which she took a package of letters tied with black ribbon. She drew from among them the last she had ever received from their writer.

"Half the world divides us, my Fanny," he wrote, "and my spirit sometimes becomes so impatient to behold you once again, that I feel as if I can not live through the days, weeks, and months which must inevitably elapse before I can clasp you in my arms as the most precious gift from infinite Mercy.

"I recall your winning beauty—your charming grace—the adorable sweetness of your dis-

position, combining all that is most lovely in woman, and I ask myself if you can indeed love me as I desire to be loved. I remember, Fanny, that on the morning of our hurried union, I promised that the tie which unites us should be broken, if it were not sanctioned by your own wishes, when you arrived at an age to choose for yourself. You replied, 'Once yours, forever yours,' and on the faith of that promise, though made by a child, I have suffered my heart to cling to you, to make you its dearest and most cherished treasure, until it would be like severing soul from body, to yield you to another. Therefore, beware, Fanny, that you hold this fearful trust sacred. Yet do not fancy that I shall come to demand your heart as a right. I know the waywardness of human affections, and I shall seek to win yours before I claim the fulfillment of the bond which I would fain hope links us together for time and for eternity."

There was much more in the same strain, which indicated the generous and noble character of the writer, and Fanny thought, "I could have loved him if we had met again; but fate, Providence interfered. I am now at liberty to return to my childish dream. Ah, will its fulfillment render me happier than I might have been with Philip Wharton?"

She sank into a reverie, which was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with lamps.

"Take them away," she said, with unusual impatience. "With this beautiful moon, it seems almost sacrilege to use artificial light. Say to my mother I shall not take tea to-night—I wish to be alone."

She sat beside a glass door which unclosed upon a portico, shaded by flowering vines; an opening through them permitted the moonlight to fall over her figure. That soft and holy light which imparts a delicate charm to the most common-place features, invested hers with a spiritual grace that rendered her dreamy repose of countenance perfectly enchanting. Had her musing mind been cognizant of things around her, she must have heard the rustle of a footstep upon the lawn, which cautiously approached and stopped spell-bound when the eye of the intruder fell upon the Egeria of the spot. His heart bounded

tumultuously, and his first impulse was to rush forward, utter her name, and pour forth all the long repressed passion of his beating heart. He resisted the wild thought, and standing within the shadow of a tree, gazed with deep love-lit eyes upon all his soul held most dear on earth.

Half an hour passed thus, and motionless the pair remained; suddenly the voice of Mrs. Fletcher spoke beside Fanny, and she awoke once more to the realities around her.

"Dearest, are you indisposed this evening?" she affectionately inquired.

"Only in mind, dear mother," Fanny replied. "I have been recalling the incidents of my past life—looking over mementos that always bring sadness to my heart. To-morrow evening, when I attend Sophy Garland's wedding, I lay aside my mourning. It seems to me like breaking the last tie that binds me to the dead. I feel as if a new era in my life is commencing, and my soul is unquiet and restless—it can not behold the sunshine which must lie upon a pathway to be trodden by as youthful feet as mine."

The mother sighed, for she remembered her own experience of life; yet Fanny's future promised fairly, and this momentary cloud would soon pass from her spirits.

"Fanny, have you any idea who you are to meet at Mr. Garland's to-morrow evening?" inquired Mrs. Fletcher.

"Any one in whom I am particularly interested?" she quickly asked.

"George Dale will be there."

Fanny uttered an exclamation of pleasure which reached the concealed visitor, and his strong frame quivered with emotion.

"It is well," she said. "Our acquaintance once renewed, and he shall not again hold himself aloof from his earliest and best friends. How did you learn this, mother?"

"I have a letter from Mr. Dale, in which he says that George was a classmate of Sophy's betrothed, and at his earnest solicitation, he has consented to attend the marriage."

"And how is dear, kind Mr. Dale?"

"He speaks of himself as enjoying his usual health, but his letter is nearly filled with you and your affairs. He seems at last to have resigned all hope of Mr. Wharton's return,

and he holds himself in readiness to transfer to you the property which was willed to you in case he never came back to his native land. At the conclusion he says, 'You may be sure that I look upon the restoration of Philip as hopeless, when I again permit George to throw himself within the sphere in which Fanny moves. What the result may be, I know not, for she so attractive, so flattered, may form other attachments; but I know that for him there has been but one, will be but one, in life.'"

Fanny's heart throbbed tumultuously. She recalled the devotion of her boy-lover, her own attachment to him, and the years in which she had sedulously driven his image from her mind were annihilated. Her thoughts flew back to the old garden with its shadowy path in which they had wandered arm in arm—the seat beneath the beech-tree where they had read from the same book—the ramble in search of flowers—the Gilpin-like race upon their ponies, and a smile irradiated her pensive features.

During the years of her girlhood, these memories had been thrust away into the darkest corner of her heart, for she felt that she had no right to suffer them to come forth into the light of day; but now the interdiction was removed; she could dwell on them, cherish them, as dearly loved friends; and cheerful was the tone with which she said,

"I must read your letter myself, mother. I will accompany you into your room immediately."

They left the apartment together, and the intruder emerged into the open moonlight, removed his hat from his throbbing brow, and tossed aside the waving hair that clustered around his temples. By that light he was eminently handsome, and the glow of happiness which suffused his features gave them an expression of almost superhuman beauty. He drew near the spot on which Fanny had been seated, and hastily plucking a flower which had casually brushed her hand, he pressed it to his lips, and concealing it in his breast, hurried across the lawn, and was soon beyond the limits of Willow Glen.

A few hours later, a strain of soft music arose beneath her window; Fanny listened

intently—there was but one instrument—the guitar was touched with skill, and a deep, full-toned voice sang two stanzas of a love ballad, by Whittier, which the performer had himself adapted to a favorite air.

"How thrills once more the lengthening chain
Of memory at the thought of thee!
Old hopes which long in dust have lain,
Old dreams come thronging back again,
And boyhood lives in me:
I feel its glow upon my cheek,
Its fullness in this heart of mine,
As when I paused to hear thee speak,
Or raised my love-fall eyes to thine."

"Yet hath thy spirit left on me,
An impress Time has worn not out,
And something of myself in thee,
A shadow of the past I see,
Lingering still thy way about.
Not wholly can the heart unlearn
That lesson of its happier hours,
Nor yet has Time's dull footstep worn
To common dust that path of flowers."

Fanny did not raise to look from her easement to ascertain who the musician was, for she intuitively knew; though of late years the tones of that voice had been unfamiliar to her ears, and she did not remember ever having heard him sing, she knew that George Dale was there; and when all again was still, and the quick flutter of her little heart had subsided into a more equal pulsation, she slept with a quiet smile upon her lips, and in her sleep she murmured his name.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the following morning, Fanny arranged herself most becomingly in a coquettish demi-toilette, in which she looked as pure and as lovely as a snow-drop. Pleasant anticipations sent an unwonted bloom to her cheek, and her soft eyes, so full of happiness, "seemed to love whatever they looked upon."

There is something beautiful in happiness. The heart sunshine can light up the homeliest face—can impart interest to the most common-place features. Pity it is that it is so of-

ten dimmed, so deeply overshadowed through-out so large a portion of life. We struggle through the dark cloud until light again appears; but it is with a shudder, and a thrill of remembered anguish, that the mind reverts to those sloughs of despond with which our paths have been so thickly studded. Oh life! bitter and dark are thy teachings to the young and unbackneyed spirit; if we could not lift the wrung soul to that light which gleams steady and true upon the benighted way, how could we have courage to struggle to the end?

Fanny sat in her sanctum, with a book open before her, but her eyes scarcely wandered toward it. She was dreaming of the time to come, and endeavoring to send forth her fancy upon its shrouded page, to draw from it some omen of the bright future she believed about to open to her.

Blessed spirit of Hope, which flings upon the funeral pyre of existence all that is lovely and alluring, gilding even destruction with hues of heaven! We set forth upon the voyage of life, "Youth at the helm, and Pleasure at the prow;" a bright rainbow formed of our sunny hopes, spanning the dark and turbid stream we are called on to navigate. The eyes are fixed upon that delusive halo, until the breakers roar and dash around us. We struggle for life against the wild waves, and lo! when the tempest is past the clouds yet linger, and shut out all brightness from the future. The glad sunshine of trusting youth is dimmed forever, and the first glory of existence has departed. But as spring puts forth new blossoms, the heart rises from its first struggle, and new hopes, less bright, less sanguine, are formed, again to be overshadowed, again to be dashed into fragments to the earth, until at last the closing scene arrives, and the dreamer often finds that his existence has been but a series of crushed hopes and disappointed aspirations. Like the Danaïdes, we all seem condemned to pour water into broken vases—a labor ever renewing, never ending. Happy that spirit, which in the gloomiest hour can turn with unwavering trust to the Star of Bethlehem, which gleams above the darkness in calm, undimmed

lustre, and whispers to the stricken world-wearied soul, "Be ye faithful unto the end—I will never forsake nor deceive ye."

In the bright waking dream of that young heart, there was no shadow. The poetry of youth and hope bathed the future in its own golden hues, and her day-dream was beautiful exceedingly. Ah, if she could only imprison some of its brightness for use in darker hours, when the inevitable realities of life must come crowding upon her!—those solemn hours in which the soul says "There is no joy in life," and who has not many such?

Fanny at length heard the chimes of the alabaster clock, striking the hour of twelve, and she started from her seat.

"So late!" and she sighed lightly. "Ah, he will not call this morning."

A half glance at herself in a large mirror, and a look of disappointment closed the speech. She had taken such pains with her toilette, she really looked so well, that it was a shame, and moreover, a great piece of neglect on the part of Mr. George Dale, which she would make him repent of yet.

As she languidly proceeded to draw aside the covering from her picture, to employ herself at her usual morning's work, the bell rang, and in another instant Mr. Dale's card was brought in. Mrs. Fletcher entered with him, and Fanny was spared the embarrassment of meeting him alone. They talked together as old friends, and after the lapse of half an hour, no one would have fancied that for so many years they had lived almost as strangers to each other. But there are some persons who never feel strange to us; we receive them at once as friends, and sit in the light of their presence as before the angels of God, for we intuitively know them to be the "heart's own country people," and we welcome them to the warmest place in its sanctuary.

George Dale was both manly and elegant in his person, and his large dark eyes had an eloquence in their expression which Fanny thought would exactly suit the head of her Jewish prince; but she would not ask him to sit for his picture; it would embarrass her too much to attempt to paint a likeness of so handsome a young man. She would remember

the expression, and transfer it when alone to her canvas.

She found that he talked well on many subjects, and eloquently on those which interested him. The volume she had been looking over was still lying open on the table; it was a finely-illustrated copy of Burns, to which George Dale's eye at length wandered. He examined it with pleasure.

"This is an exquisite engraving; but nothing can be too fine for such poetry as this."

"Do you like illustrated works?" inquired Fanny. "For my part, I honestly confess that my mental pictures are often outraged by the delineation of the artist."

"Yes, where he pretends to give an embodiment of the ideal figures which flit before the imagination while reading the creation of a master-spirit in the fairy land of fancy. Such, for instance, as the heroines of Scott and Byron, not one of which ever came up to my ideal vision of the character. But this objection ceases where scenery is depicted, for nature is always grand or beautiful, and he who is capable of faithfully copying from this lovely world of ours, can always interest."

"You express what I have often felt. You are then an admirer of Burns?"

"Yes, an admirer of his genius, and an apologist for the faults of the man. It seems to me that one not gifted with a poetic temperament can never understand or appreciate the struggles and difficulties of this unfortunate child of the Muses, with his soaring and ethereal spirit chained to the dull and unimaginative labors of poverty, until their very earthliness dimmed its glory. Let the man of genius to whom the possession of independence affords the excitement of change of scene, and congenial companionship, imagine himself in the position of the rustic poet, and then dare to judge him for his failings. One of the most melancholy conditions of genius is that it wearies of all things. What once delighted from its novelty, becomes 'flat, stale, and unprofitable,' and the unsated ideal craves yet another view of the many phases of human existence. To such a man as Burns, imprisonment in a dungeon would be little less congenial than constant confinement to the same spot, and the same associations. The dull

monopoly of life he found must paralyze his faculties, if not ultimately madden his mind, and he sought relief in the only species of stimulus he could command. Yet, I hope you will not consider me an advocate of intemperance. I am now defending the cause of a man most painfully situated—a man of a high order of genius—not one of talent, for there is a wide difference between them, and they should not be judged by the same standard.”

The earnest face glowed, and the eyes of the speaker grew brighter than before.

“Can your philanthropy also find an excuse for Byron, who is said to have sometimes owed his inspiration to vulgar gin-and-water?” asked Fanny with a smile.

“No,” replied George, gravely. “Lord Byron had no such excuse. Born at the opposite extreme of the social scale, with rank, sufficient fortune for independence, and talents of the most brilliant order, far different might have been his career. Unfortunately, too much was given to him, and those gifts were abused until satiety, recklessness, and early death ended a career, which, if rightly viewed, inculcates a great moral lesson.”

“You then consider independent mediocrity the best school for talent?”

“I believe such has been the decision of wiser heads than mine, and the history of one of our greatest luminaries in literature illustrates its truth.”

“Scott, I suppose, you allude to.”

“Yes—the wizard of the north, the good man, as well as the great enchanter. Possessing a social position sufficiently high to enable him to enter such society as was most congenial to his taste, on a footing of equality, yet with every inducement to desire to elevate himself to a greater eminence, Scott possessed a great advantage over both Burns and Byron.”

“Yet he is accused of possessing a grasping spirit, which brought upon himself the ruin that clouded the closing years of his life, and probably hastened that event.”

“True; but can not you excuse him, when you recall the institutions under which he was educated? To leave not only a distinguished name to his descendants, but to found a great

house and endow it with sufficient wealth to sustain his honors, was his earnest wish. I own, it appears to me a noble ambition, although some have been found to moralize on the signal disappointment of all his aspirations, as a judgment of Providence. Misfortune crowds the avenue to every path in life, and why a great failure shall be stigmatized as under the law of Heaven, more than a lesser one, I can not understand: yet we would be sorry to point to our neighbor when stricken with sorrow, and say it was the just reward of his evil doings.”

“I am glad to hear you speak thus,” said Fanny, with a bright blush, “for Sir Walter is one of my idols, and to me the solitary and ruined man is greater when struggling to remove the mountain of debt which threatened to overwhelm him, than in the zenith of his fame and prosperity.”

The little clock again rang out its silvery warning of the flight of time, and George blushed to find he had transcended the limits of a first call so far as to remain an hour. In answer to his graceful apology, Mrs. Fletcher replied,

“I hope you will not stand on ceremony with us, my dear George. Remember that we are not acquaintances of a day, but friends of long standing; and neither my daughter nor myself are forgetful of the pleasant months we passed beneath your father’s roof, in those days when we most needed a friend.”

George glanced at Fanny. She said nothing, but the smile with which she offered her hand, assured him that she fully participated in her mother’s assurances of a cordial welcome beneath her roof.

George Dale mounted his horse, and rode slowly away, absorbed in a deep and delicious reverie. Stilled for years beneath its conscious hopelessness, the early affection of his heart sprang into new and vivid life beneath the influence of that bright ingenuous smile. Yet, in the midst of his happiness, he trembled at the possibility that Wharton might yet return to snatch her from him again, when the strong soul of the man should have suffered her enchantments to coil themselves into his heart of hearts; for George knew the strength and tenderness of his own nature, and if he

permitted himself to love the companion of his boyhood with all the fervor of his soul, to lose her would be far worse than death.

He thought over the years which had elapsed since Wharton’s fate had been known; the improbability that he could have escaped a watery grave, and he was reassured. He suffered hope to play around his heart; he dreamed of the future with Fanny as his own, and his spirit reveled in anticipated happiness.

That evening they again met at the wedding of Miss Garland; that was followed by a succession of parties, rides on horseback, and pic-nics, at all of which Fanny was the bright spirit of joyousness. George was often her cavalier, and at home her constant visitor. What was more natural than that the childish attachment between two persons so formed to attract each other, should be renewed with a fervor unknown to its early stages? Fanny acknowledged in her inmost soul, that George came up to the standard she had erected for him, and in some respects surpassed it. The picture of the Jewish prince was completed, and while under the hands of the fair artist, the full-toned voice of the handsome original might often be heard reading aloud from some favorite author.

There were delicious moonlight promenades beneath the shades of the lawn; murmured tones of tenderness or remonstrance might sometimes be heard, for Fanny was too much of a woman not to torment her lover occasionally; and at the close of his rather protracted stay in L—, George obtained the precious boon he sought—Fanny Wharton was his betrothed bride, and he departed the happiest of men, to make arrangements for their union.

CHAPTER XII.

EARLY in the fall the wedding was to take place, and happily passed that golden summer to the young hearts which were so closely united by sympathy, taste, and feeling. Yet amid this intoxicating dream, there were occasional hours of dark misgiving to Fanny: it appeared too beautiful to last—this foretaste of heaven had too little of earth’s alloy to give

it stability; and when this shadowy fear settled on her spirit, she prayed in vain for peace. The image of Wharton arose as a dark phantom between her and happiness with another. In her dreams he reproached her for her inconstancy, and in her waking hours, if she closed her eyes, he stood before her mental vision, wearing a sad and sorrowful expression. Such fancies disappeared in the presence of her lover; for when with him, no dark omen had power to dim the radiance of her happiness.

The day appointed for the marriage at length drew near; Mr. Dale had already arrived in L—, accompanied by his son, and deep and sacred was the joy which reigned in Willow Glen.

While all is preparation and glad anticipation turn we to the port of New York. A ship is entering the bay, and many eager groups are gazing upon the approaching shores with emotions as varied as are their hopes and anticipations.

Leaning over the side, wrapped in deep thought, stood a tall, sun-burnt man, rather shabbily dressed. His hair was sprinkled with gray, and his brow was seamed with many lines of care and suffering. Though scarcely over thirty, he might have passed for a middle-aged man. The working of his features spoke of a strong emotion, and his burning eyes seemed to devour the green slopes and sunny fields, which bore to his throbbing heart the conviction that at last he was approaching the land he had so long yearned to see, which he had so often despaired of ever beholding again. A gentleman drew near and accosted him.

“In one more hour we will land; your eager wish is at last fulfilled.”

“The person he addressed drew a convulsive sigh.

“While wandering in the desert, famishing, despairing—when laboring in a far distant country for bread, and for the means of reaching my native land, all that sustained me was the hope that this hour would arrive; and now that I am here, my soul is oppressed with a thousand fears which fill me with unutterable anguish.”

"Cast them aside, my friend: they are but natural to one who has endured so much as you have. Yet the nature of your sufferings you have left me to guess, for you have never more than alluded to them."

"You have shown sympathy for me, and since we are on the eve of parting, I will give you an outline of my history. At twenty-two I was a gay youth, and like most others of my years, passionately fond of pleasure. Possessing wealth, I was soon launched into the society of a dissipated city, and my first associates were not such as were calculated to give stability to the good principles in which I had been educated, nor to set before me a very high standard of action."

"Before all noble and generous impulses were quite stifled, I accidentally encountered a child of rare loveliness of person, and uncommon endowments of mind. I was, from the first moment of our meeting, charmed by her great beauty, but had not chance or Providence again placed her in such a position as to enable me to serve herself and her mother in a very signal manner, I should probably have forgotten her. Her father was a wretched inebriate, who sought to wrest her from the protection of her mother, and to save her from such a fate, child as she was, I claimed her as my wife. After the performance of the ceremony, which gave me the right to control her destiny, I placed her where her education could be properly completed, and set out on an extended foreign tour. In five years I intended to return and claim my bride. I embarked for my native land, expecting to reach New York by the time she completed her seventeenth year, but unhappily the ship was wrecked when only a few days out of port. I escaped from the cabin almost by a miracle, and clung to a floating spar for many hours before I was picked up by a vessel bound for New Holland."

"When we arrived in sight of a portion of the coast known to the captain, he stopped to obtain fresh water. I went on shore with several others—the country at that place was a desert wild, inhabited only by the beasts of the forest. I wandered away from the remainder of the party, lost my way, and could

not regain it. I made many fruitless attempts to reach the sea again, hoping some ship might appear in sight, and my terrible pilgrimage come to an end. I had entangled myself inextricably in the mazes of the forest, where but for the scanty subsistence from the wild fruits peculiar to the country, I must have perished. Language would fail to paint to you the sufferings I endured from hunger, thirst, and weariness, added to the despair of mind which often assailed me in those terrible solitudes."

"I had nothing to guide me except the course of the heavenly bodies, and by them I pursued as direct a track as I could toward that portion of the country I knew to be inhabited. After months of wandering, I reached Sidney emaciated, worn out, and in tatters. At first, I was mistaken for an escaped convict, and no one would listen to my story; but at length I was fortunate enough to meet with a man who came out on the same ship which rescued me from a watery grave. He was humane enough to give me employment, which saved me from starvation. I remained with him as a shepherd until an opportunity of returning to England presented itself. I worked my passage to Liverpool, and when there lost no time in embarking for my native land. After an absence of eight years, I am about to stand once more upon the shores of my home; but who knows what desolation I may find awaiting me? My heart is torn with fears."

"If this young girl should have married in the meantime, my friend, there are many others who will readily console you for her inconstancy; so cheer up. God has not so wonderfully preserved you, to despond now when in sight of home."

"I must find her free!" said Wharton, vehemently. "In the wilds of the desert, when despair knocked at my heart, her sweet face arose before me, her soft voice rang in my ears, and bade me hope for her sake. I struggled on, I conquered all for her; and now, if she prove false—if she dare to prefer another to me! My God! the thought wounds me more keenly than a two-edged sword!" and a burning tear rolled over his sun-browned cheek.

"I dare say you will find all right, friend," said he whose tone of sympathy had won from the sufferer the history of his wanderings; yet when he saw the concentrated passion with which Wharton spoke, he shrank, like many others, from the manifestation of deep emotion, and hastily wringing his hand, with those common-place words of consolation, left him to brood over his own fears alone."

The ship was moored, and Wharton stepped once more upon the well-remembered wharf. There were changes, but still the place was familiar, and he rapidly threaded his way toward the heart of the city; for he was too poor to pay for a carriage, and there was no certainty that the person he sought would be at home."

It was nearly dark when he reached the place of his destination, and he discovered a faint light gleaming from the windows of the office. A glance at the name on the door satisfied him that the lawyer who formerly attended to his affairs was still its proprietor, and he hurriedly knocked.

A young clerk, who was a stranger to him, opened the door.

"Is Mr. Warren at home?"

"No, sir; he is not at present in the city."

Wharton paused to reflect on the course it would be best to pursue. He knew not whither to turn, for he was penniless, and so changed that he knew it would be necessary to identify himself, before he could claim his own.

"I am weary," he said. "I have already walked several miles—I will rest a few moments, and learn from you when Mr. Warren is likely to return."

The youth rather unwillingly permitted him to pass, for his wayworn appearance and threadbare garments were not great recommendations to his courtesy.

He felt faint and sick: on the eve of learning what was of such vital importance to him, his heart beat thick and fast, and at moments he felt as one dying. The boy saw his extreme paleness as he entered the lighted room, and offered him a glass of water. It revived him, and he inquired,

"How long have you been in Mr. Warren's office?"

"Five years this last summer."

"Ah, in that time you must have heard of a singular circumstance concerning a Mr. Wharton, who was supposed to be lost at sea. Mr. Warren had the charge of his business, and was authorized to settle up the estate in case of his death, while abroad."

"Oh, yes; that was a strange case, and it's about that the Governor has gone into the country now."

"How? tell me about it quick," said Wharton, eagerly. "Have they ceased to look for his return? Do they already regard him as dead?"

The young man shook his head.

"I don't think there is much doubt about that. The old gentleman, his former guardian, has at last yielded, and the will that was left in Mr. Warren's hands has been proved. He has gone to L—— to settle some of the business finally, and to be present at the wedding."

Wharton reeled as though a blow had been dealt him.

"Whose wedding?" he fiercely asked. "Do not dare to say that Fanny Wharton is about to become the wife of another! Do not utter such base slander, unless you would have me choke the vile falsehood in your throat."

The clerk regarded him in fearful amazement. He evidently thought his strange visitor mad; but he replied,

"Mrs. Wharton will certainly be married to-morrow evening, sir; but what interest you can have in it, I can not imagine."

"I—I no interest in it, stupid dolt! Do you not see that I am the man they thought dead? the man whose grave they are wreathing with their wedding garlands, while I am living, breathing, and suffering? Oh, suffering more than the torments of the lost! My Fanny—my beautiful rose—my pure pearl—my heart's treasure lost—lost, lost to me forever!" And he threw his arms wildly above his head, and stamped in his anguish upon the senseless boards.

The clerk stood appalled. He at length said, in a timid tone,

"It is a great pity, sir; but who could have believed that you would ever come back after so many years?"

"But I have come back, and woe to him who has usurped my place—to her who has forgotten her plighted faith! To-morrow evening, did you say? Ah, I am yet in time; where can I find them? At Dale Cottage?"

"Mrs. Wharton has never resided at Dale Cottage since your departure. She removed to the town of L——, after your loss was believed certain."

"And now, who has transplanted me? Speak, speak! for I am on fire with impatience."

"She is to marry the son of old Mr. Dale."

The crimson flush of passion faded from Wharton's features, and he leaned his head upon the table, with a feeling of deathlike sickness in his heart. He recalled the boyish love of George Dale, the affection Fanny had evinced for him, and he felt that such a denouement was to have been expected. He remembered the kindness of his old guardian, all the wretchedness his appearance must inevitably produce, and for one moment he was tempted to withdraw as mysteriously as he had appeared, leave them to their happiness, and live a life of obscurity and labor. Then came the memory of all he had suffered—the hopes that sustained him thus cruelly blighted; the lightness with which he fancied himself forgotten, and he registered a sacred vow to claim the right the law would render him, and a batch from his rival the bride he had so early won.

He abruptly asked,

"How far is L—— from this place?"

"About a hundred miles."

"Is there no railroad?"

"None. It is a common country road, though now in good order."

"And when does this accursed marriage take place?"

"To-morrow evening."

Wharton groaned,

"I must have money—I am penniless. I must bribe the driver, or I shall be too late. Quick—give me fifty dollars, I must leave for L—— within the hour."

The clerk hesitated.

"Excuse me, sir; but we do not keep money

in the office, and I have but a few shillings about me."

"Go out and get it, then. I have told you who I am. I will remain until you return."

The young man looked confused.

"The place is left in my charge, and I can not leave it in the care of a stranger. Pardon me, sir, but really there is no proof that you are really the person you declare yourself to be, and it is as much as my situation is worth to do as you desire."

"No proof," repeated Wharton, turning his working features toward the light; "good heaven! do you suppose any man capable of simulating such agony as is now shaking my frame—tearing my very heart-strings in its vulture-like grasp? Yet you are right: my threadbare garments do not command belief; but I am not the less the person I assert myself to be, and you refuse me the aid I ask at the peril of your life. In this extremity, I will not be said nay. Get me the money, I say, or take the consequences."

He approached the young man menacingly; but he was not a coward, and did not recoil before him.

"Stop one moment, sir, and listen to reason. It is now quite dark—I am not in the habit of borrowing money on Mr. Warren's credit, and doubt very much whether I could obtain what you require, even if I made the attempt. My own name would be of no use to you—but there is a way."

"Name it," said Wharton, hoarsely.

"Can you not remember some former friend to whom you can apply to bear witness to your identity, and at the same time furnish you with the funds you need?"

Wharton paused a moment to recall to memory those who would be most likely to serve him. He named several, but at each one the youth shook his head. He did not know them, and could not assist in finding them in the short time left to them to act. He at length named Linton as the last one he could think of, though he certainly could not regard him in the light of a friend.

"Ah, yes," said the youth, "I know Mr. Linton very well. He often comes to our office, and I have been to his house to carry

papers; I will lock up here, and accompany you to him."

It seemed an age to the impatient man while he paused to allow these preliminaries to be completed; and fatigued as he had before been, the fiery excitement burning in his veins impelled him onward at such a rate that it was with extreme effort his companion could keep pace with him.

They reached Linton's residence: the house was lighted up, and the sounds of conviviality issued from the open doors. There was evidently a gay party within, and at any other time Wharton would have shrunk from appearing before his former acquaintance under such circumstances. But now there was no time for hesitation. In reply to his demand to see Linton, the servant said, "That he entertained a large party at dinner, and could not be disturbed."

Wharton recognized the man as one who had formerly been in the service of Linton, and he removed his hat to see if he would know him, in spite of the changes which time and hardship had wrought in his appearance.

"Bennet, do you not remember me? Look well, for I am one you once knew, and it is important to me that you should recognize me."

The man stared helplessly at him, and slowly shook his head.

"I can not tell as I ever saw you before, sir. My master has so many new friends, that I forget one set as fast as another comes in."

"Pooh! you old blind idiot, can you not even remember the man that saved your life when the gray ponies ran away with your master's phaeton, and you were so drunk you could not keep your seat on the box?"

"Ay, sir, I remember that well enough; but it was young Mr. Wharton as did that, and he's been drowned many is the long year ago. More's the pity, for he was a liberal gentleman with his money."

"But he is not drowned. I tell you: he now stands before you, and demands an interview with your master."

The man stared harder than before, and then said,

"Well, if you are him, you are wonderfully changed, that's all: but my master must hear

that you are here, sir, and under such a curious coincidence of circumstances, perhaps he will leave the table for once, before all the company is lying under it."

He unclosed the door of a small room opening from the hall, and ushered the two into it, while he went on his errand. Wharton paced the floor in irrepressible impatience. He had not, however, long to wait; the strange disclosure made by the man caused Linton to leave his guests immediately, and in a few moments his tall figure entered the apartment in which they awaited him, and upon his cynical features an expression of inquiry, strongly mingled with doubt, was apparent, as he gazed upon his unexpected guest.

The lapse of time had not improved his appearance. His features had grown coarser and quite colorless, and his blackeyes gleamed more coldly than ever beneath their heavy brows. He leaned against the door frame, as if unable to sustain his weight, and his utterance was slightly thick, as he said,

"You wished to see me, sir, and if my man is to be credited, on rather an extraordinary errand. Yes, rather extraordinary: for I believe it is by no means common for dead men to return to life, and you will excuse me if I am a little skeptical as to the fact, ha! ha!"

Wharton moved the lamp so as to throw the light upon his features, and firmly replied,

"Linton, you must know me—you *must* know me, for more than life depends upon your recognition. I am Philip Wharton—that Philip Wharton who once called you friend—who escaped almost by a miracle from becoming what you now are. Arouse your faculties, man, and look on these sun-burned features—they are the same you once knew, though storm-beaten and seamed with care. Come close to me, man—scan them well, for I *must* be known to you."

"And if you are," drawled Linton, indolently, "of what advantage is that likely to favor you? If I recollect rightly, when Mr. Philip Wharton and myself parted last, it was not as the best of friends. Why then should he appeal to me to identify him?"

"Because, among all I have known, you were the only one this youth could direct me to, and I am in such a strait that every instant

of time is more precious to me than words can express."

"Ah, you have heard, then, that to-morrow evening my pretty cousin repudiates her union with you, and takes a more youthful partner. All fair and right, I say—you cheated me out of her, and Dale checkmates you. By Jupiter! it's the best thing I ever heard of!"

Wharton sprang toward him with a gesture of fury, but an instant's thought enabled him to reflect on the hopelessness of his position, if Linton refused to aid him. With difficulty repressing the wrath that burned within him, he asked, in a tone nearly inarticulate with anger,

"You acknowledge, then, that I am no impostor?"

"Let me look at you again. Why—yes—I believe there is a little left by which to recognize the handsome Wharton, as you were once called, though you really are devilishly changed for the worse."

"Then you will not refuse to advance me a trifling sum of money to aid me in reaching L—— in time to put a stop to this marriage? It was for this purpose I sought you."

"Why, really, I hardly know. When I think of the scurvy trick you played me in days o' lang syne, about this very girl, I do not know why I should assist you to reclaim her. If she marries Dale, the law will give her to him, because your absence has been sufficiently long to give her a right to a divorce. On consideration, I believe I will suffer pretty Fan to follow her own inclinations this time, and then I shall be avenged, all around; for the knowledge that she has two living husbands, and both madly in love with her, will destroy the peace of the little sensitive plant as effectually as I could have blighted it, if she had been forced to give herself to me."

Wharton drew near to him, and his white lips and gleaming eyes betrayed the passion that shook his frame.

"Linton, I am a desperate man; I demand a hundred dollars of you, to be returned fourfold within the week, if you wish it; and if you refuse me—if you are the means of my not reaching L—— until after my wife is given to

another, I take all things in heaven and earth to witness my vow—I will kill you. Yes—listen—tremble—I will sever your vile life from your body, and send your soul with all its unrepented evil to howl among your kindred friends."

Linton's sallow features grew yet more pallid, and he drew back from the flashing face which was almost touching his own.

"Really, this is a strange way to beard a man in his own house. But since you are so violent, I do not care if I do furnish you with the trifle you demand. I have my own enjoyment at all events, for settle it as you may, there is bitter suffering for all of you, and so far as I can see, no promise of happiness in the future. Fanny loves Dale, I tell you, with all a woman's devotion, and it's my belief that he will kill you sooner than yield her to you."

Wharton ground his teeth, but made no reply. He only held out his hand for the promised money, which was given after a little delay. Without another word, he hastily dashed from the house, followed by his young companion, and in another hour was on his way to L—— as fast as horses could carry him.

Daylight found him forty miles on his way, and still sixty weary miles stretched between him and his destination. On—on, was his single thought, his sole word to the driver. Only place him in L—— before eight o'clock in the evening, and he should be magnificently rewarded. The man did his best, but at two places fresh horses were not to be obtained, and when the sun was setting, they were still twenty miles from the bourne of his wishes. Wharton was almost despairing—the wearied horses could scarcely move out of a walk, while his chafed and impatient spirit was among the happy group, amid whom he would soon enter as a blighting specter—to claim that which every throbbing pulse in his heart told was unspeakably precious to him, yet which had been bestowed upon another. The sufferings of past years seemed as trifles in comparison with the storm of passionate feeling that swept through his soul during the long hours of that weary ride.

Just at nightfall, they approached a small village, and after much difficulty, he succeeded in procuring a fresh horse. Abandoning the

carriage, he mounted the steed, and set forth in the darkness of night, on as wild a race as ever was run by a man half maddened by suffering.

It was a chilly, starless night, and the wind moaned through the trees with a sound which seemed to his excited imagination the wailing of nature over the great anguish that rooted in his own heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE autumn had been lovely, until the morning of the bridal day. Leadens clouds lowered above, and gusts of wind, accompanied occasionally by cold rain, rendered the day comfortless and dreary in the extreme. Fanny was not superstitious, but a shudder thrilled through her frame as she looked forth into the gray and hazy atmosphere. On this last morning of freedom, she involuntarily thought of Wharton, and again his uncertain fate came as a cloud between herself and happiness, that would otherwise have been too perfect. She prayed fervently, and felt calmed and strengthened, by casting her future fate upon the mercy of Him who had hitherto protected her.

A small party of friends had been invited to attend the ceremony, and on the following morning the bridal couple were to set out for Dale Cottage, to spend the first few weeks of their union in its favorite seclusion.

The hours of the day were too busily occupied to permit Fanny to dwell on her own emotions, for her mother's health was too delicate to bear much fatigue, and the young lady of Willow Glen was as fastidious in her household arrangements as she was careful in giving all the varying shades to the charming creations of her pencil. The innate love of the true and the beautiful which distinguished her was visible in every thing that surrounded her, and this fitness it was which rendered her home a little temple of grace, elegance, and neatness.

Fanny desired to be married in her own sanetum, and there her exquisite taste had conjured up a scene of fairy-like beauty. At the farther end of the room stood her picture

of the leper, the frame wreathed with foliage and flowers. Porcelain vases of elegant form, filled with blooming plants, were placed in a semicircle on each side, and the earth in which they were imbedded was concealed by fresh moss and the scarlet blossoms of the verberna. Above these hung gorgeous wreaths, forming an alcove, in which the bridal pair were to stand.

Fanny, in her pure loveliness, clad in a drapery of silver gauze, and crowned with orange blossoms, looked the queen of this fairy spot, as she stood beneath its shelter a few moments before that appointed for the ceremony. The company were already assembled in the next apartment, awaiting the unclosing of the folding-doors, which was to display the tableau to them in all its unique elegance.

George entered by a side door, and stood enraptured.

"Fanny, you were always beautiful to me, but now you look like an angel, only minus the wings; and for that I am grateful, because such appendages might enable you to fly away from me, and I could not exist without you now, life of my life."

"Hush, George; do not speak thus. The only wings that can now separate us will be heavenly ones; and if God should see fit to remove me from you, to be truly an angel, you could and would live until, in his own good time, he should again reunite us."

"Fanny, dearest, do you know that, in spite of your loveability, you have one great fault, in my eyes? You always check my raptures in so serious a manner that it sometimes casts a chill over me. I should think you perfect, if you would only be as childishly happy as I am, and would tell me that, in linking your fate with mine, you are gaining the other moiety of your own soul, which has strayed through the world mateless until that mystic attraction, of which we read so much, and understand so little, drew us toward each other."

Fanny smiled a saucy little smile, and looked up at him, but in another instant her eyes filled with tears; she placed her hand in his, while she earnestly said,

"Be satisfied, George. I love you more

than words can express, or I would not be here as your plighted bride."

"Thanks, sweetest, dearest, best. I am the most fortunate being living."

"There is the clock chiming the hour," said Fanny. "In another instant the door will unclose, as that was to be the signal to my mother that we are ready."

As she finished speaking, the doors slid back, and disclosed the beautiful tablean to the delighted guests.

The minister advanced, the ceremony was performed, and the party crowded into the room to offer their congratulations. At that instant the sound of horses' feet, suddenly checked, was heard without; a bustle followed, and a loud, menacing voice spoke in reply to the remonstrance of the servants. In another instant, in the midst of this scene of elegance and happiness, stood the dark figure which was to cast desolation upon it all.

With garments wet with the cold rain of night, hair disheveled and saturated with moisture, and heart overflowing with bitterness, stood Wharton, gasping, in tones that sounded like the last expiring effort of nature, "Stop! I charge you, stop! this must not go on."

In spite of time and change there were four present who knew him at a glance; and the last awful trump could scarcely have struck into each heart a more deadly and sickening sense of doom and desolation than the sound of his voice produced.

George instinctively clasped Fanny to his breast, as if there she was safe, while she clung to him as a frightened dove for protection.

Mr. Dale advanced, and confronted the exhausted intruder, with an awe-struck and remorseful expression upon his features.

"Philip, is it indeed you, returned among us as if from the grave? Alas! that my old heart should be torn between anguish that you are here and joy that you have escaped the fate we have so long considered certain."

"So long!" repeated Wharton, bitterly. "A few fleeting years have rolled around, and I come back to my own, and find my name buried in oblivion, while those who should have cherished it are building their founda-

tions of happiness above my imaginary grave. This is a glorious welcome: even my wife seeking protection from me in the arms of my rival. Unhand her, sir—she is lawfully mine, and as such I claim her."

He advanced menacingly toward the wretched pair. George held her only the more firmly to his breast, as he said,

"She is mine by every tie of truth, honor, and affection; and from her own lips alone shall issue the decree which drives me from her side."

"And by the more sacred tie of gratitude, I claim her plighted hand," thundered Wharton. "She dare not repudiate my claim. Fanny, is it not so? speak—there can be but one decision now."

Fanny released herself from the supporting arm of George. She was perfectly colorless, but she was too dreadfully excited to faint. Encouraged by her action, Wharton drew a step nearer, but she put forth her cold hand to repulse him, while a slight shiver shook her frame.

"Do not approach—do not touch me—I can not bear it. Listen to me, for I mean every word I now utter. To you, Mr. Wharton, I am bound by ties whose strength and validity I should not once have disputed. They were formed by necessity, and for years were considered by me as sacred; but pardon me, when I say that your prolonged absence—the belief, gradually merging into certainty, that you were dead, caused me to consider myself free to bestow my affections where I wished. I met one I had highly esteemed in childhood—we loved. Was there any wrong in that to the bridegroom I believed had long since perished? Now, in the moment of our brightest hope, you step between myself and the man of my choice; but you claim me in vain. To you I will not belong, for I love another with all the strength of my being—to him, I can not return, because you place an impassable barrier between us."

Exhausted by contending emotions, Fanny's head sank upon the bosom of her mother, and she motioned George from her side as he made an effort to support again her trembling frame.

"This can not—shall not be your decision, madam," said Wharton, impetuously. "I

claim the right—do you hear?—the right to control your destiny, and upon your own words I formed my pretensions. 'Once yours, forever yours,' you said, and upon them I have built a faith which time and absence have alike failed to shake. Oh, Fanny, consent to dwell beneath the same roof with me—permit me to make the effort to win your love, and we may yet be happy. I will forgive the wandering of your heart to another, when you believed me dead. I will be to you the tenderest and truest of friends, until you permit me to claim a dearer title."

"Cease—cease," said Fanny, despairingly. "Placed in this bitterly painful and humiliating position, I can not wrong one by listening to the appeals of the other. You will feel it impossible for me to yield to your request, when I tell you that I love George Dale with all the strength of a first affection. You are surely aware that the circumstances of our union were such as to preclude all thought of love on the part of such a child as I then was. If you are just—if you are the generous Philip Wharton I once knew, you will not exact what you feel to be impossible, from a heart that is well nigh broken in this terrible ordeal."

Stung to madness by this appeal, Wharton vehemently exclaimed,

"I will not yield my just rights. I claim the authority over your fate which justly belongs to me. The power rests with me to bring you back to a true sense of your duty, as a wife. I will not blindly give up my own happiness, and you dare not refuse the fulfillment of the vow plighted to me."

Exhausted by painful emotion, Fanny sank upon a seat, and Mr. Dale stepped between her and her excited lover.

"Philip, this scene must no longer continue. You are cruel. Fanny has expressed her decision, and believe me, she is one to abide by it."

"Ah, old man, you were once a parent to me, and I would respect your gray hairs; but you are the father of my rival, and can, therefore, have no voice in this matter."

"It is precisely because I am his father, that I have a right to interfere. All this is miserable enough, and will be productive of yet more wretchedness than we now anticipate, even

without the presence of useless contention. You consider your own disappointment alone; forgetful of the crushing blight which has fallen on the prospects of two who, a few hours since, were all the world to each other. Are you the only sufferer? Look on the pale, despairing face of my son—on the drooping form of her you so violently claim, and see if anguish less keen than yours is imprinted upon their features."

"And of me you ask compassion for their anguish, when in it I behold my bitter wrong! Old man, look on that angel face, and think that for years of suffering I have dreamed of it—worshiped it—trusted to the heavenly purity of soul it seemed to express, and after all, I return to find its owner willingly given to another—then tell me if my violence is not excusable."

"In your present state, of suffering and excitement, you are unfit to decide on your future course, Philip. Take a few hours for repose and reflection. Then, perhaps, we can arrange this unfortunate affair without passionate reproaches, which only serve to aggravate afflictions sufficiently bitter in themselves."

"I believe you are right, sir," replied Wharton, in a subdued tone. "I will go. Mr. Warren I believe is here. He will accompany me to the hotel, and to-morrow we will meet again. Then I shall be more calm—at present, I am exhausted."

Mr. Warren approached, and offered his arm, and he nearly sustained the reeling form of Wharton, whose strength seemed to desert him, as his violent excitement passed away.

George Dale would have drawn near Fanny, but his father withheld him, and with one mournful look, they passed from each other's presence.

CHAPTER XIV.

FANNY lay upon her sleepless couch. She heard the wailing of the wind without, and the dashing of the rain in fitful gusts against the windows; she pressed her hand upon her burning lids, and tried to dull the gnawing pain that quivered through her whole being, that she might snatch a moment's forgetfulness

in the blessed oblivion of sleep. Poor girl! the quick throbbing of her excited pulses, the rapid rush of the blood throughout her frame, forbade all repose, and she alternately prayed and wept, without any mitigation of the anguish she endured.

Suddenly there was a sharp sound against the window, and amid the pauses in the storm, she was certain she heard her name pronounced. She raised her head and listened; again the voice came to her ear, and in its sorrowful accents she recognized the tones dearest to her on earth.

She arose, and wrapping a large shawl over her form, unclosed the window and looked forth in the darkness. The rain was falling in a thin mist, and the chilly nightwind blew cold and damp upon the bare head she would gladly have sheltered from every blast.

"George, it is you, I know. Why are you here? and in such terrible weather?"

"Because I can not rest. I am like the lost soul which is tossed on a sea of misery and doubt. Fanny, I have come to ask a promise—to demand a pledge without which I can not be at peace. Peace! my God, what a mockery to speak of it, after the events of this night!"

"True—true," murmured Fanny—"yet what is it George? Whatever I can honorably grant is due to you, for I have innocently involved you in a very unhappy fate."

"Promise me, my angel, that you will not permit the union between yourself and Wharton to be legalized; for it was a mere form which in itself is not binding."

"I did not suppose you would consider it necessary to exact such a promise, George, yet I give it to you. My whole soul recoils from the thought. I am yours in heart, and faithful to our beautiful dream of love I will still remain."

"Thank you, dearest; and now consent to go one step farther. Let us fly; I will bury myself in the far western wilds with you, or I will seek the sunny shores of Italy, and—"

"And forsake the fair career opening before you?" interrupted Fanny. "Forget the claims of your aged father upon his only child? Oh, George, I had not expected this from you! If no moral tie withheld me from being yours, those considerations would place an effectual

barrier between us. I swear to you, that I will never consent to become the wife of Philip Wharton; but it is also due to him, that without his full consent I never will be yours."

"His consent will never be wrung from him, Fanny. Our days must be passed in bitter regrets, in loveless solitude, while he stands as a dark cloud between us, and scatters desolation upon the brightest hopes that ever cast sunshine upon two human hearts. Oh, Fanny, my soul rebels against this decision."

"Yet it is the only one I am permitted to make, George. If I fly with you, my name bears the stain of wrong to him to whom I once voluntarily gave myself. If I claim a divorce, the clamors of the world will be raised against the ungrateful one, who forgot the noble kindness of the man who once saved her from perishing in the streets. Oh, much is due from me to him, and I dare not utterly trample upon the ties his benevolence wove around me, in those days when he was my only friend."

"It is that I dread, Fanny. Those old associations will regain their strength; you will listen to his arguments, to his persuasions, and finally consent to admit the validity of the tie which binds you to him. Oh, Fanny, Fanny, the knowledge of such an event would kill me. I could not survive it."

"If you understood all the truth and purity of a woman's love, you could not utter such words, George," replied the poor girl, in a sad tone. "For me there is but one course that can promise even tranquillity. I must see you no more. This farewell must be final, or my heart will prove traitor to the principles I have made the law of my life. Bury yourself in your professional pursuits, and the habit of intense mental application will blunt the keenness of your sufferings. You have many resources—you are a man—you can go forth to the world and seek distraction from one haunting memory in its varied avocations. For my sake, I bid you do it. The thought that you are unhappy, will give an additional poignancy to my own sufferings."

"Fanny, you are an angel, and I will endeavor to obey you, but oh, you know not the bitter struggle that is rending my heart. At this moment, I would sooner part with life

than utterly renounce the hope of our future union."

"It is best to extinguish such hopes at once, George, lest we be tempted to the great wickedness of wishing for the death of a brother; for it seems to me that while life lasts, Mr. Wharton will never relinquish me to another."

"Who knows, Fanny? He may in time be touched by our sufferings, our constancy, and withdraw his claims. Oh, Fanny, I must hope. I can not bear the darkness that closes over my life, without a prospect, however faint, of our future union."

Bitter tears stole from the eyes of the unhappy girl while this conversation continued, although she exerted sufficient self-command to prevent her emotion from being audible in the tones of her voice, as she replied to the impassioned words of him she so truly loved.

Faint with suffering, she at length entreated him to leave her, and seek the repose they both so much needed. As if to second her wishes, the storm again renewed its violence, and amid darkness and desolation, the two parted, who, but a few hours before, had deemed themselves united for life.

"Give me your hand, Fanny," said George, in a suffocated tone; "I once deemed it mine for a brief bright space of existence, and surely I possess the right to clasp it once more."

Fanny extended her cold and trembling hand, and it was pressed in both his own, with an earnest tenderness that almost unnerved her. She seemed more deeply to comprehend the struggle in that noble and generous spirit, which had so long and truly loved her.

"Oh, life, canst thou have in store for me another moment of such unutterable bitterness as this?" he exclaimed, as his hot tears fell like rain upon the quivering little prisoner. "Methinks death were bliss to the anguish of such a separation. I leave you, my Fanny—my life—my only love—I obey your wishes—'tis all that is left me now. I will devote myself to my father—I will seek distinction in the career I have commenced; but when you think of me, feel assured that in my heart of hearts a hope of our reunion still survives, or I could not have courage to live. Years may intervene, gray hairs may shadow my brow,

but should the time arrive in which there is no opposing barrier to our union, it will find me unchanged; and if you also are free, Fanny, you shall yet be mine."

"Trust me implicitly, George. Through life I shall be as truly yours as when we stood beside each other, and plighted a vow which we believe irrevocable. True to you will I live and die."

Her hand was clasped more fervently than before; a brief prayer breathed over it, and George Dale tore himself away. Fanny watched the dark figure dimly seen by the fitful lightning, as he pursued his rapid way from the spot he had of late looked on almost as his home.

In constant motion, Fanny endeavored to still the anguish that tore her heart—she walked to and fro until morning dawned, and then sank like a tired child upon her couch, and slept in utter prostration.

When she awoke, she found her mother watching beside her, and when she looked on her pale and troubled face, the poor girl endeavored to smile, but the effort only ended in a burst of tears, which were wept upon the bosom that had ever soothed her sorrows. When she became more composed, Mrs. Fletcher gave her a letter from Mr. Dale, which had reached Willow Glen some hours before. Fanny hastily tore it open, and found a few lines hurriedly written, in which he informed her that George had already left L—. It was his intention to make arrangements for foreign travel, and in a few weeks he would probably embark for Italy. A friend in whom his father had entire confidence, would probably accompany him, and change of scene, with pleasant companionship, would prevent his mind from brooding too constantly over the sudden blight which had fallen on his prospects of domestic happiness.

Fanny sighed heavily, but she thanked Heaven that he was removed from the spot fraught with so many bitter associations to him, and breathed a prayer for his welfare and happiness, wherever his lot might be cast. She then turned to the remainder of the letter. Mr. Dale went on to say, "I have been with Wharton this morning, and he is more calm, though still suffering from great irritability and

excitement. He insists that it is his right to endeavor to regain the place he once occupied in your affections. He requests, nay, demands, that you will permit him to visit you daily for three months, and during that time, to allow him, by his assiduous attentions, his great care for your happiness, to endeavor to win back the love he persists in believing was once his.

"This will be a terrible trial for you, my child, and I have vainly represented to him the misery he will inflict on both you and himself, with a result so certain to be disappointing to his hopes. Can you bear this ordeal, dear Fanny? I know not what to advise. If Philip were not much changed from what he once was, I would say, consent to his proposal—convince him that there is no hope of a return to his love, and he may voluntarily restore to you the freedom to bestow your hand upon the one you prefer. But his humor is uncertain—and you are not strong enough, my darling girl, to bear the long continued conflict which is demanded of you. Reflect, and decide for yourself, my dear Fanny, and amid your heaviest trials, remember that in heaven you have a guide and comforter, and on earth you claim a father's love and protection from him who now addresses you in heaviness of heart."

After a few moments' reflection, Fanny replied,

"I will make the effort demanded of me, dear friend, beloved father, for such you must ever be to me. I will accede to Mr. Wharton's request; I will endeavor to convince him that I can not give him more than the affection of a sister. If Heaven will bestow upon me the power to extricate myself from the wretched position in which I have innocently plunged myself, I shall be forever one of its most grateful votaries. I can but trust and pray to be guided aright in the difficult path before me."

Then came the struggle to nerve herself for the approaching interview—the terrible shrinking of the spirit from the presence of him toward whom she once stood in so different a relation. To crush back the burning tears that deluged her soul with anguish, as she listened to the pleadings of a love which every throb of

her deeply-agitated heart pronounced hopeless.

Wharton speedily availed himself of the permission thus granted, and Fanny soon felt and understood the painful position in which she had placed herself. He appeared to take it for granted that in yielding thus far, she gave him almost the assurance of ultimate success. He was alternately the despairing, the hopeful, or the outraged lover; all the stores of his mind were unfolded—all the tenderness of his soul laid before her; and when she remained unmoved by his entreaties, he often vented his disappointment in the wildest expressions of anger, frequently mingled with threats of self-destruction, or vengeance upon the man who had supplanted him.

The courage of a martyr, and the patience of an angel, could scarcely have sustained any woman under such a trial, and Fanny faded day by day, until she looked like a white shadow moving through those scenes amid which she had once been so happy.

Months of inconceivable wretchedness, of bitter struggles, passed away, and the earth once more was gay with verdure and sunlight; but the heart of the unhappy girl was desolate beyond expression. She felt that she had failed, for Wharton seemed more earnest in his determination never to relinquish her, than at the commencement of this unhappy contest. Wearied and exhausted, she pined in spirit with that utter prostration of soul, that dreary conviction of the worthlessness of existence, which, in seasons of great suffering, is life's most bitter heritage to the sensitive and refined.

Mrs. Fletcher watched her fading form, her cheerless smile, with bitter and painful apprehension; and she remonstrated with Wharton with all the energy she could command.

"It is true," said he, despondingly, "I am destroying her. I feel that I am a wretch; but then she spurns, she insults me. For this boy she repudiates her plighted faith; she closes her heart to my most impassioned appeals, and I can not bear it. I believe I could see her perish, sooner than behold her his wife."

"What, then, is to be the end of all this, Mr. Wharton? Must my child be offered up a sacrifice to your exactions? You must be

aware that her firmness is invincible. She relinquishes her lover at your command, and you have no right to ask more. Leave her—suffer her to regain the tranquility which can alone restore her health. Do you not see that she is perishing daily? and yet you have no pity for her sufferings—you think only of your own."

"I have cursed myself for such mean selfishness, Mrs. Fletcher," he despondingly replied, "but I have not the courage to leave her. You can not tell what it is to give up such a being as Fanny, after so long considering her as my own. Let me try to win her yet, a little longer, and if—if—oh! I can promise nothing, for I can not measure my ability to perform."

He rushed away in uncontrollable agitation, and Mrs. Fletcher was convinced that from Wharton's generosity there was nothing to hope. Rousing herself from the lassitude of delicate health, she determined to act for her daughter. She immediately wrote to Mr. Dale, and demanded his assistance in removing Fanny from the scene of her present sufferings, to some secluded spot in which she could be secure from the intrusion of her half-maddened lover.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. DALE instantly responded to the letter, and assured Mrs. Fletcher that he would take immediate steps to secure such an asylum as she desired for her daughter; but alas! before their arrangements could be completed, Fanny's health succumbed beneath the hopeless struggle which had so long torn her soul. A low, nervous fever seized her, for which medicine seemed to have no remedy. She would lie for hours in listless vacancy, with her eyes fixed upon some distant object, which she would not permit to be shut from her view by closing the window-blind. Those around her supposed that the prospect of the hills soothed her; but she knew even amid the listless apathy of suffering, that a single beech-tree, beneath whose wide-spreading branches she and George had often sat, was the only object amid the lonely view which attracted her notice.

She scarcely slept at all; and she forced herself to swallow nourishment only in pity to the agonized entreaties of her mother. She had resisted bravely—she had heroically borne the sufferings of her mind, until its unnatural tension forced it to yield, and then the reaction was complete. The light of heaven is not more utterly shut out from the blind, than hope now was from the mind of the unhappy girl. The future closed darkly before her, and unable to continue the struggle, she sank at once into that state of apathy which may well be called a living death.

Unable to leave her, Wharton wandered around her dwelling, like an unquiet spirit. He was wretched; and he began to doubt within his soul, whether he could be happy even if he could succeed in winning her from the man of her choice. Remorse preyed upon his mind, yet a feeling of bitterness lingered: he could not quite resolve to relinquish her to his rival, while a hope of her ultimate restoration to health remained to him.

One evening, as twilight faded from the earth, and the golden haze of a bright sunset yet lingered upon the hill-tops, he cautiously drew near the open windows of Fanny's room. The curtains were drawn back, and he stood gazing in mournful silence upon the pale form which reclined in a large chair, supported by pillows. All the buoyancy of youth was gone—all the brilliancy of health—but a pallid shadow remained of the young Hebe he had once known. Her eyes were closed, and her pale lips wore an expression of such touching despondency, that his heart wept tears of blood over the sufferings he had himself inflicted.

Her mother sat beside her, but she was presently summoned from the room, and Wharton drew nearer and leaned against the frame of the window. Fanny heard his step, and she unclosed her eyes, and saw his shadow against the light. It was the same spot on which George had stood on the night of their last parting, and she faintly uttered his name.

"Oh George, is it your living form, or the image my fancy so often conjures up? Speak to me—my soul wearies for the sound of your loved voice. I believe I am dying, George,

but I am faithful. Oh no, I can not wed another, my own—my love."

She feebly stretched forth her hand, and overcome by emotion, Wharton clasped it in both his own, and pressed it convulsively to his lips.

"You must not—you shall not die," he whispered; but even in that faintly-breathed tone, Fanny recognized his voice. She made an effort to withdraw her hand, but he held it firmly.

"It is probably for the last time, Fanny," he pleadingly said. "My heart is softer than a woman's to-night—do nothing to arouse the jealous demon within me, and I may be capable of acting generously. Oh best beloved, how deeply have you suffered! How recklessly I have acted! I feel it, I know it all, now. Let me gaze on your pallid face, without one look of aversion to mar its marble beauty, for I would carry with me in my exile a memory of its fair loveliness."

A faint flush came into her transparent cheek, and her lips unclosed as if to speak; but the words died away, unuttered.

"You would ask me if I am indeed in earnest love; I read your meaning well, and though it gives a pang to my heart, to know that your peace can only be regained by removing my presence from your daily life; still I think I can be heroic, and promise that if you will smile once more—if you will suffer hope to gild the future, I can tear myself from all that is dear to me in existence."

"Not all—oh no, not all," murmured Fanny. "New ties will weave themselves around you; such generosity will never be permitted to go unrewarded. Now I know the kind friend of my childhood once more; forgive me that I learned to love another, when I believed myself free to do so; and cease to cherish bitter feelings toward me, because I can not tear his image from my heart."

"Forgive you, poor angel! Ah, 'tis I who should demand pardon for all I have made you suffer in my selfish egotism. Yet I have suffered too, Fanny—how keenly, I need not now tell you; and it is only in the conviction that life will be the sacrifice if I do not give you back your freedom, that I find strength to re-

nounce you. Live, then, though not for me—far, far away, I will seek for the pale shadow of happiness—contentment. But there is one promise I claim. Dale has gone to Europe to remain three years. Do not recall him—test his constancy by absence, and if he returns true to you, I yield you to him."

Fanny clasped his hand, and bathed it in her fast-flowing tears. New life thrilled through her frame at his words, buried hopes which she had believed dead forever, sprang into new existence, and her languid pulses again throbbed with joy—joy that yet was mingled with much pain, for the struggle of him who so nobly renounced her. Cold drops bathed his drawn brow, and tremulous were the tones of the strong man, as he leaned toward her, for the last time.

"Give me one memorial of the past, Fanny. Let me sever one ringlet from your beloved head, to be worn next to my heart, as long as live lingers in it."

Fanny bent her head—a shower of bright waving hair fell forward, and hastily severing a tress, Wharton concealed it in his breast.

Fanny again took his hand, "I have one request to make in my turn. Promise me that you will not withdraw yourself from the association of others; that you will not permit the spirit of misanthropy to vail your many noble qualities. You will again go forth among your equals—you will seek for another to fill my place in your affections. So noble a heart should find one capable of appreciating it. I can not be happy in the thought that but for me, your lot would probably have been a brighter one."

"Oh no—think not that. But for my casual encounter with you, but for the influence your young soul exerted on my life, I should probably have been that being more loathsome than a leper—a man devoted to the demon of intoxication. You saved me, Fanny, when I hovered on the brink of ruin—and the good you then accomplished, I now return to you, in giving you back your happiness. I do not say forget me—remember me in your prayers, for much is needed yet to enable me to go forth upon my future path in peace."

"My prayers in your behalf will be heard," replied Fanny, in a tone of assured conviction.

"He who has proved himself so capable of self-conquest as you this night have done, will yet find true happiness. When that hour arrives, write to me—let me participate in your joy, my brother."

"I promise it, Fanny—and now adieu forever! No more on earth shall we meet—the memory of your young loveliness, of your elevated purity of soul, are all that will remain to me of the past."

He leaned forward suddenly, clasped her drooping form in his arms, and kissed her fervently on lips, cheek, and brow. Her head rested for one moment on his heaving breast, his lips moved as if in prayer, and gently replacing her upon her pillow, he fled from the spot.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE health of Fanny had received too severe a shock to recover without much care. On the intelligence of Wharton's departure, Mr. Dale immediately joined the mother and daughter, and arrangements were made to visit a quiet watering-place, in the hope that change of scene, sea-bathing, and the reviving effects of a bracing atmosphere, might once more restore her to her former blooming state.

The best restorative to Fanny, however, was a long, long letter, she was permitted to address to George Dale, in which all her past trials, her present happiness were glowingly portrayed. She counted the days which would intervene before she could receive it, and her mother noted that from the hour in which she believed it had reached him, she seemed to regain new life. The rose once more bloomed upon her cheek, and gladness sparkled in her eyes: her step regained its buoyancy, and sometimes snatches of song were warbled as in that happy time before grief laid its numbing hand upon her soul.

The answer to her letter at length came, and it was filled with all a lover's fondest dreams and anticipations. George consented with a good grace to his probation, but considered the idea of testing his constancy by absence, as quite absurd. That was something which should never be doubted, for in the

wide world there was for him no other woman half so adorable as his beloved Fanny.

The correspondence was untiringly sustained, and before the three years had elapsed, Fanny might have obtained materials from his letters, for a very respectable book on the beauties of nature and art, in the foreign lands he passed through, and also a very complete volume of tender thoughts and most poetic fancies; but she would as soon have thought of baring her heart to the prying gaze of public curiosity, as laying before the world one sentence from those dearly-prized epistles.

Mrs. Fletcher and her daughter took up their abode at Dale Cottage, and as the time of George's return drew near, he proposed that they should meet him in England, and there be reunited, after which they would spend a year in visiting the most interesting portions of Europe. The proposal possessed many charms, and after much discussion it was decided on. The next steamer took out a venerable, but still vigorous old gentleman, accompanied by two ladies; their voyage was prosperous, and on landing in Liverpool, they were met by the enraptured son and lover.

Arrangements were already made for their marriage, and on the day after her arrival, Fanny and George Dale were again united.

Years of happiness lapsed into the surging gulf of the past, but the radiant mist of remembered joy formed a bright halo over that vanished time, for there was rational and sacred happiness beneath the roof of George and his fondly-loved Fanny; yet they had received no tidings of Wharton. They knew that he yet lived, for his income was regularly drawn from the hands of Mr. Warren, but that was all.

Six years passed away, when one morning a letter with a foreign post-mark was brought to Fanny. She recognized the writing of Wharton, and hurriedly broke the seal. It was dated from the city of Mexico, and contained the following words,

"I at length redeem my promise, Fanny. Although it was made so long ago, I am convinced you are still interested in its fulfillment."

"I have wandered for years without an ob-

ject, and spite of my efforts to overcome it, my soul was often filled with gloom and misanthropy. I have visited the wild prairies of the west, have lived among the savage, and conformed myself to his mode of existence: again I have sought the abodes of civilized men, and endeavored to find an interest among them, but never have I succeeded until of late. Now I write to tell you that the shadow has left my pathway, and I am once more happy. While traveling in Mexico, chance enabled

me to preserve the life of a beautiful Spanish girl, and her glowing gratitude was the first gleam of sunshine that fell upon my seared heart. In return for the life I saved, she gave me her love—I joyfully accepted the boon, and I now write beneath the shadow of my own fig-tree, with my dark-eyed Inez leaning over my shoulder. Yes, Fanny, I am happy, and that you and the man of your choice may continue so, is the fervent prayer of Philip Wharton."

THE DIVORCE.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a brilliant entertainment in one of the most fashionable houses in New York. Two gentlemen stood together within the embrasure of a window heavily draped with crimson damask, and made their comments on the company assembled in the ball-room. Both were decidedly of the *élite* in the society in which they moved, and one was eminently handsome. It is rare to find a man both handsome and *distingué*; a certain degree of intellect is required to deserve the latter epithet, and nature is generally too impartial to bestow both upon the same individual.

Mr. Wilmer was an exception: to him was given beauty of person, a fair share of mind, and, to counterbalance them, a heart accessible through only one medium—that of pleasing the eye. A connoisseur in female attractions, he looked on and sneered at the gay and joyous figures which moved in concert with the inspiring music, produced by a fine band; in his estimation, all save *one*, wanted a certain "*je ne sais quoi*," which only the perfection of beauty can boast.

The companion of Mr. Wilmer was not handsome. He had the air and bearing of a gentleman, and his ordinary features were pleasing, because they possessed that refinement which is the offspring of elevation of mind, and benevolence of heart. He had enough of nature about him to be pleased in the pleasure of others; to admire without being too critical; in short, to observe the maxim which tells us to "do as we would be done by."

A pause of some length in their conversation ensued, which was broken by Wilmer, who asked,

"How long have you been absent, Fenwick?"

Fenwick started, for his eyes were rivetted on a young girl, who looked so fresh, so pure, so new to the scene before her, that he was interested in the evident pleasure she seemed to enjoy.

"Three months," he laconically replied.

"Ah—so long? Then I must place you *au fait* as to the news of the day. Shall I, egotist-like, begin with myself?"

"If you please. Has any thing extraordinary happened to you since I left? You have not turned Benedict, I know."

"Not yet, but on the eve of the great change. Do you see that tall girl in the black velvet dress, with pearls in her hair?"

"Yes, I have been attracted toward her. The expression of her face is the sweetest I have ever beheld; yet she is far from beautiful."

Wilmer sighed, with a tragi-comic air.

"True—very true. She is not beautiful, and she is a blue; yet I have asked her to marry me, and she has consented."

Fenwick looked at his companion as if doubting his sincerity.

"You betrothed to any other than Clara Moreland, our sylph, our Hour! I thought you too devoted to her ever to dream of another, while she remains unwedded."

A cloud passed over Wilmer's brow, but he answered, indifferently,

"Clara was too worldly-wise to take a poor

proud man, when she knew her own fortune to be inadequate to the support of a fine establishment. You have not then heard that the trousseau is prepared, and within another month Clara becomes the wife of Crawford, the millionaire; and within the same time Miss Temple, with a fortune of a hundred thousand, will be transformed into Mrs. Wilmer. Quite comfortable that, hey, Fenwick?"

"Quite," replied Fenwick, coldly, for there was something in the tone of his companion's voice which jarred upon his feelings; and a vague sympathy for the inexperienced girl who was about to trust her happiness in the keeping of this cold man of the world, oppressed his heart.

At that moment, the most dazzlingly beautiful woman that the imagination can picture, attired with a degree of elegance which was in keeping with her brilliant style of loveliness, passed before them in the mazes of the dance; and Fenwick turned from her perfect features, to look again on Wilmer's betrothed.

No—Kate Temple was not beautiful, if regularity of features, brilliant bloom, and perfect symmetry of person can alone constitute beauty; but thank heaven, there is beauty for the heart, as well as for the eye; and to those capable of appreciating this divine emanation from a generous soul and a pure spirit, Kate Temple was lovely exceedingly. She was tall, and rather inclined to *embonpoint*, but her complexion was beautifully soft and fair, and she had the roundest and whitest arms and shoulders in the world. Her features were irregular, yet the *tout ensemble* must have been eminently pleasing to any man whose critical taste had not rendered him ridiculously fastidious. An intelligent and candid soul beamed from her large dark eyes, and the play of her beautiful lips in conversation, disclosed a set of pearly teeth, and the sweetest of smiles.

Unfortunately for Wilmer, he had spent the earlier years of manhood in Europe, and had, of course, become a connoisseur in works of art. He had worshiped the godlike emanations of immortal genius, until the finer enthusiasm of his nature had been deadened; and what did not reach his standard was condemned or passed indifferently by. He was often heard to say, that no woman less fault-

less than the Venus de Medici, should ever claim the homage of his heart.

Soon after his return to his native land, Clara Moreland made her debut in society; and her faultless person challenged the admiration of even so fastidious a critic as the traveled Macaenus. He soon became her declared adorer, and for two years every one belonging to their set, supposed that he would eventually be the successful wooer of the belle. Wilmer was sufficiently infatuated by her beauty to have ventured his lot in life with hers; but as he had said to Fenwick, the young lady had proved too worldly-wise. She sacrificed her affections to her interests, and accepted a middle-aged gentleman, who possessed one of the most magnificent establishments in New York.

The disappointed lover met with Miss Temple, who was just introduced into society. She was an orphan, and an heiress—the state of his finances was not flourishing, he was wretchedly piqued at Clara's want of faith, and soon made up his mind to offer himself to Kate; who, ignorant of his former history, accepted him as her future husband.

And the sensitive, the refined, the intellectual Kate Temple was won by a man who regarded himself as a victim to circumstances, who looked with a jealous pang on the elderly and very common-place person that had rivaled him with his faithless Clara. He considered Miss Temple merely as the representative of so many thousands a year, who could be endured, in consideration of the pleasures her fortunes would purchase for him.

Selfish being! How could such a woman bestow her wealth of affection on such a "counterfeit presentment" of what a man should be? Alas! like many of her sex, she had suffered her imagination to endow him with every excellence. He was handsome as Apollo, graceful as Antinous, and acted the lover with consummate tact and knowledge of character; and Kate Temple loved him as "youth, genius, woman loves."

Fenwick gazed long and earnestly on the expressive features of Wilmer's betrothed, and an involuntary feeling of sadness stole into his heart. There was something in the face that won on him, he knew not why: the smile seemed a familiar one, which of right belonged

to him, and he tried to call to mind who among those he had loved had thus smiled on him. In vain did he search the cells of memory, and he thought:

"Her face must have appeared to me in my dreams, and in my absence this cold, fastidious man has won the angel from my path, to perish on his. That girl can never exist without affection; and Wilmer will give her the respect due to her station as his wife, but nothing more."

He at length spoke aloud.

"I sincerely congratulate you on the exchange you have made, Wilmer. The loss of beauty of person without soul, is well compensated for by the possession of the fortune, and amiable qualities united in your betrothed: not to mention her intellect, which will certainly qualify her to be a companion to as cultivated a man as you are."

"Pooh! I hate a blue. She will try to rule, I know—these smart women always do, but I shall soon let her know that I am her master. All I require of my wife is to look elegant, and to have just sense enough to think me the most divine man of her acquaintance. The pill is well gilded, however. Shall I present you?"

Fenwick assented, and they drew near Miss Temple. A flush so faint as to resemble the delicate taint of the blush rose, tinged her fair cheek, and her clear eyes sparkled with pleasure as Wilmer approached and introduced his companion. At that moment Fenwick thought her almost beautiful, but Wilmer was dazzled by a glance from the brilliant eyes of Clara Moreland, as he passed before her to the side of his betrothed, and his thoughts were absorbed by the fickle beauty. The usual self-command failed him; his manner was preoccupied, and he scarcely heard the words which flowed so eloquently from the lips of the two beside him. Fenwick possessed colloquial powers of a rare order, and there was some spell in the bright face of Miss Temple, and in her charming smile, which drew forth his best efforts to entertain. She was pleased to become acquainted with any friend of Wilmer's, and as Fenwick listened to her lively remarks, and watched the play of her features, he wondered how any man could be

blind to, the exceeding attractiveness of her appearance.

She at length remarked Wilmer's abstraction, and inquired if he was indisposed. Thus aroused, he replied that he was never better, and asked her if she would waltz with him.

"Miss Temple never waltzes," said a clear, musical voice, near them, "but I do. Pray come with me, Mr. Wilmer; I have a thousand things to say to you, and as you would not ask me to dance, I wagered a pair of gloves that I would ask you; behold I have won."

The softest smile, and most bewitching glance, accompanied these words; and Wilmer sprang to his feet, with a flush of gratified pride upon his cheek. Kate Temple's vivacity fled; she listened to Fenwick, but scarcely understood what he said, and after a brief space, desired him to seek the lady who had acted as her chaperon, as she wished to return home.

Clara Moreland clung to the arm of Wilmer, and whispered,

"Let us save appearances by waltzing once around the room, and then, if you can leave the side of Kate Temple so long, give me five minutes in which to restore myself to your esteem."

Wilmer bowed, and after complying with her wishes, led her into a conservatory, which opened from the ball-room. He stood in silence, awaiting the explanation she had promised, and Clara leaned as if overcome by emotion, against the frame of a sash door, through which the bright moonlight beamed on her perfect features and faultless form. The vain, weak man before her, gazed on them and forgot that she had lured him on to believe himself beloved by her, and then had cast him aside for one more favored by fortune. She knew that all the heart he had was irrevocably hers, and yet she had trampled on it.

He was about to utter an impassioned reproach for her falsehood, when the tones of her liquid voice pronounced his name, and he listened spell-bound to the words.

"Frederic, forgive—forgive me. I have wronged you grievously. And I—O, Frederic, if you knew how miserable I am, you would not condemn me."

Tears were gleaming on her dark lashes,

and her voice faltered with emotion, which, if not genuine, was the result of the most inimitable acting.

"Do you then really love me?" asked Wilmer. "If so, why—why do you marry this detestable old Crawford?"

"Speak not thus of that excellent man, Mr. Wilmer. He is older than I am, it is true; and because he is rich, the censorious world says that I have sold myself. But you—you will not believe this, when the voice of your Clara—yes, yours, for I have loved—Oh, heaven! I still do love you! when my voice assures you that nothing less than imperious necessity could induce me to become the bride of another, you will believe that I speak the truth."

"What necessity can there be for such a sacrifice? You are independent. I am not absolutely poor; your mother can have no power to compel you to this union, if it is repugnant to yourself."

"Ah, speak not thus—you—you are no longer free."

"I will break the bond," said the infatuated man. "I believed you false. I was mad when I bound myself to another. Speak but the wish, adored Clara, and I am yours forever. Kate will forgive me, when I tell her how wildly I love you—how long I have worshipped you. She is proud—she will forget that I have been more to her than a friend."

"It can not be, Wilmer; your honor is pledged, and Clara Moreland will never tempt you to swerve from its dictates," said the wily syren, in a mournful tone. "Marry the fortunate Kate Temple, and I, in my gilded bondage, will sigh over the dream that is past, and pray for your happiness with the wife of your choice."

"Choice!" repeated Wilmer, bitterly. "Have I not told you that I adore you? that I loathe the shackles I have imposed on myself? Clara Moreland, tell me—I demand it of you as a right—why do you marry this man, if your own inclinations lead you to refuse the splendor he offers you?"

Clara's lips quivered, and for an instant the paleness of death rested upon her features. She conquered the emotion—the last effort of truth and nature over her callous and unwomanly

heart—and replied to him with a serious earnestness that had all the effect she anticipated.

"I will tell you my reasons, Frederic, and then you may judge me. My mother, you know, is in a wretched state of health. She has lived luxuriously always, and could not bear the anxieties of a narrow income, nor endure to live in a less elegant style than she has been accustomed to. We are considered wealthy, but our resources are limited when compared with our expenditures; and this system has been pursued so long that we are on the verge of ruin. Mr. Crawford was my father's friend. To him the settlement of his estate was confided, and he holds bonds against it which will absorb the whole. He asks me to cancel those bonds by giving him my hand, though he is not ungenerous enough to make that a condition. He told me that if I could not give my own free consent to marry him, he would still insure a support to my mother and myself."

"And you—why did you not refuse?"

"Because I was touched by his generosity, and I felt that I could esteem him sincerely. I can not come to you a penniless bride, drag you down to ruin, and destroy my mother by permitting her to know the terrible state of our affairs."

"Can this really be so?" asked the lover, gazing with bewildered surprise on the magnificent figure before him; for jewels of price sparkled in her dark hair, and glittered on her finely sculptured arms, and the most *recherche* Parisian millinery floated in airy folds around her person.

"Tis too fatally true," was the sorrowful response. "I am bought with a price, and to save my invalid mother from what, to her, would be worse than death, I sacrifice my happiness. Aid me to be true to myself, Frederic. In your wedded home think of me as one who will ever cherish the memory of our past as the brightest among life's early dreams. Its realities can never offer any thing half so dear."

Her eyes were raised for an instant to his, and the expression which first enslaved him, beamed from beneath their shadowy lashes. In their soft blue depths he read the tender

and confiding affection of which he believed himself the object, but before he could speak to avail himself of this momentary softness, the speaker had passed rapidly from his side, and he succeeded only in overtaking her as she reached the entrance to the ball-room. She left the scene of festivity immediately afterward, without offering a further opportunity to Wilmer to exchange a word with her; and he watched the assiduous care of the privileged *fiancee* as he wrapped her furs around her, and handed her to her carriage, in a perfect fever of jealousy and rage.

The chilling air of night, however, soon restored to him the power of reflection, and he was far from satisfied with the part his beautiful friend was playing. Her mother he knew to be a weak, silly woman of the world, and the filial devotion of the daughter had never been such as to induce him to believe in the reality of the sacrifice Miss Moreland so sentimentally described. That she valued wealth and its appliances, he fully understood; and before he slept, he came to the mortifying conviction that he had been placed in competition with Mr. Crawford's thousands, and they had gained the victory over all his fascinations. Yet he saw that Clara could not bear to yield her dominion over him to another; he felt assured that she loved him alone, even while preparing to give herself to a rival. She evidently wished to keep him in her chains, and, if possible, induce him to break his engagement with Miss Temple, although she herself would be no longer free to accept his devotion. Wearied with thought, and puzzled by the apparent inconsistency of her conduct, he at last slept, and dreamed that he hurled Mr. Crawford over a precipice, and he, to save himself from falling, caught Clara, and bore her over the gulf to certain destruction.

CHAPTER II.

CLARA MORELAND was alone in her own apartment, and she seemed wrapped in thought which compressed her beautiful lips, and threw a shadow across the lineless brow.

The room was the very temple of luxury; a Persian carpet, wrought in the most delicate

and beautiful of patterns, interwoven with flowers that looked as if they were just plucked from the stem, covered the floor. The couches and ottomans were draped with purple velvet richly embroidered, and mirrors of every variety of shape hung on the walls, so that the fair occupant could survey her own loveliness wherever she turned. A portrait of herself, painted in the character of Gulnare, hung over the fire-place. A demi-twiglight, produced by the light falling through half-closed blinds on rose-colored curtains, reigned throughout the room.

A couch luxuriantly cushioned was drawn in front of the fire, and on it reclined the young lady, wrapped in a loose dressing-robe of flowered silk. Her hair hung in bright folds over the pillow on which her head rested, and she appeared to be idly waiting for her maid to complete its arrangement.

As the girl's step was heard outside the door, a smile of bitter meaning flitted across Clara's face, and she said, half-aloud,

"Suppose he should marry her, after all? Even then I can"—

She paused—clasped her hands together, and showed her even and pearly teeth, firmly closed, as if upon some stern resolution, which should not be shaken.

"I played my part well, at any rate. Who would have believed that he could be piqued into acting thus? My power over him is not quite as well established as I had thought." Thus muttering, she scarcely heeded the entrance of the maid, until she spoke beside her.

"Here is a letter for you, Miss Clara, and Mr. Crawford is below, inquiring after your health. He says you were up so late last night, he will not disturb you, unless you are quite ready to receive visitors."

She languidly took the letter.

"You may go down, Kitty. I shall not need you. I will finish the arrangement of my hair myself. Tell Mr. Crawford that I have a violent headache this morning, and I hope he will excuse me."

The girl left the room, and as the door closed on her, Clara started up and eagerly tore open the letter. It was from Wilmer.

"I have reflected on our interview of last night, on your unexpected revelation, and

when I left you, I had despair in my heart. I can not say that there is much of happiness there now; but I am at least calm, and capable of making a decision. The case seems to be a very clear one: I am poor—alas! that it should be so! and you have spent more than your income, until the consequences are coming home to you in the shape of poverty that must be averted at any sacrifice. You, my brilliant Clara, were never born to fill a mediocre position; I can not labor, for I was not “to the manor bred;” you solace yourself for a disappointment of the heart by securing the splendor of wealth, and I admire your example too much not to follow it.

“I shall become the husband of Miss Temple, and in spending her noble fortune in the most refined and elegant manner, hope to extract from the enjoyments it can purchase, as much happiness as earth has now to offer to your ever sincere and devoted

“FREDERIC WILMER.”

Many shades of feeling passed over the face of Miss Moreland, as she read these lines; and her teeth were pressed so firmly on her red lip, that blood sprang from it. There was keen disappointment mingled with contemptuous anger upon her beautiful brow, as she crushed the letter in her hand, and threw it upon the blazing fire.

“Thus perish the record of a weak and selfish heart! Yet—what is mine? ha! ha!” she wildly laughed—“mine is strong to obey the dictates of an iron will. He shall be mine—dearly—doubly mine, and the wrung heart of that woman who has dared to be my rival, shall be thrown a crushed and writhing offering at my feet.”

The firelight gleamed upon her flushed cheek and flashing eyes, and her wonderful beauty at that moment might have served as a vivid representation of that of a fallen angel. She again threw herself in a recumbent position on the couch, and at intervals words broke from her lips, as if wrung unconsciously from the fiery excitement raging in her bosom.

“I love this man with all the strength of a strong nature—weak as I know him to be in some respects—unprincipled, perhaps, as his seeking this girl would seem to prove, still he

has cast a spell upon my soul that death only can remove; and mine he shall be, if I move every earthly agent at my command to gain him. I—yes, I would brave death for him. Am I not now weaving the web that leads to crime?—crime which, if detected, leads to—”

Her whole frame quivered with the thought of horror which blanched cheek and lips. After a pause, she continued:

“Pooh! what is it after all, but shutting out the sunshine a few years earlier from a head already hoary with time? The Spartans considered thieving no crime, unless it were discovered; and my deed shall be shrouded in such mystery as to defy detection.”

She arose and hurriedly paced the floor, and strong scorn settled around her mouth, as she muttered,

“This old fool must needs throw himself upon my path. He is our creditor, too, and only cancels the bond on gaining my hand. Well, he shall have it, and much joy may its possession bring him. Ha! ha! I can make myself merry with my own *diablerie*. I can not live without luxury, so he, he must pay the penalty of seeking me at such a disadvantage to myself. He has offered to settle on me all he possesses, to be mine at his death—ha!—his death. Well, he is old—yes, older than my father would be, and may die any day—besides he is apoplectic.”

Could Mr. Crawford have beheld the face of his betrothed as these words fell from her lips, he would have been far from congratulating himself on his successful wooing. There was a smile quivering around her mouth, but there was more of contemptuous daring than mirth in it, and a cold shiver crept through her frame as she accidentally beheld her own face reflected in a mirror, as she passed to and fro in her agitated walk. The expression of it recalled a strangely turned compliment she had once received from an exquisite,

“Ah, Miss Moreland, there is *death* in your smile.”

After gazing earnestly upon herself some moments, she went to a book-case, and brought from it several volumes. One opened of itself to the biography of Catharine de Medici. The second was the history of Madame Brinvilliers, the celebrated poisoner, and the third

was an old English recipe book, said to be a copy of one formerly in the possession of the infamous Mrs. Turner, who was executed for poisoning, in the reign of the first James. It contained not only directions for compounding such medicaments as are curative in their properties, but those that bring doom speedily and surely without betraying the dire secret by any outward mark. As she bent over her terrible studies, her mind evidently absorbed in them to the exclusion of every other emotion, her savage beauty might have served as a study for a painter, had he desired a model for one of the detestable heroines of Roman history. All the softness, all the witchery of her attractions had vanished. The childlike abandon which in society characterized her manner was exchanged for the cold self-possession of meditated crime.

Clara Moreland was the only child of a man who had defied all laws, both human and divine. He was an unbeliever in the sacred truths of revelation: a scoffer at all human affections. Thrice has his murderous aim sent a guilty soul with all its unrepented evil into eternity. The laws of the duello were rigidly observed, and he escaped the punishment which justice demanded.

He had married a woman of weak mind, and little cultivation, but of rare beauty of person. Clara inherited her mother's charms, and her father's intellect, together with his audacity of character. He lived long enough to impress all his own peculiar opinions upon her opening mind; and he rejoiced to see that she was freed from what he called the weakness of her sex. Yes—he rejoiced that his child, so richly endowed by nature, was utterly perverted; that the most beautiful—the most attractive traits of her sex, were as a sealed book to her darkened mind. His motto had been “trample on impossibilities,” and fully was it adopted, and acted on by his daughter.

Her womanly tact, however, taught her to secure one thing which the father had scorned—the approbation of the world. Every enjoyment must be obtained which her capricious fancy might desire; but the usages of society must never be glaringly violated. Remorse was a feeling unknown to her, and future retribution she scoffed at as the dream

of the fanatic. To such a woman, love was a passion which triumphed over every other, save that of self-interest.

Her own fortune was exhausted—her habits luxurious, and she felt that wealth must be hers, though procured at any sacrifice. When the resources of herself and her mother were nearly at an end, Mr. Crawford offered himself. He knew the position in which they were placed, and deemed it by no means improbable that this haughty beauty would sooner accept himself than embrace poverty as her lot. He was right, but it was not without a bitter struggle that she sacrificed Wilmer to her desire for wealth; and the very necessity of the sacrifice, made her loathe the proposed union with a bitterness of which a disappointed woman is alone capable.

Her rage was without bounds, when she saw that Wilmer had also bowed before the god of Mammon, and if any thing would have embittered her disappointment, it was the choice he had made. Kate Temple and herself had been schoolmates; and two characters more dissimilar could not have been thrown in contact. The pure and noble soul of the ingenuous Kate, instinctively shrank from the bold and daring spirit of Clara Moreland, and all her advances toward intimacy had been quietly, but perseveringly repelled. Light and darkness could as well mingle together, as these two women, so different in their nature and impulses, become friends. Fatal to the happiness of Kate was it, that she should have crossed the path of Clara Moreland, for each sigh wrung from her breaking heart over the indifference of her husband, would be but music to her who hated her for having circumvented a portion of her well-laid schemes.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW more weeks rolled by, and the gay world of New York received a new impulse from the respective marriages of two of its most brilliant stars. Mrs. Crawford, in bridal lace and diamonds, seemed more attractive than ever; and many looked from her lovely face toward Frederic Wilmer and his bride, and wondered how he could have reconciled

himself to the necessity of marrying a plain woman; for plain, Kate certainly was, beside the unequalled Clara.

This comparison was sought for by Mrs. Crawford, and Kate was pained to find that in the first week of her married life, she was forced to yield a point in which she considered herself right, to the will of her husband. He decisively said that she must overcome her aversion to Mrs. Crawford, and receive her advances toward an intimacy, or he should be seriously displeased. Poor Kate loved him too sincerely to hazard his disapprobation, although compliance with his command rendered her extremely unhappy, even during that halcyon period, known as the honeymoon.

Contrary to her wishes, they were involved in a constant round of gayety, and at every entertainment was her sister bride, with sweet insincerity and bland smiles for the wife, and whispered words and stolen glances for the unprincipled husband; while Mr. Crawford stood smiling by, pleased with the attentions his young wife received.

Within a few months after her marriage, Kate Wilmer found that she had become a perfect nonentity, so far as a will of her own was concerned. Her husband took upon himself the responsibility of deciding for her in all things, and appeared to become seriously angry, if an objection or remonstrance escaped her lips. She felt herself a slave to his slightest caprice, but a love as deep and true as angels may feel, gilded the chain, and though it bore her to the earth, she was contented to wear it—ay, happy in her bondage, so long as she believed herself his voluntary choice as a wife.

But alas! too soon came the conviction that the whispers of the world which she had vaguely heard before her marriage, and had disregarded, were all too true. A smile from the syren lips of her pretended friend could draw Wilmer to her side, while the dullness of the self-satisfied husband was bestowed upon poor Kate.

Mr. Crawford was an excellent man, but he was decidedly a heavy-minded one, and it was a most insupportable weariness to listen to his prosing. To a woman of vivid fancy, lively

imagination, and quick colloquial wit, it was a new species of torture to hear the drowning of his dull voice, as he uttered truisms, with that air of gravity which stupid people mistake for wisdom.

But Kate bore the infliction patiently, for she was changed from the bright spirit which so short a time before brought sunshine with her into every society she entered; and she listened to him with a degree of patience that many marveled at.

Bitter is the disenchantment of an affectionate and romantic heart! Within one little year, Kate found herself the neglected wife of the man she had once believed among the noblest of his kind; her feelings outraged; her tastes disregarded, and to crown her misery, a rival whose slightest wish was a law to her husband. Yet all this was done with such tact on the part of Clara, that the circle in which they lived wondered why it was that Mrs. Wilmer looked so pale and subdued; so little like the Kate Temple whose sprightly wit, and gay humor, had once enlivened their reunions. When the heart is steeped in a disappointment which affects every hope in life, the brow can rarely beam with contentment. Poor Kate had not learned that lesson of self-control which enables many to put on the armor of endurance, and look serenely to that God who sends the affliction, and is also able to give the consolation and deliverance from it in his own good time.

There was one who saw the change, and truly interpreted it, though he was far from suspecting the black turpitude developing in the heart of one of the actors in this sad drama of domestic life. Fenwick rarely threw himself in Mrs. Wilmer's way, for he never looked upon her without a degree of interest he feared to increase. The sympathy he felt for her unhappy position, gave an intensity to his solicitude very near akin to love, and he carefully held himself aloof. He trembled for her happiness, but he was powerless to save her from the pangs inflicted by the unprincipled conduct of her husband.

Kate was proud and reserved, and she bore all in silence. If she had made known the depth and bitterness of her anguish, even the indifferent heart of Wilmer might have been

touched by her wretchedness; but she locked it in the silence of her wounded spirit, and he fancied her contented with the lot in life which had been awarded her!

"She is too cold-hearted to feel that I do not love her," he thought; "and she has no kind friend to enlighten her."

True, she had no watchful mother, jealous for her child's happiness, to mark her pallid cheek and joyless manner. There was no heart to weep tears of blood over its unloved darling. She was alone in her sorrow, for she was an orphan without near relations. The warm heart that in childhood had been thrown back upon itself, by the coldness of those on whose protection she had been cast, had comforted itself with the thought of a home of her own in the future, which was to be the very temple of contentment and affectionate kindness; and this joyless desert was the realization of her childish dreams!

I know of no creature on earth so forlorn, so much to be sympathized with, as a helpless little child, whose warm heart yearns for the prodigal love which only a mother can bestow, left in the tender years of infancy to the care of strangers. The orphaned Kate was removed from her desolate home, in which death had reveled for many days, taking in his chill embrace the parents and two young brothers; she was but four years old, and at that early age her guardian placed her in a boarding-school, as the easiest method of ridding himself of the trouble of so young a child.

Among a crowd of children of different ages, and tempers utterly unlike, individual character is seldom remarked by those in authority. The romp, the shrew, and the sensitive plant are alike cared for, as far as food, lodging, and instruction are concerned; but to the last the aliment of the soul is denied. Timidity and shyness prevent the expression of their eager desires; the yearning tenderness of the little heart is hushed into a quietude which often seems stupidity. Thus repressed, many times outraged, this keen sensibility survives, either to become a blessing to others who need the sympathy of a heart that has suffered, or a curse to its possessor. Alas! to a woman how often is it the latter!

Such had been Kate Temple's early experience: she went forth into the world, possessed of wealth sufficient to tempt the mercenary, with the bright hopes of seventeen, and the trustful heart of a guileless child of nature. She who had so deeply yearned for affection, had poured forth her own a sparkling draught upon the arid and selfish heart which had so remorselessly won her from peace and happiness, to pine in solitude of spirit over the crushed dreams of her youth.

Had Kate been a worldly woman, or one of little sensibility, she might have found contentment perhaps in her brilliant position, and in the pursuits of fashion. But, unfortunately for her, she possessed an elevation of soul which rendered her incapable of appreciating such petty sources of happiness; and her bright anticipations, her deep faith in the honor of the man she had so ardently loved, sank into the blank night of a despondency which nothing could console.

Nothing? Ah, no! Heaven in its kindness did not utterly forget the neglected, broken-hearted wife. The waveless torpor of disappointment was broken by the birth of a daughter; and the long-repressed tenderness of her heart gushed forth over the helpless little image of herself.

Even this child, so deeply idolized by the young mother, Wilmer did not permit to be a source of unmingled happiness to her. He noticed the little creature but to bewail her want of beauty, and never was the kiss of parental love impressed upon her infantile brow. Bitter and indignant were the tears wrung from the eyes of poor Kate, by his utter want of feeling. For herself she could have borne all; but that his child should be thus coldly treated because she was not a model of beauty, unmasked all the mean selfishness of the man to whom the birth of this helpless creature had only the more strongly bound her.

The hour came when Kate held her child to her heart, and felt in every quivering fibre of her frame, that her feeble life formed the only link that bound her to her wedded home. This was what Clara had labored and planned for, and she smiled in her splendid home, as she pictured to her fancy the slow tortures of the sensitive nature she knew so well.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Crawford sat in her boudoir, in a simple but exquisitely becoming morning costume. An Italian greyhound lay crouched at her feet, his large, liquid eyes raised to her beautiful face, with an expression of almost human adoration.

Wealth and taste had combined to render this room a perfect gem of beauty. The walls were painted in an arabesque of green and gold, in a most fantastic and graceful pattern; compartments were left for four large paintings, and Cole's voyage of life, exquisitely copied, occupied them. Statuettes representing Hope, Love, Despair, and Courage, stood on marble pedestals in the corners of the room, and vases of blooming flowers imparted that air of refinement which the presence of God's most perishable and beautiful gifts to his children, can alone bestow upon household decorations. The chairs in this room were all unlike each other, and each one was a model of ease and elegance; and the foot seemed to sink into a bed of roses, as it pressed the soft velvet carpet which covered the floor. All the elegant and expensive trifles which a woman of capricious taste and unlimited means could collect around her, were scattered about the apartment; and few persons could have entered it without finding something to interest or amuse them.

Clara was more beautiful than ever; it seems strange that the evil, each day growing stronger within her, should not have marred the radiance of her charms; but no seraph from the realms of bliss could have looked more innocent or more pure than this woman, who carried locked within her soul thoughts and purposes of such deadly import, that even fiends might shudder in the contemplation of them.

There was no relenting in the purpose dimly shadowed forth in her soul previous to her marriage. To wed the confiding old man, and speedily rid herself of him, had been her original intention; but the marriage of Wilmer had, in part, defeated her plans. All her arts were then used to prevent him from being won to love his wife, and gradually to produce a degree of estrangement between them,

which would, at any time, be made to end in a divorce. This purpose once attained, death should speedily free her from her own matrimonial shackles; the possessor of her husband's almost princely wealth, she would then be free to unite her fate with that of the man for whom her passion led her to brave so much.

An artist's apparatus stood in the room, and a tall, dark-eyed young man, of singularly handsome appearance, was engaged in sketching Mrs. Crawford and her pet. Like most of those gifted with his talent, the artist was a man of deep and concentrated feeling, and undisciplined sensibility. One who looked calmly into his wildly flashing eyes, and watched his ever changing expression, could read in them the fiery excitement native to his soul, which a keen disappointment could easily lash into madness. Yet Clara had dared to trifle with a spirit thus perilously endowed; for she was a stranger to fear, and the suffering he might endure she was indifferent to.

On this morning, the burning cheek and tremulous hands of the painter, expressed more eloquently than words, the wild passion with which his artist soul was filled, for this most perfect specimen of nature. His emotions he dared not clothe in words, addressed to the wife of one of the most influential men in the city; but the vain heart of Mrs. Crawford understood what he dared not express, and she exulted in the effect of her attractions. Not one emotion of regret or self-condemnation passed through her callous heart, when she remembered the unprincipled efforts she had made to attract the admiration of this gifted youth, that she might have the triumph of having a portrait of herself, painted by one devoted to a higher branch of his art. Franstein had hitherto refused all solicitations on the subject; but who could resist a request from the charming Mrs. Crawford, urged with an eloquent flattery that few hearts could have been proof against?

The picture was commenced, and Clara saw the radiant image of herself grow in beauty beneath his hand; and her softest smiles and sweetest words were lavished upon the artist, who proved himself so capable of doing justice to her charms. Each sitting but added

new fuel to the flame already consuming the ardent soul of the painter, and he bowed his impassioned spirit in idolatry before this embodiment of his brightest dream of human loveliness. He was an eloquent talker, and, had Clara not been already devoted to another, she might have been won to love this new worshiper at her shrine, who offered the subtle flattery of his soul's entire devotion. He looked forward to that morning hour, during the remaining twenty-three, and dreamed of the heavenly expression which brightened over her face as she listened to his picturesque description of scenes he had witnessed, and grew animated in her turn, as the conversation proceeded.

No one had hitherto been admitted to these sittings; but now the picture was nearly completed, and Mrs. Crawford had granted permission to another person to enter her sanctum.

A ring at the bell was followed by the announcement of a visitor, and to the annoyance of Franstein, Mr. Wilmer entered.

After duly admiring the portrait and complimenting the artist, he said:

"I am happy, Franstein, to find you employed in so gallant a manner. Your ideality is rarely gratified with so beautiful a model, I fancy."

"I rarely paint portraits," replied Franstein coldly, and for the next hour he silently continued his employment, and listened to the lively gossip with which Mr. Wilmer entertained Mrs. Crawford.

He at length said:

"You have doubtless heard of the separation between Stanton and his wife? They have applied for a divorce."

"What reasons are given for such a proceeding?" asked Mrs. Crawford, carelessly.

"Oh, incompatibility of temper; a sufficient excuse, I think."

Mrs. Crawford darted on him a peculiar glance, which surprised and puzzled Franstein, for he happened to look up at the moment, and caught its expression. She inquired:

"Would you think that sufficient, in your own case?"

"Undoubtedly; all other contracts are bro-

ken when they become profitless or, burdensome, and this yoke matrimonial, which is hardest to bear of all, they make fit tighter than any other. A poor devil must avail himself of any apology to slip his head out of the noose, when it threatens to suffocate him. By the way, speaking of being freed from matrimonial fetters, reminds me that I heard, yesterday, of the indisposition of your *cara sposa*. Nothing serious I suppose?"

A faint shadow passed over the smooth brow on which his gaze was fixed, and her lip was slightly tremulous as she replied:

"Mr. Crawford has been slightly indisposed, but it is nothing serious I believe."

Franstein thought she suppressed a sigh, given, perhaps, to the brilliant bondage into which she had sold herself. "Ah, if she were only free!" he thought; if he dared to pour forth his passion in words—to aspire to a return. Well, wait; the husband was old, his constitution pretty well broken up, and she must soon be once more at liberty to listen to the vows of one better suited to become her partner in the race of life. Yet, why was this Wilmer allowed to visit her so unceremoniously? to pour his flatteries unchecked in her ear? He too had a wife, whom he shamefully neglected. Franstein remembered that he had been devoted to Mrs. Crawford before her marriage, and a faint gleam of light fell on his mind. He half guessed the truth, yet he did not attach a suspicion of wrong or blame to his beautiful idol. Her conduct was too carefully guarded to permit the slightest shadow of reproach to cling to her, although it was well known to all their circle, that Wilmer was almost as much infatuated by her charms as before his own marriage. "Poor man! how could he help it," they asked, "when his wife was so cold and repulsive in her manner, that it was impossible to love her?"

Thus judged the world, and Franstein among them, could find no fault with the fascinating being who flattered him with the epithet of friend. But on this morning he was bitterly jealous of Wilmer, and in his heart of hearts detested the vain coxcomb who appeared on so friendly a footing with the woman by whom he felt himself every hour more deeply enthralled.

He was about to throw aside his brush, and request Mrs. Crawford to look upon his morning's work, when a violent ringing was heard at the door, succeeded by a heavy trampling of feet, and the sound of several voices speaking in a rapid and excited manner.

Clara became deathly pale, and endeavored to rise from her seat, as she feebly said:

"Good heavens! what can be the matter? See, Mr. Wilmer, what has occurred."

Harden as she was, she recoiled from what the next moment might reveal. Before her wish could be obeyed, the door was thrown open from without, and several men entered bearing what appeared to be the dead body of her husband. Clara shrieked and fainted.

It appeared that Mr. Crawford had imprudently risen from his bed, to which he had been confined for several days. His attentive wife had only left him for the brief hour which was engaged to the artist—for she was a model of devotion to her elderly husband—and he had promised to remain quiet until her return. Oppressed with the sense of suffocation which weighed upon his breast, the sick man thought a walk in the open air would relieve him, and he persisted in rising and leaving the house. The servant feared to acquaint his mistress with what was passing, for she had given strict orders that these sittings were never to be interrupted, and he followed the wasted and tottering figure of Mr. Crawford, until he fainted and fell in the street.

A physician was fortunately passing at the moment he was brought back to the house, and on opening a vein, he regained his consciousness and looked around for his wife. She was just recovering from her swoon, and he smiled and pressed her hand, as he noted her pallid cheek and trembling frame.

"She will soon be free," thought Franstein, as he looked upon the cadaverous face of the husband. "Ah! I must win her yet."

Wilmer, too, saw death written on that wrinkled brow and failing form, and he mentally execrated the precipitation which led him to marry a woman he had never cared for.

CHAPTER V.

A month passed, and Clara was found constantly beside the sick couch of her suffering husband. She was extolled as a model of devotion, her own hand prepared his nourishment, and she permitted no one else to mix his draughts. *Yet he did not improve.* Day by day the ghastly impress of approaching death was more visible to those around him, and the bold and guilty heart that watched beside him, trembled and exulted by turns. She was about to accomplish that destiny which she had once said to her husband was most enviable: "to be young, beautiful, rich and a widow."

The last sands were nearly run, and in the attenuated and ghastly object which lay extended on the bed of death, few could have recognized the portly, hale-looking, elderly gentleman, who, so short a time before, had led to the altar the fair, girlish-looking woman who sat beside him with his hand clasped in both her own. He made no effort to withdraw it, for he was powerless to unloose that soft clasp, though it burned and scorched even the flesh on which the chilling cold of death was fast encroaching.

Deep emotions were struggling in his bosom—terrible thoughts were they to mingle with the death agony of a human soul. His eye rested on the face of his wife, and his features grew convulsed with anguish. The physician was also in the room; he approached the bed and offered him a draught he had first prepared. While he was thus employed, Clara had not offered to approach him, for she felt it was the last one her husband would ever need. Her unrighteous task was accomplished, and she would soon be free.

The sick man faintly asked:

"Will it give me strength to speak all I have to say?"

The physician bowed, glanced at Clara, and immediately left the room. If she had seen the expression of his features, she might have been terrified; but she did not look up, and her face retained its usual calmness, though now it was touched with sorrow, or what appeared as such.

After the lapse of a few moments, Mr.

Crawford spoke in a stronger voice, and requested his wife to raise his pillows a little. The service was performed, and as she sank back in her seat, Clara saw that the eye of her husband was fixed upon her with an expression that startled her guilty soul. There was deep anguish on his furrowed brow, and his voice faltered as he stretched forth his withered hand, and said:

"Clara Moreland, why did you perjure yourself before Heaven by accepting this, when deadly hatred must have lived within your soul toward him who offered it? Fool—fool that I was, to fancy that youth and beauty could willingly mate with age and ugliness! Yet, oh God! how I have worshiped you!"

Overcome by his emotion, he wept aloud. Clara cowered before his eye in speechless dread; she trembled to hear what was to follow this ominous commencement, but she attempted to make no reply.

After a pause, the dying man went on more calmly—

"My youth and manhood were spent in the accumulation of wealth, which, at some future day, was to be lavished on you, either as my wife or as my adopted daughter; for from your very infancy I have loved you as the very pulse of my existence. If you would be mine at any price, I was resolved to gain you; if you would not consent, I still destined you alone to be the inheritor of my wealth; and so unselfish was my affection, that I should have lavished it on him who might have been more fortunate than myself in winning you. I could not resolve to say this to you, for it seemed like depriving myself of my last chance of success, where I had so much at stake. You accepted me without any seeming reluctance, and I was the proudest and happiest of men."

"And have I not been faithful and true to you?" asked Clara, in an unflinching voice. "Can you reproach me with any failure in the duty I owed you?"

"Silence—silence, madam, and listen to all I have to say. Your father was my friend, and at his death, when his estate was declared insolvent, I stepped forward and assumed such debts as left his widow and orphan child a

luxurious support. To me you owe the elegance in which you have lived; to me the baneful accomplishments which have given a deeper spell to your dangerous beauty. Even as a child you were the bright spirit of my life, and behold my reward? Death—death, and at your hands! A lingering and painful doom, demon that you have become!"

"Death!" faintly repeated Clara, gazing on him with eyes distended with fear and horror.

"Yes, death—annihilation. Oh, you so fondly cherished, so blindly trusted!"

His voice failed him, and again he wept such tears of mortal agony as were bitterer far than the doom which hovered over him, while Clara bowed down her head with a sickening feeling of terror which nearly caused her to faint. But she struggled against it; this was no moment for the indulgence of such emotion as would unnerve her. She must know all; must ascertain the extent of his suspicions, and, if possible, clear herself from the charge. She who had so completely blinded him to her defects when in the full possession of his faculties, could surely succeed in removing such fatal suspicions from the mind of a man weakened by illness and suffering. If she could not do this, what would be her own fate? All the horrible consequences of her crime arose in ghastly array before her, and, with an assumption of calmness she was far from feeling, she arose and stood beside him. Modulating her voice to the most tender of tones, she said—

"Alas! my beloved, your mind wanders. Accuse not your own Clara of so dreadful a deed. The very thought of such a terrible crime is sufficient to blight her whole future life."

Her husband looked sternly upon her.

"Fair and false piece of duplicity, seek not to veil the clearing vision of a dying man. Fear not denunciation from me. I can not forget that you have been the cherished treasure of my soul; that, for a brief space, I was happy in the belief that you loved me. Neither would I have the honorable and unspotted name you bear become a sound of horror to all good men. No; I leave you to the curse of accomplished crime. It will fall in its own good time, and crush you."

Clara breathed more freely: such retribution she feared not. After a slight pause, Mr. Crawford continued:

"While your conjugal devotion has been the theme of praise, and I have been congratulated on your untiring solicitude for my restoration to health, you were daily destroying the effect of the medicines administered, by mixing with them an infernal preparation, made by a recipe found in your own private library. A sufficient dose of this poison will produce death, without betraying its action by any outward sign. Your first aim was disappointed; that which was given to me when in health produced paralysis, but not death, and you have daily added to your awful crime by administering, under cover of affectionate solicitude, a small quantity of this deadly mixture, which slowly but surely sapped away the foundations of life."

"And who dares accuse me of this?" asked Clara, haughtily.

"Your own cousin, madam, the physician who attends me; and fortunate for you it is that he is so nearly related to you, or you would be denounced to the world in your true character. His suspicions were aroused by the singular effect of his prescriptions, and he watched you carefully, though, alas, it was only on yesterday that he could bring himself really to believe that you could be guilty of so dire a deed. You allowed no other person to prepare my draughts but yourself, and he detected you in pouring into them a few drops from a small vial you carry in your pocket. No doubt it is there now, but it will be of no further use to you; your evil deed is accomplished."

Clara replied by drawing an embroidered handkerchief from the pocket of her dress, and then turning out the remaining contents in her hand.

"You see, yourself, there is nothing of the kind here; and I can only say that Dr. Elmer possesses singular powers of vision, to behold what never occurred."

"It is useless to deny, madam, what can easily be proved. No sooner did Elmer actually witness this surreptitious mixture than he resolved to analyze what remained in the cup. He did so, and proved, to his own sat-

isfaction, the presence of one of the most subtle poisons known to the medical profession. He then remembered seeing among your own books several singular ones to be possessed by a lady. With my permission, he entered your private room, and there found the volume from which the directions for compounding this preparation were obtained. When certainty of your guilt was gained, he cautiously revealed it to me; and I—I, who had looked on you as the pure spirit of womanly faith and truth—found but a fiend, in the disguise of an angel of beauty. I, who had loved you so fondly, found my soul writhing with horror and hatred toward you."

Clara was overwhelmed by this clear statement of her guilt, but her natural audacity came to her assistance. She raised her head, and looked him calmly in the face, while she said—

"Alas, my love, this is surely the raving of delirium. You can not believe me really guilty of this crime."

Her husband gazed on her some moments in sorrowful surprise, and he muttered,

"So young, and so hardened! Alas, who would believe it! Clara Moreland, do you believe in a God? in a future?"

"I do not," replied she, in a clear, distinct tone, and in those words the secret of her revolting insensibility was avowed.

"Then, may God pity you, remorseless sinner that you have become! Listen to my last words, and heed them well. The fortune for whose possession you have plunged yourself in crime shall be yours, that you may feel its insufficiency to purchase happiness. I have exacted an oath from the only other person cognizant of your guilt, not to betray you, and you are therefore safe from detection. Revel in the wealth I permit you to retain, without a thought of the weary days and sleepless nights spent by your victim in its acquisition; but judgment shall yet overtake you. I am put out of the way for some younger and fairer lord, and by him shall I be avenged, deeply, dearly. I have read your doom; now leave me. Take from my dimming eyes the sight of your fatal beauty."

Clara obeyed him, without a word in reply, glad to escape from a scene which had shaken

her guilty soul to its center. Trembling at his words, yet exulting in the weakness which secured her from punishment, and allowed her to retain his coveted wealth, she sought the retirement of her own room.

Within a few hours Mr. Crawford breathed his last, and during the evening Clara received a note from Dr. Elmer, containing the following words:

"The ties of consanguinity forbid me to make known to the world what a monster it cherished in its bosom, in your fair-seeming self. I can not meet you without betraying the loathing with which your unnatural crime has inspired me, and comments on our estrangement might arouse suspicions which you could not meet."

"Leave your native land forever; travel in foreign countries. The weakness of your late husband left the means in your power to live in magnificence in any land you may prefer. Go, and if Heaven is sufficiently merciful to you to permit continued concealment to rest on the dark fact, repent of the evil you have wrought."

The lips of the murderess curled in scorn, as she read, and she muttered,

"My own inclinations lead me to the same goal, or I would remain and defy suspicion. I have not ventured thus far without calculating all the chances in my favor. After all, I have but acted as the great law of nature dictates. In seeking my own happiness, I have put away the shadow that darkened my path. An old and fond husband! did I not endure him long enough to fairly purchase the right to my freedom? If I had not been a most consummate actress, he would long since have discovered the loathing with which he inspired me. I bore with him until the mind of another was in a state to be moulded to my purposes. Ah, Wilmer, deep is the debt of love you owe me."

She sank into a reverie in which dark thoughts and bitter purposes were mingled with dreams of love, and the sunny clime of Italy. She was startled by the sound of steps, and heard the suppressed murmur of voices, as the nurse and undertaker passed her door, on their way to the chamber of death. She shuddered, and grew pale, and for a moment

her fancy hovered beside the stark form from which her agency had dismissed the mysterious tenant. She quickly repressed such thoughts, and seating herself at her writing-table, she penned the following note, announcing the event which had just taken place:

"Wilmer, I am free! The bonds I rashly fettered myself with are broken, and you, for whose sake freedom would have been so dear, are bound to another. I could sacrifice much for you, Frederic. Prove, then, the strength of the love you have so often professed for me, by breaking a tie which has become hateful to you."

"In two weeks I leave for Europe. I shall not see you in the interim, and this is the only time I shall communicate with you. A woman situated as I am can not be too circumspect in her conduct. Do not seek me; but commune with your own heart, and make a resolution which shall be final. On the morning of my departure, I will give you a few moments in which to declare your decision. If you love me as I have fondly trusted, you will sacrifice all for me, even as I would for you. If not, I can die in the sunny land to which I go; for I swear to you I will not survive your utter loss."

"I do not desire you to accompany me; but in six months I shall expect you, freed from every tie which can prevent me from becoming your wife."

This note had no signature, and it needed none. Mrs. Crawford sent it by her own confidential servant, with orders to deliver it into the hands of Wilmer himself.

A few days after Mr. Crawford's funeral took place, the following announcement appeared among the fashionable news, in one of the city papers.

"We understand that the beautiful Mrs. C—d has made arrangements to leave for Europe in the next steamship. We trust that the grief of her recent bereavement may be alleviated by travel in a foreign land. This lady is a proof that congeniality of mind can reconcile difference in age between married persons. Her devotion to her husband during his last illness has been spoken of as unparalleled. Her mother, who has for sev-

eral years been an invalid, accompanies her, and a promising young artist is attached to her suite.

"We commend her liberality and munificent spirit, in affording such an opportunity to a son of genius, to visit the world of art, in the older nations of the earth; and can not refrain from offering her example as a precedent for others of the wealthy, who annually leave our shores for a European tour."

Clara read this alone in her boudoir; and a smile of mockery flitted over her lips, as she thought how easily the world is deceived by the beautiful, the fascinating, and the wealthy.

CHAPTER VI.

WILMER sat leaning back in his chair, with his feet propped against the marble mantel, smoking a cigar. He knew that his wife particularly disliked the scent of tobacco smoke, and therefore he chose to defile her own sitting-room with its fumes.

Kate, in a plain white wrapper, with her hair neatly braided under a little lace cap, sat beside a work-stand, employed in embroidering a dress for her child. There was deep and touching sorrow expressed in her countenance, but no trace of petulance or anger. When her eye wandered toward her husband, she softly sighed, but did not venture to address him; for, in the slovenly, slipshod man, who looked as though a smile had never irradiated his countenance, few would have recognized the elegant Wilmer of society.

Of late his temper had become so overbearing that, with all her innate dignity of character, which forbade her to condescend to the vulgarity of quarreling with her husband, Kate found it a hard task to keep silent. She had hoped that, after the departure of his enchantress, he would be won to return her affections; but, alas, she had not stood beside him on the deck of the ship which bore Clara from her native land, and witnessed what there took place, or the faint gleam of hope which shone upon her heart on her removal would have been instantly quenched. She had not beheld the look of triumphant love with which

her rival drew from her finger a sparkling gem, and whispered,

"When you are once more free, come to me, and at any hour you may demand it, by sending me this ring, I give you the hand which it has adorned."

With such a compact in existence between two such unscrupulous persons as Wilmer and Mrs. Crawford, there was little chance that domestic peace should rear its altar beneath the roof of the unhappy Kate. Her husband endeavored to irritate her into demanding a separation, which he would then take care should become a legal divorce; and, as the surest means of wounding her to the soul, he treated her child with brutal unkindness. He invaded the apartment which had hitherto been sacred to the use of the mother and daughter, and made himself such an object of terror to the latter, that she never saw him enter, without shrieking and sheltering herself upon the bosom of her mother.

Kate had left her asleep in her chamber, and after finding fault with every thing that had been done during the morning, Wilmer asked,

"Where is the child? I believe you encourage her in her pretended fear of me. I do, by George! and I will let you know I will not put up with such conduct, madam."

"A child of a year old, Mr. Wilmer, can not be expected to love a person who treats her as you have treated Emma. Her arm is blue now, where the grasp of your fingers left their mark last week."

"Do you taunt me, madam, with my treatment of my own daughter? She belongs as much to me as to you, and I will treat her as I please. Frightful little squalling creature that she is! There, there she goes now—waking with a yell, like that of a wild Indian. Pretty management you have, to permit her to scream in such a disgraceful manner. Bring her in here, madam, and I will teach her how to behave, since you are too tender-hearted to bestow a little necessary correction upon her."

Kate silently left the room, but tears were streaming over her face, as she entered her chamber, and took in her arms the little trembling creature, who had been awakened from a sound sleep by the raised tones of her

father's voice; tones which her infantile ear had already learned too well to distinguish. Anticipating a scene of violence toward her darling, the mother wound her arms around her, and endeavored to quiet her cries; and they had sunk into faint sobs, when Wilmer entered, pale with anger.

"I choose to be obeyed, Mrs. Wilmer. I required you to bring Emma to me, and you hush her into silence by caresses, when she needs correction."

The little girl shrieked as if she understood the import of his words, and as he drew near with his hand outstretched to tear her from her mother's arms, Kate arose, and straining her helpless burden to her breast, said,

"Frederic—Mr Wilmer, for God's sake forbear. You will make my child an idiot by such treatment. See, how the poor thing trembles and clutches my collar with her little fingers. I have borne this too long already, and you shall not again strike her."

"Shall not? Who is to prevent me?" he asked, mockingly.

"I, her mother, her only protector, will."

"You? pooh, you have no power over your own fate. I am its master, and you dare not rebel against my authority."

He approached nearer, as if to seize the child. Kate was deadly pale, but there was no shrinking in her glance.

"Frederic Wilmer, beware," she impressively said. "Endurance has bounds—I have suffered all that a woman may endure and live, and for the sake of my child's future fate, I have borne much that my soul rebelled against. Your neglect—your insults to myself, were passed silently by, because I looked upon my child, and would that no stain should rest upon her fair name, fixed there by the gossip of the malignant, concerning the separation of her parents. Behold the only tie that binds me to my loveless and most wretched home."

"Do you offer me a temptation to take the brat's life, madam? for on my soul the price does not seem to me too dear to rid me of the shackles that eat into my very soul. Seek for a divorce, if I do not treat your child tenderly enough, and rid me of your detestable presence."

Excuse me, but the truth will burst forth sometimes."

Kate looked on him, and wondered how she could ever have considered him either noble or generous; and her roused soul arose to meet the emergency in which she was placed. She spoke calmly, for disdain was too strong within her heart to suffer the deep emotion struggling there to gain the mastery.

"You reveal to me nothing new. I have long felt that from being an object of indifference to you, I have become one of actual dislike; but for the reason already mentioned, the future welfare of my daughter, I decline seeking a divorce. A separation I am willing to have, because that can be obtained by mutual consent, without the necessity of a lawsuit, which would bring our daily life before a curious and cavilling public. That, I would avoid, because I would not have my child blush for her father."

Wilmer, in ungovernable fury at her refusal, uttered in a decided manner, approached her, and said,

"Will *this* then suffice to sever the detestable yoke?" and he struck a blow upon the side of her head so severe and unexpected, that she reeled beneath the shock.

His cowardly soul quailed before the glance she cast upon him, as she turned away without a word, and clasping to her heart the child for whose sake she struggled against the indignant despair that threatened to unseat her reason, left the room.

Wilmer, debased in his own esteem by his unmanly act, paced the floor with a frowning brow and writhing lips. A dim consciousness of the worth he had slighted, the true affection he had so bitterly outraged, dawned upon his mind, and he regretted that he had not openly stated his feelings and wishes to his wife, and have appealed to her high-toned generosity to release him voluntarily, by herself demanding a divorce. It seemed impossible that she should still cherish one feeling of affection for him, and she might have been induced to see the expediency of consenting to a formal separation of all interests.

He consoled himself with the thought that his end was accomplished at all events, for she must now see the impossibility of their

continuing to live beneath the same roof; and the pride of his wife secured him from the scorn his unmanly treatment merited. He knew that Kate would never avow to the world that she had been subjected to the indignity of a blow.

CHAPTER VII.

Poor Kate wept until the fountain of her tears appeared exhausted, and she raised her head from her pillow with that feeling of hopelessness and utter physical prostration which succeeds the violent indulgence of grief.

Her truly feminine soul shrank from the only path now open to her, for the long-suffering wife was no longer permitted the choice between the endurance of harshness and oppression, or the open rupture of that bond which the word of God emphatically pronounces indissoluble by man. "Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," are words of simple and straight-forward meaning, and need no interpreter to those who believe in the sacred book from which they are taken.

The wedded home of the helpless wife no longer offered its shelter to her head; and he who had promised before men and angels to be her loving and true protector, had annulled the contract by his own cowardly act. His dastard soul, incapable of appreciating the beauty of character which distinguished his wife, had spurned the last hope of salvation from ruin and disgrace, which Heaven in mercy held out to him.

Kate no longer loved her husband—bitter scorn, and a stern sense of wrong, for which no atonement could now be offered, were the feelings which swayed her mind; but it was exquisitely painful to her proud and sensitive nature, to be forced to lay bare the unhappiness of her home—to speak to strangers of the utter impossibility of living beneath the same roof with the man to whom but two short years before she had been united.

She was entirely at a loss to know to whom to apply for advice or assistance in her unhappy position: but while endeavoring to restore outward calmness to her demeanor, and

to remove the traces of emotion from her pallid features, she received a note from her husband, which relieved her from this dilemma:

"After what has passed, it is impossible that we shall continue to live together. Fenwick will be your best legal adviser, as he is friendly to both of us, and will conduct every thing with that discretion and delicacy which an affair of this kind demands.

"From you must come the demand for a divorce, as you can urge sufficient cause for seeking it, and the odium which will be attached to me, I am willing to bear for the short time I shall remain in this country, after the decision which frees me is given.

"The property which I obtained with your hand, I am willing to divide equally with you; my moiety, of course, reverting to Emma at my death."

Again tears started to the eyes of Kate, but she indignantly dashed them away, and after bathing her swollen features, and struggling resolutely against her emotion, she felt more composed. Wilmer had already left the house, and his note was dated from a fashionable hotel in the city. Thus their rupture was by this time known to their "dear five hundred friends," and she an object of contemptuous pity, or open blame to the majority of them; for it is an indisputable truth that, however innocent and amiable a woman may be, she suffers more in public estimation from freeing herself from the power of a tyrant, than her husband does, however brutal may have been his conduct toward her.

Her heart is not only broken, and her only legitimate empire, that of the affections, rudely overthrown, but the voice of censure throws its fatal blight over the desolate soul already bowed to the dust with its weight of sorrow. Is it not enough that the altars of her home are desecrated? her warm heart thrown back upon itself? the fairy hopes that made her youth joyful swallowed up by the surging waves of a despair which is deaf to the voice of consolation; but must the petty and scandal-loving spirit of society, also make her a mark at which to point its keenly-barbed arrows?

How many noble, high-souled women have sunk beneath the untold anguish of their lot,

and borne with every indignity, sooner than undergo this terrible ordeal?

Fenwick was alone in his office, when a servant entered with a note from Mrs. Wilmer, written in so tremulous a hand as to be nearly illegible, in which she requested a few moments' conversation with him. His heart misgave him, for he had seen much of the by-play between Wilmer and Mrs. Crawford, and he at once divined the cause of this unusual summons. He shuddered at the thought of the keen suffering which must have driven a woman of Kate's shrinking character to demand a separation from her husband.

He had seen, with sorrow and indignation, that the influence of Clara continued almost as great over his former friend after his marriage as before; and in disgust at the perversity of mind which caused him to turn from the pure and abundant fount of happiness he possessed in the strong attachment of his wife, to the worldly coquette who had trifled with him, and yet still held him captive, in spite of her delinquency toward himself, Fenwick had withdrawn from the companionship which once afforded him pleasure. He had fancied himself acquainted with all the weakness and all the strength of Wilmer's character, for they had been boys together; but a darker page was yet to be read before the record was closed.

A short walk brought him to the door of Wilmer's residence, and in a few moments he was ushered into the presence of the deserted wife. He had expected to find her subdued and wretched, but he was startled by the impress which a night of such suffering as humanity is seldom called on to endure, had left on her features. Years seemed to have been added to her age since he last looked upon her, and the calm of her manner appeared to be the result of utter hopelessness. Emotion had exhausted itself—the worst was known, and strength had been given to endure it.

"I sent for you, Mr. Fenwick," said Kate, in a low but steady voice, "to request you to draw up a deed of separation between myself and Mr. Wilmer. I approach the point at once, as a prolonged conversation on such a subject must, you are aware, be extremely painful to me."

Fenwick bowed.

"I fully comprehend you, madam," he said, "but is this step absolutely necessary? Can no mediation effect a reconciliation? Wilmer has faults, I know, but he has also good traits, which should lead him to appreciate his happiness in the possession of such a wife. I hoped you might be able to save him from himself."

A faint flush arose to Kate's cheek, and for an instant she, struggling to speak, Fenwick arose and turned away, that he might spare her the consciousness that another beheld the voiceless anguish of her spirit. He continued to gaze through a window until she regained sufficient self-command to address him again.

"Be assured, Mr. Fenwick, that no mediation can avail—my decision is irrevocable—neither has it been made without sufficient consideration. The law will not require a statement of the causes of a mere separation—it is enough that we both desire it; and when she who asks your good offices, claims them as the early friend of Selina Burton, you will not refuse such assistance as you can render her in this the darkest hour of her life."

A flood of light suddenly poured upon the mind of Fenwick, and he remembered where and under what circumstances he had first met the sweet smile which had once puzzled him.

"And are you indeed the sprightly playmate of the cousin whose early fate I have never ceased to regret?—her nurse in her last illness, and her companion in her happier hours? Pardon me, sweet Kate—Mrs. Wilmer, I mean, that I was heedless enough to have forgotten even the name of the charming child who once spent a summer vacation at my father's house. When we first met, so familiar was the expression of your features, that I imagined the fanciful dreams of old might be true, and I had known you in some former state of being. I will exert myself to serve you, dear madam, with all the energy, all the delicacy you can desire."

Kate murmured her thanks, and after a few moments of reflection Fenwick said,

"If your determination in this matter is irrevocable, why seek only a separation? Free yourself at once from all ties, is my earnest

advice. Believe me it will be much better. Wilmer will probably leave his native land forever, and the bond which a man can trample on, can still be made a galling yoke to you."

"I can not," faltered Kate. "Take into your hand a newspaper containing the intelligence respecting such trials, and read the heartless comments of the press. See the most sacred rights violated—the inmost recesses of daily life laid bare before an indifferent and curious public—the sanctity of home desecrated—oh, no! I believe it would kill me."

Fenwick saw it would be vain to urge her further, and after obtaining such instructions as she could give him, he left her for the purpose of having an interview with her husband.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH an indignant heart and burning cheek, Fenwick knocked at the door of the room occupied by his former associate. He found Wilmer indolently lounging over a late breakfast, with several newspapers scattered around him.

His slumbers had evidently not been broken by any intrusive feeling of remorse; and as Fenwick glanced through a half-open door which led into the adjoining apartment, he was disgusted to perceive in the empty glasses, wine-stained table, and scattered cards, the evidences of the orgies of the past night. He could thus, in his heartless egotism, disregard the wrongs he had heaped upon a helpless and uncomplaining woman; and, while her heart broke beneath its load of unspeakable anguish, find forgetfulness in the revels of dissipation.

Wilmer read something of what was passing in Fenwick's mind, and he arose with an affectation of cordiality, and offered him a seat. He said, apologetically, as he glanced toward the open door,

"Several of my club called in last night, and in spite of my opposition, they sent for cards and wine to enliven me, as they kindly said."

"I certainly did not expect to find that you

had so soon resorted to such means of consolation," replied Fenwick, coldly.

There was a brief pause, and Wilmer seemed slightly embarrassed. He, however, soon recovered himself, and said,

"You have seen Mrs. Wilmer, I presume, and know all about this confounded fracas?" and he looked keenly at Fenwick, to ascertain how much Kate had revealed.

"I have had the honor of a conversation with Mrs. Wilmer, and she has signified to me a desire for a separation from yourself."

"Quite right," said the husband, indifferently. "I am as anxious for it as she can possibly be; and where both cordially unite in the same wish, there need be no delay in obtaining its fulfillment."

Fenwick gravely continued:

"Before proceeding further in the affair, I considered it due to the friendship I have felt for you, to make an effort to restore peace to the home you have so recklessly abandoned. Your wife has devotedly loved you, Frederic. She chose you from many suitors, any one of whom might have endeavored to render her happier than you have made any effort to do. But she preferred you to them all, and how have you rewarded her trust? Reflect on the consequences of your conduct toward an affectionate and warm-hearted woman; her youth is blighted, and her position in life rendered too equivocal to be happy. You can not have done that which is unpardonable: return, I conjure you, to your home, and abjure the sinful intentions which have led you to commit this wrong toward the woman you vowed to cherish and protect."

That Wilmer understood his last allusion, was evident from the crimson flush which mounted to his temples; and for an instant he closed his lips firmly, as if resolved to repress the expression of his angry emotions. He at length spoke calmly,

"Our long intimacy permits much to be said by you, Fenwick, which no other man dare utter to me. We will confine our conversation to one subject if you please; and you need not trouble yourself to lay bare the motives of my conduct. My wife asks a divorce, and I am more than willing to grant it;

for I pine for freedom more eagerly than a caged lion. We are not suited to each other: let that suffice, and do your devoir as quickly as possible. In acting thus, you will prove yourself a true friend to both Kate and myself. I have employed Messrs. — as my lawyers, and you may confer with them on the subject. Where both parties are agreed as to the necessity of a divorce, an affair of this kind can be speedily arranged."

"But Mrs. Wilmer does not desire a divorce. She naturally shrinks from its publicity, and she would not listen to a proposal of the kind."

An oath escaped Wilmer's lips; he rose from his chair, kicked it over, and strode to and fro the floor in irrepressible anger.

"She shall have it: she must—I will force her to give me back the freedom I so recklessly bartered for money; for she knows I never loved her; and now I loathe her very presence. What! shall a mere form bind me forever to a woman, who herself sees the necessity of a separation between us?"

"You forget that you voluntarily sought that woman. That you won her trusting affection, and now—I will not proceed Wilmer. If you are not undeserving the name of man; if you have one spark of honor left in your soul, you must shrink from consummating the wrong you now meditate."

"I am no weak driveler," retorted Wilmer, scornfully, "to sacrifice my happiness to a mere chimera, which you straight-faced men call honor. Since you hint at my intentions, I will avow them; and I do not blush to do so. Yes, the dream of my early manhood, the idol of my soul, awaits me in a foreign land; and think you I will suffer this clog on my path to remain? No, I trample upon the unholy bond, which was forged in a moment of madness, and I will leave no means untried to break it."

Fenwick arose, and prepared to leave

"It is well," said he coldly, "I will use my influence with Mrs. Wilmer, to procure her consent to a divorce, as I certainly think it will be best for her own peace to break every tie that binds her to one who has shown himself so reckless of her happiness. This must

be the last interview between us. I shall hereafter confer with Messrs. —, as I fear another meeting might lead to a personal difficulty, which I would at present avoid."

"I am aware that you consider me a villain and a fool," said Wilmer, passionately. "But, as I do not wish to quarrel with you, I let it pass. When you see Mrs. Wilmer again, she will have had more time for reflection; and I am certain she will then feel that the only course left to her is to comply with my demands."

Fenwick had scarcely left the room, when the bell was violently rung by Wilmer; and in a few moments his servant entered, and inquired what he would have.

"Do you know of a decent, middle-aged woman, who can act as nursery maid?"

"Sir? Nursery-maid, sir? Do I understand you rightly?"

"Yes, idiot; why do you repeat my words? I wish to hire a woman to act in that capacity. See to it immediately, and have one here in two hours. I will pay her whatever she charges. Tell her there will be but one child to take care of."

"Yes, sir, I have an acquaintance as is a regular nurse. She is not engaged just now, as I happen to know, and she will suit, exactly, sir."

"Very well; go to her, without delay; and as you do so, stop at the nearest magistrate's office, and tell him to send me a couple of police officers, in an hour and a half."

The door closed on the wondering servant, and, gleefully rubbing his hands, Wilmer muttered,

"I have her in my power now; I can mould her to my will, like wax, if I strike her through her child. The law gives me the custody of the brat, and Kate must come to terms before I yield her up again."

Yes, such is the unjust, and, in many instances, most iniquitous command of the law. The child of many tears is often torn from the bosom of the tender mother, by its profligate and unprincipled father; and that feeling which nature has wisely made the strongest and deepest she has implanted in the human heart, a mother's instinctive and inextinguishable love for her offspring, is made a source of ex-

quisite misery to her who is thus bereft of the child whose infantile cries have been hushed to sleep upon her bosom; whose little hands have twined their first clasp of love around her neck; whose early lisplings were learned from her lips."

Such is the tie ye often sever, oh ye wise men of the earth! If, when that law was framed, each one who gave it his sanction had looked forward in the vista of future years, and beheld a beloved daughter placed in such a position, would he not have drawn back, and felt, as the Israelite of old, as he approached the sacred veil which concealed the holy of holies from his sight? Man, in his blindness of heart, has arrogated to himself the right to sever a bond which Heaven has visibly sanctified.

CHAPTER IX.

WORN out with suffering, Kate had thrown herself upon her couch, and that heavy sleep which refreshes not, gradually crept over her senses. Her child awoke, and nestling closer to her bosom, twined its little fingers in the loose braids of hair which fell over the pillow. In her sleep she murmured a snatch of an old nursery song, she was accustomed to sing as a lullaby, and both mother and child again slumbered.

The noise of approaching feet, the suppressed tones of remonstrance, gradually growing louder, were unheard by that hapless mother, who smiled in her sleep, as the opening scenes of a dream flitted through her fancy.

She stood beside the altar, with a heart filled to overflowing with happiness too deep for words. The husband of her choice clasped her hand within his own, and gazed on her with eyes beaming with tenderness. Suddenly his features changed, and he grinned with mocking malignity, and was about to hurl her over a precipice, when Fenwick rushed to her rescue, and tore her from his grasp.

A wild cry escaped her lips, and she started up, to find several strange men in the room, and her own maid alternately remonstrating and wringing her hands, as she stood between

them and the bed on which her mistress reposed; while the startled faces of the rest of the household looked in at the open door.

"I tell you it will kill her outright," said the girl. "She has not eat any thing since day before yesterday, and I believe this is the first time she has slept. If you persist in taking the child away, I know it will be the death of her."

"Never mind, young woman," said one of the men, "we have our duty to do, and other folks must answer for the consequence."

"What does this mean?" asked Kate, springing to the floor, and looking wildly around her. "Who are you, and by what authority do you thus insolently intrude into my chamber?"

The one who had before spoken made an awkward attempt at a bow, and said,

"We only does our duty, ma'am. The gentleman sent us for the child, and if this young woman would have been quiet like, and have brought her to us, we'd ha' gone away, as peaceable as lambs, and let you take your nap out. My maxim is, eat, drink, and sleep, when we can, for trouble is a mighty dead weight on all three o' them delights o' this carnal life."

Kate listened in bewildered silence. The thought had not once occurred to her that Wilmer could be so inhuman as to torture her unnecessarily, by claiming a child toward whom he had shown an indifference that was almost criminal; while, to her, Emma was the last link that bound her to existence.

The noise had aroused the little girl, and she stretched forth her arms to her mother. Kate snatched her to her breast, and turning to the men, said,

"Leave this apartment, instantly. There is no law by which the chamber of a woman innocent of crime can be invaded; and tell him who sent you on this shameless errand, that my child is in my arms, and I defy him to tear her from them, so long as life is left me."

"Your defiance is not worth much, madam," said a voice from the next room, and the domestics that crowded around the door fell back, and allowed Wilmer to enter. The determination expressed in those tones struck terror

to the inmost soul of his wife; and a single glance at his face showed her that resistance would be useless. He was very pale; but there was an expression of iron determination on his countenance which indicated what was passing within.

Kate held to her child with the frantic firmness of despair, and, as he approached, with outstretched hand, to tear it from her, she felt her helplessness to defend her just right, in all its bitterness.

She threw herself upon her knees, before her heartless husband, and exclaimed,

"Leave her to me, Wilmer, and I forgive you all. Take every thing beside; strip me of fortune; tear from me hope, joy, respectability, but leave me my child; and I will find a blessing and a prayer for you in my stricken heart."

"The law gives to the father the custody of his children," he replied, unmoved by her anguish. "Emma must go with me; I have already provided for her comfort."

Kate arose; she had debased herself in vain before her callous and flinty-hearted persecutor. She bent her head one brief moment over her screaming child, and a prayer ascended to Heaven for the helpless little one she was forced to resign to the tender mercies of such a father. She then held her toward him, and said,

"Take her; you have well calculated what would fill the cup to overflowing. If you had one spark of affection for her, I could even excuse the suffering you thus heap on a head already bowed to the earth with sorrow; but you do not love your child: a base and unmanly desire to wound one who too fatally placed her happiness in your power, alone actuates you. Take your daughter from the only heart that loves her; but every pang you now so ruthlessly inflict on her who never, even in thought, injured you, shall, at some future hour, be repaid. God suffers such wrongs at times, but he never fails to avenge them on their perpetrator."

Wilmer sneered; for her appeal had failed to touch him. "God nor devil shall prevent me from fulfilling the intention with which I came hither," was his impious response, as he roughly took the trembling child from the

arms of her mother, and, signing to his emissaries to follow him, left the room.

The excitement which had sustained Kate through this trying scene was over, and she fell senseless on the floor, as the door shut out the last glimpse of her darling. The overtasked heart yielded beneath its weight of woe, and before night the bereaved mother was raving in the delirium of a brain fever.

Day after day passed, and to the regular inquiry of Fenwick at her door, the answer was, "No better." He had made several ineffectual efforts to see Wilmer, and had finally addressed him a note, conjuring him to restore the little girl to her suffering mother, and he would undertake to procure her consent to whatever he wished, so soon as she was in a condition to be consulted. Wilmer briefly refused to act thus, until Kate was sufficiently recovered to signify her consent to a divorce.

A week of intense suffering passed, and once more Kate recognized those around her, and inquired for her daughter.

The recollection of all that had occurred, previous to her illness, gradually dawned on her mind, and she buried her head in the pillow, and asked of Heaven why she had been permitted to awake once more to the remembrance of her bitter sorrow. When life was stripped of every charm, why should she continue to drag its weary load through long and dreary years?

Her maid informed her that Mr. Fenwick had called that morning, and, learning that she was better, had desired her to inform her mistress that he wished to obtain an interview, so soon as she felt well enough to grant it. He desired her to add, further, that he had strong hopes of soon being enabled to restore her child to her arms.

A faint hope gleamed on the sorrowful heart of the invalid, but it instantly faded before the recollection of the brutal harshness with which her infant had been torn from her, and she murmured, with starting tears,

"No, no; he but flatters me with a vain hope. I so love my babe that I would give all the remaining years of my life to clasp her to my breast, and thus die. But he who unhappily has power over my destiny, is allowed

this unrighteous use of it, and I must school my heart into submission."

"Here is a note, ma'am, which I think I may venture to give you," said the girl, with some hesitation. "Mr. Fenwick said, as soon as it was safe for you to bear the agitation of reading it, I must let you have it. I think, maybe, what's in it will do you good."

Kate broke the seal with tremulous fingers, for she saw it was from the only friend she could truly claim as such, and she believed he would give her all the consolation she could now receive. It ran thus:

"MRS. WILMER,—I am authorized by Mr. Wilmer to inform you that so soon as things are in proper train to insure him the divorce he seeks, he will permit his daughter to return to your protection; and if your consent to such a course is promptly given, he will pledge himself never again to interfere either with her or yourself.

"My advice is to comply with his wish as soon as possible, and give few thoughts to the opinions of others. The warm sympathy of the best of the class in which you live, will go with you, and strong in your own consciousness of right, disregard the comments of the idle and malicious.

"Yours, respectfully,

"WILLIAM FENWICK."

The hope thus held out of regaining her lost darling filled her heart with rapture she could not a few moments before have believed herself capable of ever again feeling. Her Emma could be regained—could be hers—hers alone! There was life, hope, happiness, in the thought; and she thanked Heaven for the boon of continued existence, for the sake of that beloved little one. She read on, and sighed heavily. Alas! Kate was not strong in her sense of right: necessity, that stern task-master, before whom we have all quailed, dictated to her the course she must pursue. She was driven by her husband's cruelty to violate a direct command of God, and sever the tie which had been ratified in his name. That Kate was a truly pious and conscientious woman, was proved by the Christian fortitude which had enabled her to bear with resignation the accumulated anguish of her married life. She believed herself right in her refusal

to free her husband from his bonds, but she could now hesitate no longer. Her duty to her child, doubly orphaned, if she abandoned her to the father who had made himself an object of terror to her, rose paramount to every other consideration.

Let the world talk: she would turn from its hollow courtesies, to the quiet of her own home, enlivened by the prattle of the "sole daughter of her house and heart;" she would atone for her involuntary breach of the command of Heaven, by the strictest attention to the duties which might devolve upon her.

Kate seemed endowed with new life: she ordered writing materials to be brought to her, and supported by pillows, traced with a tremulous hand, her full consent to all Wilmer demanded. "Only restore my child to me," she concluded, "and I shall forever bless you."

Her reply was immediately communicated to Wilmer, and he was overjoyed to be released from his young charge. The nurse proved worthless, and the child feared the strangers that surrounded her, and missed the cares of her mother too much to be a very quiet guest. She fretted herself into a fever, and Wilmer, with all his hardness of character, could not think without dismay of being the cause of his own child's death. The little girl was not seriously ill, but his fears magnified her indisposition, and he was nearly ready to return her to her mother without having gained his purpose. A communication from Fenwick relieved him from his dilemma, and that night Kate slept calmly and sweetly with her arm enfolding her heart's treasure.

CHAPTER X.

NEARLY a year had elapsed since the grave closed over the form of Mr. Crawford, and his beautiful widow had buried the recollection of that event, in the oblivion which is found in gayety and adulation.

She was in Paris, that paradise of the idle and the wealthy; and never did woman receive more intoxicating proofs of the power of her attractions. The highest in rank, and brightest in intellect, alike bowed before a

beauty which had no peer, and a fascination of manner that was unsurpassed. *La belle Americaine* was declared to be a happy medium between the levity of the Frenchwoman and the reserve of the Englishwoman. She spoke the language with the elegance and purity of a native, and the wits declared that the point of an epigrammatic sentence was never lost on her; while the dandies said her eyes discoursed too eloquently to need the aid of speech. The penniless noble laid his empty coffers at her feet, hoping to replenish them with her wealth; the millionaire vowed himself her adorer; and the homage of genius embalmed her name in impassioned verse.

To each one, she gave sufficient encouragement to keep him in her train, but dexterously avoided committing herself to any. Yet amid this brilliant life, which appeared more like a bright dream than a living experience, there was one ever near her whose watchful care, and entire devotion, demanded the reward of seeming confidence, and sweet smiles; and Frankenstein, whose delicacy of feeling prevented him from breathing his passion in words, until a sufficient time had elapsed from the death of her husband to render such an avowal proper, believed that he was sure of a return to his passion when he should dare to speak.

Clara was one whose aim was to enchant all who approached her; even the menial who waited behind her chair, was not too insignificant to be fascinated by her grace of manner. Some women are satisfied with the triumphs which await them in society, and reserve the indulgence of sullenness and ill-humor for the domestic circle; but Mrs. Crawford was never more charming than in her own home. She was a consummate actress, and constant practice enabled her to keep the violent passions of her nature under strict control: but solitude was often terrible to this brilliant worldly woman.

Could he who daily poured forth the worship of his heart on his soulless idol, have beheld her in the few brief hours she permitted herself to pass in the privacy of her own apartment, he would have been appalled at the

change which passed over her. The voice of conscience would not be utterly stifled, and the fear of discovery hung as a dark cloud over her future destiny. To become an object of horror and contempt to a world whose adulation was necessary to her as the air she breathed, was a thought fraught with terror. Her crime she repented not—but she quailed before the consequences its discovery might yet entail upon her; and her soul yearned for the presence of him for whose sake they had been braved.

But one womanly feeling survived in her indurated heart, and that was the wild love which had been her fate. Wilmer's last letters had announced that he was once more free, and might be expected in France on the next packet; and Clara was feverishly happy in anticipating his arrival. He came to claim her as his wife, and she cast not one sorrowful or regretful thought to the wronged and forsaken woman, whose peace had been wrecked by her arts. In their success, she found the happiness she had long sighed for, and she deemed herself justifiable in thus securing the accomplishment of her own wishes.

As this crisis in her destiny drew near, she reflected on the unchecked devotion of the young artist, and wished, yet feared to dismiss him, to pursue the object with which he had embarked for Europe. Frankenstein had forgotten his original intention to study the models of art to be found there, in his more interesting study of the caprices of his lovely patroness. A devotion so delicate, so flattering to the spoiled beauty, she could not resolve to dispense with; and reckless of consequences to one whose temperament ever led him into extremes, she continued her encouragement to the aspiring hopes she could not but perceive.

As the hour of Wilmer's expected arrival drew near, she felt the necessity of coming to an explicit understanding with him, yet audacious as she was by nature, she could not find courage to do so. The happy dream of her love that lived in her own heart, gave her human feeling toward another on whom so terrible a blow was about to fall, and she shrunk from indicting it.

The gay season was at its height, and the halls of royalty were thrown open for a mag-

nificent entertainment. A fancy dress ball was given by Louis Philippe in honor of the birth-day of one of the princes. Attired as the genius of her country, and radiant in beauty, Clara was the most admired of all the brilliant figures which flitted through the pageant. Her gorgeous costume, her exquisite dancing, elicited a compliment from the royal lips of the King himself, and this evening witnessed the most flattering of her many triumphs. There was a flush as lovely as the tint of the oleanda upon her delicate cheek, called there by anticipated happiness, and poor Frankenstein gazed upon her with rapture, and fancied that his own whispered words of admiration had called that lovely blush to her cheek.

He had scarcely noted that at the moment they alighted from the carriage, a letter was placed in Mrs. Crawford's hands, which she seized the first opportunity to read. She had recognized the writing, and her heart beat quick with happy thoughts, as she glided behind the friendly shelter of a statue which held a lamp in its hand, and took from the inclosed paper the ring which had been her parting gage with Wilmer. He had merely written,

"I am in Paris, and claim the fulfillment of your promise. I arrived at dark, and went immediately to the house of the American ambassador, where arrangements are already made to unite us at twelve to-night. The strictest secrecy will be observed, and we can defer the open acknowledgment of our union as long as you may think propriety demands it. Come to me so soon as you can escape from the ball without observation, my adored Clara."

"Your devoted WILMER."

The gay scene passed before her as a brilliant panorama in which she had little interest, though she smiled, danced, and talked as usual. Her soul was now in a state of rapturous excitement, as she looked forward to the meeting which awaited her; and as the hour approached, she withdrew from the observation of Frankenstein, and leaving a message for him that indisposition compelled her to return home, she entered her carriage, and was driven at once to the American ambassador's.

Wilmer met her as she alighted, and in a few brief moments the wrongs he had committed against his wife—the crime she had stained her soul with—were for a moment forgotten by each one, as the minister of God pronounced his blessing upon these unholy nuptials.

The newly wedded husband returned with her to her own residence, and during their drive thither, their arrangements were agreed on. Their marriage was not to be openly avowed for two months, but in the character of her suitor, Wilmer was to have constant access to her house; and Clara mentally resolved to rid herself of the surveillance of Frankenstein as speedily as possible. She hoped it would be easy to do so by offering him the means of residing in Rome a few years, in the pursuit of his professional career.

In the meantime the young painter had left the ball-room as soon as he had ascertained that Clara had retired; and he was surprised and chagrined that she had not called on him, as usual, to accompany her home; but his surprise was much increased when he heard the sound of the carriage, driven to the door, after he had retired to his own apartment.

He drew back the curtain, and softly unclosing the blinds, beheld his idol descend from the vehicle, assisted by a tall man, enveloped in the folds of a cloak, with a large hat so drawn over his brow, that by daylight he would scarcely have been recognizable.

The demon of jealousy was aroused within his bosom, and softly descending, he took a circuitous path which led by the road; for the house was a villa in the outskirts of the city, with extensive grounds around it; and as the carriage emerged from the yard, he sprang lightly behind it, and was driven toward the stable in which the horses were kept. His object had been to discover the abode of this mysterious stranger, and by bribing the driver, Frankenstein ascertained, to his own mortification, that he had preferred walking to his lodgings.

On the following morning, as he sat with his fair Circe, over their late breakfast, at which Mrs. Moreland was too much indisposed to appear, with many expressions of concern, Clara remarked his haggard looks, and recom-

mended change of scene, as necessary to his health.

He fixed his large, dark eyes earnestly upon her face, and asked, "Would it occasion you one real pang to know that I was no longer numbered among the living?"

"Assuredly, yes; a keen one, dear Frankenstein, it would be to know that my friend, my brother in affection, was no more."

"Brother," he repeated, with bitter emphasis. "You are not blind, madam, and you must know that my soul is enthralled by your charms. You must feel that I adore you, with a wild strength of passion which at times seems as if it would master my reason. My bright dreams of fame, the high aspirations of my youth, the visions of the enthusiast, are merged in this all-absorbing passion, which, until last night, I fondly imagined was returned. Clara, best-beloved, be mine, or I die at your feet, a blighted, hopeless wreck."

The passionate energy of his words startled the guilty trifler, and she half rose, with the intention of leaving the room, but he seized her by the dress, with almost maniac fury.

"No, no; you do not leave me until I know my doom. Who was it that came with such mystery to your door last night? Who held your hand so long in his clasp, and impressed his accursed lips upon its whiteness. I saw it all, as I stood above you; and I felt, from that moment, that I have been but a puppet in your hands. Who was it, madam, I ask? Speak; for, on my soul, I will know."

Clara, at first, was frightened by his violence; but the natural audacity of her spirit arose, and she coldly said,

"You are surely delirious, Mr. Frankenstein. Has any portion of my conduct authorized such an outbreak on your part? I am not accountable to you for my actions, and I tell you I will not permit such insulting language from my dependent."

The last word, uttered in a tone of freezing contempt, struck to the heart of the unfortunate young man, like an icebolt. The passions careering through his soul were calmed by the force of the blow; he gazed on her in utter silence for several moments, and then slowly repeated,

"Dependent? yours? Yes, I have been

your dependent; and I have blindly, madly, forgotten every thing, in the delirium of a passion I fancied returned. You have cruelly undeceived me, madam. A haughty and imperious woman I little expected to find, beneath that soft and dazzling exterior; but my delusion is past, and with it I bid farewell to the brightest dream of happiness that ever eluded a mortal's grasp."

He turned to leave the room.

"Stop; stay one moment," she exclaimed. "Pardon me, Frankenstein; I would not so have wounded your noble heart, had a moment's thought been taken. You must forgive my hastiness, and still accept the means of pursuing your studies, from my superfluity."

"Never, madam; add not insult to injury. I am not so base as to accept the alms which have once been made a subject of reproach."

He strode from the room, and within the hour left the villa. Clara regretted the effect of her words, but she was happy to be released from his presence, on any terms. She would seek him out again, send him such assistance, secretly, as she felt assured he must need; and thus she quieted her conscience, while the unfortunate young man went forth, with wild passions writhing in his undisciplined heart, which threatened the overthrow of the little reason his disappointed passion had left him.

CHAPTER XI.

WEEKS rolled by as a happy dream, to the enamored pair, and the close of the two months rapidly drew near. Clara was often missed from the gay assembly; for the devotion of Wilmer was too highly prized to be paraded before the public gaze, and in her secret soul she thought her happiness had not been too dearly purchased.

The whisperings of remorse, for a time, were silenced by the accents of adoring love which dwelt upon her ear, and she ceased to look forward to a terrible judgment for her crime. In the delirium of passion all was forgotten, save the presence of the one so intensely beloved.

But this could not last; the reaction must take place sooner or later; and gradually a

fear, so faint as to resemble the distant speck of a cloud amid the blue firmament, dawned on her mind. Wilmer frequently spoke of her husband, and the scenes preceding his death; and once he mentioned an interview he had with Dr. Elmer, a few days before he sailed from his native land. All Clara's self-command failed to preserve the appearance of calmness, and he remarked the sudden paleness which overspread her features.

"You manifest singular emotion, my love," he said. "One would think you regret the old man's death."

Clara had quite recovered; she smiled, and asked,

"When it gave me liberty to become your wife? Oh, no; you know better than that."

Even to him she felt the necessity of wearing a mask. She knew that she could not survive his knowledge of the crime she had perpetrated; she would not live to become an object of suspicion and disgust to the man who had violated every tie of honor, to win her. She felt that he who had cast from him his blameless wife, to wed her, would be quite capable of forsaking her, in her turn, should he ever discover the loathsome want of principle which swayed her conduct; and a veil was drawn over one dark recess in her heart, a watch kept upon her lips, lest they should inadvertently let fall words which would become a clue to the terrible deed that lay buried in the silence of the past.

Clara wished the public celebration of her marriage to be as brilliant as possible, and on the appointed evening a large company assembled at an early hour in her drawing-rooms. The day had been bright and beautiful, yet its sweet influences had not been felt by the fair bride. Her toilet was completed, and she sat in her own apartment in momentary expectation of Wilmer; but she was faint, and sick at heart—a death-like sensation, as of some approaching calamity, weighed heavily upon her spirits; and she listened with feverish impatience for the sounds of his footsteps as he ascended the stairway leading to her boudoir.

She dismissed her attendant with a message to her mother, and remained alone, with her pale cheek resting on her hand.

Mrs. Crawford's residence, as we have said, was not situated in the heart of the city; it was surrounded by highly cultivated grounds, and the room she usually sat in opened upon an extensive parterre, to which access was obtained by a flight of marble steps. By this entrance Wilmer was in the habit of seeking her, and presently she heard a step ascending, which sounded familiar, but it was not that of Wilmer.

Starting up as the door unceremoniously opened, she confronted the worn and haggard person of Franstein, looking more like a specter than a living being. He softly closed the door, and coming quite close to her, said:

"So you are dressed for a bride, my pretty disdainful lady; satin glistens around your queenly form, and jewels are wreathed in your bright hair for that craven Wilmer, whose true wife is left far away to grieve her heart until it breaks. O, you painted sepulchre! I know all your loathsomeness now."

Clara endeavored to scream, but terror overpowered her as this wild-looking being glared on her with eyes in which fury and insanity gleamed. He approached very near to her, and lowering his voice to a confidential tone, continued,

"Now, tell me the truth, lady: have you not planned all this, in that subtle brain of yours? Did you not put the old fellow out of the way, that you might get all his cash, and then?"

He paused, and looked earnestly at her.

"Good God! what a fiend must be enshined in that exquisite form! Ah, why are you made so beautiful, that one can look on you, and forget all the turpitude of your guilt? No, not all, either, for murder cries aloud, and will be heard—heard—heard."

This excitement had been gradually increasing as he spoke, and the last words were shouted forth in tones of maniac glee, while he danced wildly around the room.

Clara gained strength to rise, and dart toward the door; it opened suddenly, and she fell senseless into the arms of Wilmer.

"What is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed. "Good heavens! Franstein. Have you been endeavoring to frigate my bride, you frantic madman?" he furiously continued,

as he saw that Clara lay quite lifeless in his embrace.

"You are welcome to her now," said the artist, solemnly. "She has killed one man, and made a maniac of another, but that is no matter to you; for you have broken a true heart to gain her. May she reward you as you deserve."

He darted from the open door, and Wilmer in speechless terror hung over the lifeless form which lay upon his breast as a sculptured dream of beauty. So still, so fair seemed the pale features, that he could scarcely persuade himself it was not death on which he gazed.

Her swoon continued so long that he became seriously frightened. He would not ring to alarm the house, for he had no desire that the strange scene which had just occurred should be known to others; and the cause of so singular a seizure on her bridal evening, he knew would occasion gossip he did not desire.

Placing her on a sofa, he sought for some means of restoring animation; he sprinkled water and essences from her toilet over her without any visible effect; and in despair he wrenched open a casket which stood in a half-open drawer, in which he knew she kept her most treasured possessions. Two small vials presented themselves to his view, and one was labeled, "For faintness, five drops." It contained a clear, scentless liquid, and hastily removing the leather which secured the glass stopper, he poured out a small quantity, and mixing it with water, forced it between the half-parted lips of Clara.

It had the desired effect, for she presently opened her eyes, and looking nervously round, asked,

"Is he gone? What did he say, dearest?"

"Nothing that you need care to hear, love. He is evidently deranged—we must seek him out, and see that he is properly cared for."

Clara drew a deep sigh, and a faint shade of color appeared on her cheek. She said, languidly,

"You have made sad confusion here; and you must have given me a strange remedy for faintness. It affects me singularly. What could it have been? My brain reels already from its violent action, and the objects before

me begin to flicker and grow dim to my vision. O, God! what have you given me?"

"Only this, love. Pardon my readiness in breaking open your casket, but I was really so alarmed, I scarcely knew what I was doing," and he held up the nearly empty vial.

Clara sprung to her feet, she clutched the frail glass with such violence that it crushed in her hand, and with a shriek so wild that it thrilled every nerve in his body, she exclaimed,

"Death!—death! and from *your* hand! How much did you give me, Frederic? O, send for a physician—send for every doctor in Paris, and save me from this awful doom! I am so young to die! I looked forward to such years of happiness!"

Stunned and bewildered, Wilmer listened without accurately comprehending the terrible import of her words. He rang the bell violently, and soon many pale faces were gathered in that sumptuous apartment, gazing in terror upon the writhing figure decked in bridal lace and pearls, which lay upon the velvet couch in speechless terror at the fate which hung over her.

Yes; she had partaken the doom so ruthlessly awarded to another. The same liquor which had slowly undermined the existence of her husband had been preserved by Clara in a vial which once contained a mixture of her mother's, that had been prescribed for the nervous attacks to which she was subject.

In all her travels she carried this vial with her, intending to use a portion of its contents, should punishment ever threaten to overtake her, or should the man she so devotedly loved prove false to the faith he had plighted her.

But thus to be cut off, in the bloom of her youth, on the very day which was to witness her public union with the lover for whose sake she had periled so much, and by his hand. Terrible fate! awful retribution was this, for even such crime as hers!

Wilmer clasped her hand in voiceless agony; and when the two physicians, who had been hastily summoned, reached the house, they found him kneeling alone beside the couch, with a pale, horror-stricken visage,

and the lips of the dying woman murmuring her confession in his ear.

She told him all, and she fixed her dimming eyes upon his face, to see the effect her words had produced. There was an expression of horror and loathing too legibly imprinted on the rigid features to be mistaken; and Clara felt that a double doom had overtaken her. She must die in her youth, and be unlamented even by him she had so wildly loved.

She refused the assistance she had before so passionately invoked. To her unbelieving soul it was easier far to die, than to endure the certain punishment awaiting her restoration to life, in the desertion of Wilmer.

In revealing to him the full turpitude of her guilt, she had obeyed an impulse that could not be resisted; she was probably slightly delirious when she laid bare her awful secret, but her words were stamped with an energy and truth that brought with them a conviction of the reality of the deed related.

Clara gazed into that changed face, with an expression of despairing earnestness, and said, in faltering tones,

"I see, Frederic, that you abhor me; but think leniently of my conduct, excuse the evil I have perpetrated, when you remember that it was for your love I ventured all."

"My love was yours before the evil was consummated, Clara. You have not committed this awful crime for my sake, but for the wealth it secured to you. I would have married you without fortune, and, in so doing, have escaped the actions which have stamped me a villain, in the eyes of all honorable men."

A flush of anger passed over the livid features of the dying woman, and she said, in broken accents,

"And you can speak thus! you, so fatally beloved. Wilmer, I would that I *could* believe in another state of living, for then I could look forward to a future meeting. Even in the realms of eternal suffering, it were some happiness to claim companionship with him who, on earth, was my idol and my fate. There, where all is plunged in the darkness of hopeless punishment, would you be willing to expiate your sins toward Kate Temple, by

linking yourself eternally with me? *Eternally!*"

Wilmer shuddered, as the hollow tones of her voice fell on his ear, uttering words of such fearful meaning; and he shrank in silent abhorrence from her, who could speak thus, while the impress of approaching death was rapidly stamping itself upon her pallid features.

"Speak, speak," said Clara; "express the detestation growing stronger each moment in your heart. It can but render me more willing to lose all sense of present suffering, in utter annihilation."

"Clara, you but torture yourself unnecessarily. I am not quite a demon, and would spare you the expression of my feelings. God knows they are sufficiently wretched to expiate many of the sins I have committed."

There was a slight pause, and then Clara said,

"Expiation! you will attempt it, perhaps; but what atonement can be made which can restore to you the love you have once cast from you? No; mine you have been, mine you shall be, even in death. Kate Temple shall never triumph over my grave."

"Kate will never again be united to me," said Wilmer, hoping, by the assurance, to calm the terrible agitation which convulsed her frame.

After some moments of intense bodily suffering, Clara motioned him from her side, and asked for the protestant clergyman who had been invited to perform the ceremony of marriage. He had lingered, after the departure of the rest of the company, hoping to be called on to offer religious consolation to her who was thus suddenly summoned from earth and all its pleasures.

In a few moments Mr. Garland was seated beside her couch, and, at her desire, Wilmer left the apartment.

Clara then requested the clergyman to summon the two physicians, who had been called in to her assistance, as she wished to make her dying confession, and relieve her soul from the heavy weight which rested on it.

She rejected his offered prayers, and, in the intervals between paroxysms of acute

pain, her last words were taken down. They were of so appalling a nature, that one of the medical men said to the other,

"I am almost tempted to doubt the clearness of her mind."

The elder one regarded her intently, and then replied,

"Her words are too connected to be the offspring of a disordered intellect. No, she understands perfectly what she is saying; but this is a horrible revelation!"

Exhausted by the effort, Clara remained motionless, until death claimed his prey. She perished as she had lived, an unbelieving sinner, and Wilmer, true to his selfishness, breathed a sigh of thankfulness, as he saw the last convulsion pass from her brow, and leave it in all the marble smoothness he had once so fatally adored. He thought not of the destroying sin braved for his sake, but of his own good fortune, in being freed from the chains of a woman, who might, in some jealous freak, have tried the strength of her potion on himself. The intoxicating passion he had so long cherished for her was succeeded by abhorrence for her unnatural conduct; and, as he looked on the still beautiful face of the dead, he, for the first time, felt that no outward loveliness can compensate for the absence of a spirit touched with the divine light of humanity, and love toward our fellow-creatures; and the memory of his wronged and outraged wife came as an accusing angel to his soul.

It was too late! The evil had been consummated, and the words of Kate were soon to meet their fulfillment. "God suffers such wrongs at times, but he never fails to avenge them on their perpetrator."

The weak and querulous mother of Clara had clamored over the fate of her daughter, until she was removed by a kind-hearted guest, who had lingered after the departure of the crowd, in the hope of being of some use; she carried Mrs. Moreland to her own residence, to remain until after the funeral had taken place.

CHAPTER XII.

WILMER had retired from the chamber of death, and was about to depart for his own ho-

tel, when a party of gend'armes met him in the hall, and arrested him, in the name of the French government, for the murder of his late wife.

His cheek blanched, and his frame trembled as the nature of the charge was made known to him; he remembered the words of the dying Clara, "Mine you shall be, *even in death*," and his arrest cast a fearful light upon them.

Her last confession accused him of participation in the murder of her first husband by poison, and detailed the means by which death was produced. She related the persecutions by which he had compelled his wife to demand a divorce, his subsequent arrival in Paris, and their secret marriage, followed, according to her account, by several disagreements, in one of which she threatened him with the power she possessed over his life. He had seized the opportunity when she lay in a state of insensibility, to administer to her a portion of the poison prepared for Mr. Crawford, under the plea of mistaking it for stimulating drops; hoping thus to rid himself of the participant in his crime.

Wilmer heard the awful charges brought against him, with the conviction that his doom was sealed. The chain of circumstantial evidence was complete, and the abhorrence for his crimes general. Hootings from the mob accompanied him to prison, where he was left to solitude, filled with visions of the misused past, fears of the dark future which lowered before him, and vain penitence for the wrongs he had perpetrated.

He tried to form a prayer to Heaven for aid in this extremity, but his soul was in too great a tumult of fear and excitement. He was not a man of strong nerves where danger menaced himself, and his spirit sunk in abject terror before the fate which loomed darkly before him. Was he, the gently-nurtured, the self-indulgent, to be hurled from his high estate, to herd with criminals? possibly to die the death of a felon, for a crime from which his very soul revolted.

He thought of Kate—the savior he had spurned with unmanly violence—of the little child he had slighted and ill-treated, and he would have given worlds to be able to atone

for all his unkindness to them. But it was too late.

Wilmer's indignant denial of the charges brought against him were received by the few who visited him in prison with incredulity. The devotion of Clara to him was well known; and it was believed by those to whom he addressed himself, that nothing but the terrors of approaching death could have wrung from her a word to criminate one so sincerely loved.

The prisoner cherished a faint hope that Franstein might be able to turn the tide of public opinion in his favor, and he caused him to be sought out. The artist had suffered from a severe attack of illness, and on his recovery his mind seemed restored, though the deepest melancholy preyed upon his spirits. All the facts of the case were laid before him, and Wilmer waited with breathless interest for the evidence he might give.

Alas! Franstein was biased in favor of the beautiful being he had so deeply loved; all his prepossessions were against Wilmer; and on reviewing all the incidents known to him which had a bearing on the case, he could not declare him innocent of the crimes laid to his charge with the parting breath of his lost idol.

A bitter desire for vengeance on her destroyer arose in Franstein's soul. Wilmer had rivaled him with the only woman he had ever loved, and consummated his wrongs toward them both, by destroying that image of beauty which haunted his slumbers, and was ever with him in his waking hours.

With sullen despair Wilmer beheld his fate closing around him. The American minister did every thing for him which a belief in his innocence could have prompted. His imprisonment was rendered as little tedious as possible until he could communicate with his friends in his native land; but the evidence relative to the causes of Mr. Crawford's death, which Dr. Elmer sent from New York, together with a statement of all that occurred at the time it took place, tended still further to establish the belief in his criminality.

It was finally decided that Wilmer should be sent to the United States to be tried by a jury of his own countrymen, and arrangements were made to transfer him from prison

to a ship which was about to sail for New York.

During the months which had elapsed since the death of Clara, Franstein had brooded over her melancholy fate until alienation of mind again took place, but of so quiet a character that no one suspected it; and with the cunning of those similarly afflicted, he took the utmost pains to conceal his aberrations from others. One dire purpose haunted his mind, and the means of accomplishing it occupied all his thoughts: to approach Wilmer as his foe, to inflict with his own hands the punishment he believed he merited, was the constant theme of his thoughts.

As the prisoner was to embark at Havre, a considerable journey must be performed before he was entirely beyond his reach; and Franstein did not despair of yet avenging the wrongs of which he believed himself the victim. In the disguise of a countryman, he followed the carriage which conveyed Wilmer from the prison. On the first night, no opportunity of approaching him offered itself; but, on the next, it chanced that the inn at which the party stopped was so crowded that Wilmer was placed in a small house, situated at some distance from the main building, and concealed from it by a clump of trees.

To insure his safe-keeping, the prisoner was slightly ironed, and one of the two officers who guarded him kept, by turns, a constant watch in his room. With one of them Franstein had become quite familiar, on the previous evening, when they stopped; and he now invited him to drink with him, until the hour for his watch rolled around.

The man readily consented; and when eleven o'clock came, and he assumed his guard over the prisoner, Franstein knew that he was not in a condition to fulfill his duties.

It was a dim and starless night, and the madman pursued the task he had set for himself, with a zeal proportioned to the excitement which burned in his brain.

In the dusky darkness a slender figure might have been seen, passing to and fro from a shed which contained a quantity of dry wood, and piling it, together with dead leaves, against the house in which the prisoner was confined; and at each trip he paused by a

crevice in the rude shelter, and looked on the haggard and bowed form that sat beside the table, supporting his head on his wasted hands, brooding in hopeless dejection on his altered lot in life. At such moments Franstein gesticulated violently, and muttered execrations against the unhappy object of his fury, who, amid all the darkness of his fate, little dreamed that a maddened and self-constituted avenger was on his track.

His labor was at length completed, and he drew from his pocket a flint and steel, with which he struck a light, and with trembling hands ignited the pile.

The flames crept slowly around the combustibles thus heaped together, and gradually raised their serpent-like folds to the walls of the building. The smoke at length aroused the officer from his drunken stupor, and, with an oath, he half opened the door. In the next moment he was violently dragged forth, the door was closed in the face of the doomed man, and a heavy weight thrown against it.

Wilmer had been so absorbed in painful reflection as to remain unconscious of the terrible danger which threatened him, but he was now fully aroused to his perilous position. By this time the flames roared and surged around the frail building. His cry for help was answered by a frantic laugh from the wild figure that danced and bounded in the light of the fire, while he shrieked,

"Franstein, Franstein is the avenger."

Wilmer heard and understood those words, and for one moment he felt all the hopelessness of his position; the next, new energy returned, and he made an effort to escape the appalling doom that encircled him. With his manacled hands, he succeeded in wrenching open the single window the building contained; but it was only to meet the flames rushing in his face.

He remained for one instant in that glare of heat and light, a terrific spectacle of horror and suffering; in the next, he fell back, suffocated by the volumes of smoke; and when the alarm reached those within the house, and assistance was rendered, it came too late; the roof had fallen in, and his charred and blackened remains were all that was left of the once elegant and fascinating Wilmer.

Those who first reached the scene of the disaster heard the trampling of a horse, urged to his utmost speed, accompanied by wild cries of exultation, which soon died away in the distance.

As the person of Franstein was unknown to the officer, who had with some difficulty preserved himself from the flames, no clue could be obtained to the perpetrator of the outrage. He returned to Paris, to the obscure lodgings he had long occupied, and resumed his usual mode of life. But those who remarked him saw that, day by day, he grew paler and thinner, until he seemed a mere shadow. One day he failed to come forth; the neighbors entered his room, and found him seated in front of his easel, quite dead. An unfinished picture, representing Wilmer in the tortures of purgatory, and Clara's angel face, bending before the spirit of mercy, suing for pardon for him, stood upon the easel. Beneath it was written, "Even thus she loved him."

CONCLUSION.

SEVERAL years have elapsed since these fearful scenes were enacted. In a most romantic spot, on one of the tributaries of the Hudson, a modest but elegant mansion reared its pillared front, among the stately forest trees. A green lawn swept down toward the clear waters of the murmuring stream, and a boat which rocked idly on its surface was put in requisition by a staid, elderly woman, holding by the hand a child about six years of age.

The little girl was a delicate, fairy-like creature, with large, dark eyes, and long curls of raven hair, hanging over an intellectual brow. She held in her hand an empty basket, and there was a quiet grace in her movements, which indicated the care of a refined mother.

The nurse (for such she evidently was) stood up in the boat, and with the aid of a long pole, soon pushed it over the narrow stream, and landed beneath a group of trees with her young charge.

As they walked up the pathway leading to the house, a gentleman and lady came forth

to meet them. A bright gleam of affectionate joy beamed over the features of the child, and she bounded forward into the arms open to receive her, with many words of affectionate welcome on her young lips.

"So the fairy Good-will has been to visit her sick protegee again. I see, Emma, you are a darling girl," said the gentleman.

"Mamma thought me naughty to-day, because I cried when you did not come as you promised before dinner."

"Important business detained me, little one, and I must beg to be excused," he replied, laughing.

The nurse here interfered, and declared that her young lady's shoes were damp, and she must submit to be taken in and have them changed. At a word from her mother, Emma acquiesced, and no sooner were they out of hearing, than the gentleman drew the arm of his companion within his own and said:

"I think, dear Kate, that my probation has been quite long enough. For years have I nursed my passion in silence—content to wait until time had softened the keen regret—the bitter sufferings which have been yours. But the hour has now arrived in which I must learn whether I have deluded myself with a false hope or—Answer me sincerely, Kate, for you must long have known the hope that grew strong within me, of one day winning you from the memory of the past."

Kate frankly placed her hand in his—

"A woman is rarely blind to the love she has inspired. I will own that my first determination was never again to trust my happiness in the lottery of marriage; but reflection has convinced me that my first union was not based on a true foundation. My eye and my fancy

were pleased, and I rashly intrusted my earthly fate to the keeping of one whose moral character was utterly unknown to me. He proved untrue to the trust; but you, whose noble soul, whose generous heart has been long known to me, must not be made a sacrifice to the lack of principle in another. No, Mr. Fenwick—I feel for you a truer and stronger regard than was ever elicited by him whose fearful fate atoned for many of his wrongs against me. With perfect confidence I place my own happiness, and that of my daughter, in your keeping."

"Thanks—and that regard, dear Kate, it shall be my care to render a strong and fervent love, even such as I feel for you," he whispered—"my heart could not be satisfied with less."

Kate blushed to her temples, as she replied, "If it were not such affection already, my consent to become yours would still have been withheld."

They wandered on, and on their return to the house at a late hour, from the radiant glow of happiness on the brow of Fenwick, the nurse surmised what had taken place; and the correctness of her judgment was proved in a few days by the union of her mistress with him who had shown himself her undeviating friend amid all her trials.

And the happiness of Kate is perfect as earth may know. The idol of her husband's heart and the light of his home, she has forgotten the wretchedness of her first choice in the happiness of her last. The dream of home in the orphan's heart is at last realized; Fenwick has bestowed his own name on his darling Emma, and that of the wretched Wilmer is a forgotten sound in their happy household.

THE COQUETTE'S PUNISHMENT.

CHAPTER I.

TWILIGHT was deepening each moment the sombre shadows cast by the dense foliage of the trees which clustered around a deeply imbayed window, the sash of which was open to the floor. The green turf of a spacious lawn was occasionally variegated by a mound of flowering shrubs; and the pale purple blossoms of the Pride of India trees, made the warm air heavy with their perfume. A vine covered with scarlet, trumpet-shaped flowers, and glossy green leaves, trailed its foliage over the upper portion of the window, forming a verdant screen; and through its delicate tracery, the beams of a bright moon fell in a variegated pattern upon the floor.

At the farther end of the apartment, a lamp, with an alabaster shade, cast a pale reflection on the objects immediately around it; but that portion of the room in the vicinity of the window still remained in deep shadow, except where the moonbeams fell.

As the eye became accustomed to the dim light, objects were more distinctly defined; and the gazer felt that this mysterious, dreamy twilight harmonized with the hour and the scene.

The floor was laid with alternate squares of the different colored woods with which our forests abound, and the walls of the room were white and spotless as marble. The windows were draped with light folds of embroidered muslin, falling over damask curtains of a delicate rose color. A harp stood in the center of the floor, and a guitar rested against

the sash of the bow-window before mentioned, beside which lay scattered leaves of music.

There was a recess on either side of the doorpost where the lamp cast its brightest reflection; and climbing plants, with green enameled leaves, formed a beautiful background for a couple of statues. In one, stood Canova's dancing girl, poised like a bird ready to take flight, with her arch and joyful smile imparting a life-like expression to the inanimate marble. In the other, stood the handmaiden of the gods, the beautiful Hebe; but not fresher nor fairer was her sparkling face, than that of a young girl who leaned pensively upon the marble top of the table which supported the lamp, with her eyes fixed on a charmingly colored picture of Burns and his Highland Mary. She was tall, slender, and beautifully proportioned. Her complexion was of a soft, clear olive, and the vivid rose of her southern clime imparted its bright coloring to her cheeks and lips. Her eyes were large, and intensely black, and her queenly brow was shaded by heavy masses of raven hair, amid the braids of which a few scarlet flowers were carelessly twisted, with that intuitive knowledge of effect with which some women are gifted.

A white muslin robe floated around her stately form, its simplicity unrelieved by ornament, save where the folds were drawn together over the bust. Here, a single diamond of great brilliancy flashed from amid the foliage of a small cluster of the same scarlet flowers which adorned her tresses.

There is nothing more interesting to the heart, than a young and beautiful girl just entering upon the true experience of life. Her hopes, dreams, and aspirations, are as the rainbow that spans the clouds; a promise of brightness too often quenched in the storm which lays the soul in ruins, bringing darkness and desolation as an abiding guest with the spirit which once claimed kindred with the harmony and beauty of nature. Alas! must the hour indeed arrive when the buoyant heart, the bounding step, the spirit overflowing with its own happiness, must be exchanged for that calm self-possession which is ever the offspring of intense suffering? The crown of hope is taken from the brow, and henceforth life's iron fetters must be worn.

Young, beautiful, an heiress, Florida Cleveland was fully conscious of her many claims to admiration; and the adulation which followed her wherever she appeared, she considered but as a tribute due to her charms. An only and a motherless child, her pathway was a perilous one, but to her eye it was covered with flowers of brightest hue; and although she had often sung the line of the poet, "The trail of the serpent is over them all," she was far from believing its truth. While the fair Florida gazed in apparent abstraction on the poet and his love, another figure appeared upon the scene.

A young man softly approached the window, and fixed his impassioned eyes upon the beautiful girl before him. The moonlight fell full upon his person, and revealed a slight and well-knit frame of the medium height. The contour of his face and head combined nobleness of outline, with that delicate transparency of complexion rarely found among the rougher sex. His eyes were large, clear, and unnaturally bright, and his mouth was almost feminine in its beauty. He looked like one whose spirit was too restless for the frail form in which it was enshrined; and he was just at that age when the romance of the boy deepens into the passionate idolatry of the man. One even slightly skilled in reading human emotions, could see in the soul-lit glance he cast upon the magnificent Florida, that to him she was the embodied dream of his young ideal.

A slight rustle among the foliage betrayed to Miss Cleveland that she was not alone; and with a half-startled expression, accompanied by a movement of inimitable grace, she turned toward him, and uttered the single word,

"Arthur."

Few in the world have not felt how much can be conveyed in the utterance of a few magic syllables: how deeply the soul can thrill with ecstasy as the name we may have thought commonplace is breathed by the lips we love, and henceforth forever made holy. In after years, we can recall the very tones of the voice, the peculiar lifting of the eyelids, and the soft glance which expressed even more than words themselves. The tones which now fell on Arthur's ear were soft, clear, and flexible; and the young man sprang into the room, and seized the hand which was stretched forth with a more than friendly greeting.

"Ah, this is an unexpected pleasure," said Miss Cleveland. "When did you return, Mr. Malone?"

"No—no—not Mr. Malone," he impetuously replied. "Are we not friends of long standing? Call me Arthur; for to me you must ever be Florida—the same Florida who was my playmate in childhood, and my little love as I grew older. Shall we not, as in days of yore, be the truest and warmest of friends?"

"Oh yes—surely," replied the young girl, with great apparent simplicity. "I have looked forward to this hour with such eager pleasure, for I have missed you sadly during your long, long absence. And now I trust you have returned to dwell among us, Arthur."

And the sly gipsy looked into his eyes as she pronounced his musical name, as if she delighted to linger on the sound.

"So long as life is granted me, I shall find no home so beloved, so beautiful, as that in which my childhood was spent. Can you divine the reason, sweet Florida?"

Florida blushed, and he earnestly added,

"Ah, you know full well that it is because every spot is filled with associations of one bright spirit which made my boyish life all joy. I never so fervently return thanks to

Heaven for high station and cultivation, as when I feel that they lift me to an equality with her I love, and give me courage to aspire to the greatest happiness life can bestow."

Miss Cleveland, for reasons of her own, did not wish her lover to dwell on his future hopes, and she skillfully turned the conversation; only giving him such encouragement as soft tones and bewildering glances can so well bestow. They wandered for hours beneath the moonlit heaven, and Malone was intoxicated with happiness.

"Tell me, Arthur," said the young coquette, "of your college life. Describe to me the friend who was so fortunate as to possess your confidence and affection."

"My best-loved friend, you must one day know, sweetest Florida. He is also a southerner, and a native of my own state. He is a man who has struggled through many difficulties to obtain a liberal education; with the innate consciousness that distinction must be achieved by him in the future. He is gifted with brilliant eloquence, and a wide grasp of thought; on these are ingrafted noble principles, unshrinking courage; and withal his heart is warm and tender as a woman's."

"What a noble character you have depicted!" exclaimed Florida, with enthusiasm. "I hope he is not faultless, however. In that case, one would lose their human sympathy with him."

"Not quite perfect. He possesses one great fault—he is too implacable where those he loves are wronged. Ah, he would be capable of taking a terrible vengeance."

"How has he displayed such a trait, Arthur?"

"While we were at college, Wilson, one of our classmates, was jilted by a coquettish girl in the neighborhood. Grafton said to me—'If that man was my friend, I would signally avenge him on this girl for trifling in so heartless a manner. If she has a human heart, I would crush it to atoms as ruthlessly as the car of juggernaut rolls over its victim.' And handsome as Grafton is, with his extraordinary power of fascination, he could win the affections of any woman he wishes to charm. Therefore it was well for Miss Tipton that Wilson was not his friend, I assure you."

"Does he consider coquetry so deadly a sin?" asked Florida, pouting her ruby lips.

"He argues that women sin against themselves—against their higher and holier nature, when vanity leads them to assume a passion they do not feel. It is only through women, he insists, that men can become elevated and refined, and when they become ministers of evil, it is right that the cup with all its bitterness shall be returned to their own lips. Who would expect her who should be an angel of peace to tempt to sin, or to sow the spirit of unrest in the breast which already bears the load of suffering entailed on all the race by the fall of our first mother? But you, dear Florida, need not shrink from my friend. Your sweet, womanly nature would win on him until I should almost fear a rival."

"I have no desire to know him," replied Miss Cleveland, coldly. "There is too much of the knight-errant in his character to interest me. He had much better leave his friends to redress their own grievances; for such a thing as he would undertake, could only be paralleled by the absurd adventures of the wandering Paladius, in the age of chivalry. But I hear my father's voice; let us join him."

Mr. Cleveland was a portly, hilarious, elderly gentleman, who enjoyed life as much as any of Adam's sons. He was contented with the prosperous lot in life fortune had awarded to him; kind and hospitable to his neighbors, very proud of his fair daughter, and warmly attached to young Arthur Malone, whom he earnestly hoped, at some future day, to call his son.

This greeting to the young man was extremely cordial, and until a late hour of the night, Malone remained beneath the hospitable roof of his old friend, relating his college adventures to the two interested listeners, and becoming each moment more deeply enthralled by the flashing glances of the captivating Florida.

CHAPTER II.

LETTER FROM ARTHUR MALONE TO HENRY GRAFTON.

I wish, my dear fellow, that you could have

accompanied me to Charleston. The country is in its highest beauty, and such a wealth of flowers is spread around me, that I can almost fancy myself in the garden of Eden. A wide contrast this to the vernal season in that far northern land in which we have so long sojourned.

I am so happy in reviving old associations that I am as buoyant as a child; the very atmosphere seems to infuse joy and hope into my sanguine spirit. I have already made arrangements to study my profession with Judge L—, and I shall enter his office next week. You will laugh at my promise to become a hard student, but such is, nevertheless, my intention. That unlucky fortune of mine, you will say, is too great a temptation to self-indulgence. When I feel there is no need for exertion, what shall tempt me to make it? But most wise and sage Mentor, I have a motive—a most excellent—a most attractive—ay, a most bewitching incentive to achieve distinction.

Know that I am already fathoms in love; an excellent preparation for study, you will say! Suspend your judgment, oh, most grave of confidants, for a few brief moments, and I will state my case. You may call to mind a certain fair child, some two or three years younger than myself, whose image was scrawled on each one of my juvenile books, that accompanied me to New Haven. Most villainously done, you will say, they must have been, if she was really fair, for I can remember sundry criticisms on crooked noses, lips rather too pouting, and eyes of an unequal size, in these my first attempts in the art of drawing.

However, the original of these caricatures has grown into a most bewitching creature. Recall all the perfections of the few really beautiful women you have known; then take from each one her rarest charm; combine them in one enchanting whole, and you have a faint picture of my matchless Florida. *Mine*, did I say? Ah, we shall see! I must throw down my pen, and dream a few moments.

Well, my fancy has taken her, butterfly flight, and I descend to plain prose again. Miss Cleveland is not merely beautiful; nature has been prodigal of her gifts to her fa-

vorite child, for she possesses fine intellect, and high cultivation. Not lightly will she be won, for she is ambitious; and the man who aspires to her must possess something beyond mere elegance of person and manner. The higher powers of the soul must be developed—the divinity within must plume his wings for a homeward flight, and find that success which I believe talent and energy can command.

Ah, what labor would be too great with such a reward in view! What happiness, what glory to win triumphs, and lay them at her feet! You will say that I am mad, my friend: truly I am—but it is such sweet madness, that I would not be restored to a sound mind just now, I believe. The sanguine spirit of youth and hope is with me, and I confidently anticipate success. Belief in our own good fortune often works out its own fulfillment; and I look forward to an honored and beloved future, with all the ardor of my sanguine temperament.

On the evening of my arrival, I entered the grounds which surround Mr. Cleveland's mansion, without any intention of calling at that time on the family. So many of the happiest hours of my boyhood had been passed amid those shades, that I wished to renew my acquaintance with each bosky dell and emerald glade which had witnessed the sports of my childhood. Every hallowed spot was just as I had last parted from it; a careful hand had spared my favorite flowers, and the moss-covered seat on which I had sat with Florida and assisted her to master her lessons, remained beneath the rose bower. Even the nest of the mocking-bird into which we had often peeped together, still rested among the foliage, and the sweet-voiced bird sat above it and poured forth a lay of welcome to the wanderer. I walked slowly onward, wrapped in delicious dreams, until a gleam of soft light irresistibly attracted me toward a window, which had been opened on the lawn since my departure. The soft turf did not betray my approach, and I stood entranced before the fairy temple in which I beheld my boyhood's dream of loveliness more than realized.

I will not describe to you this room; you must see it. Unless you behold the beautiful

things which surround my young Peri, you can have no conception of the poetry of soul the refined taste, indicated adornment. I gazed, enraptured, on the charming object thus presented to my view, and in my rapt movement betrayed my presence; she looked around, and I stepped forward to hear my name pronounced by a voice whose lightest tone is music. I spent the remainder of the evening at Cleveland's house, and have found myself on the same enchanted ground many times since. The old gentleman is more than kind; he treats me as if I were already his son, and Florida knows full well that I love her; but until I feel myself more worthy to aspire to her, I will control the expression of my passion; yet it is betrayed in a thousand ways, and fully understood, I am well assured. The mute language of the eye, which is yet so eloquent, has given me a happy confidence in the future. Oh, I shall yet win her, my friend, and—but I must stop—I have an engagement to ride with my charming Florida, and my horse is already at the door. Envy me, sober Harry, for I assure you that I am more blessed than that Emperor of Ethiopia of whom we read—for I have had many days of unalloyed happiness, and look forward to many more.

My dear boy, should you need assistance in the outset of your career, remember that I am your brother in soul, and as such, claim the right to—you understand me, Grafton.

Yours, truly, A. MALONE.

LETTER FROM GRAFTON TO MALONE.

MY DEAR ARTHUR,—Your letter only assures me of what I have long surmised—that you would return home to surrender your heart into the keeping of the fair lady on whose charms you so often descanted in our college days. The picture you have drawn is undoubtedly a charming one, and if Miss Cleveland is really all you paint her, your attachment to her must be of an elevating character. "No mind is perfectly developed until the master passion has been felt in all its intensity," says some writer, and if it gives energy and direction to your plans for the future, your love for the fair Florida will be a decided advantage.

But—odious word you will say, for it ever heralds something unpleasant—is this young beauty all you imagine? I concede all the graces to her, and admit her one of the most fascinating of women; intellectual she may be, with all the cultivation which prosperous fortunes have enabled an indulgent father to bestow—but, is she truthful?

This last query I am well aware you will consider almost insulting to your peerless enslaver; yet how many women who would scorn to utter a falsehood with their lips, can yet often act one to the ruin of a too confiding heart? Men, fortunately, are so constituted as to cast from their souls the fetters a false one has thrown around them; but in most cases, it is with a keen sense of suffering, and I believe that no man is better, for having the purest source of happiness, trust in a truly loved object, rudely torn from him.

You are peculiarly constituted, my dear Arthur. Nature has bestowed upon you a warmth and tenderness of feeling rarely found in our sex; and your sensitive temperament is not one to throw your all upon a cast, and recover from the stunning effects of disappointment. I warn you, Arthur, as only a true friend would dare to speak, against too great confidence in the sincerity of Miss Cleveland. Her position is brilliant—she has been educated for the world, and the heart-homage you offer may be classed with that of the commonplace admirers who must throng around one so brilliantly endowed. If she should play you false, as women, alas! sometimes do, the result to you will be dissipation, madness, or—death! Therefore keep your feelings within your own control, until something more than the mere language of the eye has given you assurance of a return of affection.

Why should you not at once propose to Miss Cleveland, and ascertain what you have to depend on? This fancy of waiting until you have gained distinction before you formally make known your pretensions, is in your case unnecessary. You already possess those advantages most highly prized by the world; and the lady herself is one of fortune's favorites. Would a true woman love you bet-

ter for the ephemeral distinctions you might gain? I can understand the joy of a wife in the triumphs of her husband; but surely no young, inexperienced girl, gives her affections to the hollow phantom called fame? If Miss Cleveland is really inclined to return your passion, now is the time to secure her heart, before the cold and callous world has breathed its chilling influence upon it. The voice of flattery will soon find its insidious way to her soul, I fear. She has been reared without the affectionate care of a mother, and—alas! my friend, I have many prophetic fears for the fate of this first bright dream of your youth. Speak with your native eloquence, dear Arthur, and learn your fate at once. To you, it is of the last importance that it should be so.

I thank you for your kind offers of service, but by exercising Spartan simplicity, I can manage to make the remnant of my small savings support me, until I enter upon the practice of my profession. I am not without bright hopes for the future, too, my friend; for I have had the gratification of finding that my career at college has been marked by those capable of forwarding my interests in my native place; and more than one of the friends of my deceased uncle has come forward with offers of service which I felt to be sincere.

Hoping that your next communication will inform me that my advice has been acted on, I remain, my dear Arthur, your most sincere friend.

H. GRAFTON.

ARTHUR TO GRAFTON.

Set your heart at rest, most mistrustful Henry. I have spoken, and been listened to with that genuine emotion which leaves me no room to doubt. I sat with Florida on that moss-covered seat on a lovely evening in June: the sun had just sunk beneath the horizon, leaving that parting glow which seems for a few brief moments to steep every object in brightness, then fades into the dreamy twilight into which the stars peep one by one, as if they had just awoke from slumber to dance their gay rounds above, and make a night of it. At first they seem to nod and wink at each other, as if exchanging significant glances over what is passing beneath

them; and no happier pair did they twinkle on upon that most blessed eve than Florida and myself. My bride was won, and a sacred pledge given by both to remain true to each other. Miss Cleveland can not marry before she attains her twentieth year, without forfeiting a very handsome legacy left to her by a deceased relative, who was strongly opposed to the very early marriages of girls in this country. She is born to be admired, and I have made up my mind to that; no doubt she will also be accused of coquetry, for all women whose society is much courted by our sex have that reputation. But possessing a faith in her truth and purity, which is firm as the foundations of the earth, I can very calmly listen to such insinuations. I shall be strong in the blessed consciousness that this idol of the crowd reserves for me alone her deepest thoughts and feelings.

Our engagement is not to be publicly announced; since it must continue so long, it would be unpleasant to become the subject of the world's gossip about such affairs; and in delicacy to my betrothed, I have consented not to make my attentions so marked as to excite comment. I have a key to a private entrance into the grounds, and when I know Florida to be disengaged, I enter her little paradise, and pass many charming hours in her bewitching society. She gives me sweet music, and I in return read aloud some strain of poetry in unison with our thoughts and feelings. In truth, my friend, if fancy I must have been born under some lucky star.

Do not imagine that I am so infatuated as to forget my studies. Florida does not permit that, I assure you; she talks in such eloquent strains of the high and noble intellects which have soared like meteors athwart our world, that my ambition is aroused to emulate their greatness; and the only relaxation I allow myself is the time spent with her. I am getting on famously, establishing quite a reputation for steadiness among the elder generations. Tell me something of yourself in your next. How fares *la belle cousine*? Is there no heart history to spring from that quarter?

ARTHUR.

GRAFTON TO ARTHUR.

I congratulate you, my dear Arthur, on the

prospect before you, and will not permit myself longer to doubt that there will be a happy *dénouement* to your attachment to the fair Florida.

You inquire of me concerning my cousin, or rather my uncle's adopted daughter—for Anna Wallace stands in no nearer relation to me. She is the orphan child of an old friend of my uncle, and a portion of my boyhood was spent beneath the same roof which sheltered her. Poor Anna has shared the calamities which seem to have pursued my family; the small independence secured to her by her protector was unfortunately invested in bank-stock, which has since proved worthless; and Anna is now living in the family of a gentleman in this neighborhood as instructress to his children. Though her education and firm yet gentle temper, peculiarly qualify her for such an employment, I feel a natural pang of regret that a being formed for companionship with the bright and beautiful in our world, should be condemned to the dull monotony of the school-room: compelled to tame down the elastic spirit, and check the bounding mirth of her years, to enact the sober and dignified part of the teacher. She bears her crosses well, however, and the little ones under her charge are warmly attached to her. The discipline she is now undergoing may form her character to greater excellence in the future, and that such will be its effect, I sincerely believe.

Anna has not grown up so pretty as her childhood promised; yet there is a charm in the flashing brightness of her expressive face, which interests me more than mere beauty of features. Her style is peculiar. Her eyes are of that dark hazel which is usually termed black, though they are far more expressive than black eyes, with lashes and brow of the same hue, while a profusion of golden hair is braided above her smooth white forehead. Her rosy lips close with an expression which gives character to the face: altogether she is a most pleasing and agreeable girl, and I regret my poverty more than ever, when I remember the warm attachment of my uncle to her, and feel my own inability to place her in a position in which her youth could enjoy the pleasures and advantages to which she was

born. Yet, do not fancy that I am in love with Anna, for such is not at present the case. I am given up mind and soul to study, and rarely suffer myself to seek the relaxation of society. When I do, it is natural that I should turn to her who is almost the only link between my boyhood and the present.

Adieu,

H. GRAFTON.

CHAPTER III.

FLORIDA Cleveland was by nature and education a coquette. Vanity was the shrine at which she had been taught to bow a fine intellect and a heart which nature designed for better things. An aspiring and ambitious spirit prevented her from lightly yielding her affections, though the homage offered to her charms was too delightful to be refused. The music of flattery made the atmosphere in which she lived, and the fair heiress, within one year of her debut in society, became the most distinguished belle of her day—the most sentimental of flirts—the most impassioned of coquettes. So like the real was the feigned passion, that each lover in his turn would have sworn that for the first time her heart was really touched when he became her adorer.

Three years have elapsed since that moonlit walk upon the lawn with her first lover. Triumphant had been her career of coquetry, and never in days of chivalry did ladye fair exact or receive more homage than the magnificent southerner. Three years have but imparted new loveliness to that expressive face—have but given an additional grace to the elegance of a manner always captivating—and Florida was more admired than ever.

And Malone? What had become of his sanguine hopes—his noble aspirations, while chained to the triumphal car of this imperious beauty? For more than a year the consummate tact of Florida prevented the veil from being withdrawn from his eyes; he believed her all his own, and he was willing that many hours should be given to the intrusive world, while he believed that the deeper sensibilities of her nature were devoted to himself.

He nobly strove to fit himself for the acquisition of the high prize of future destiny.

tion; but alas! study can not accomplish all things; nature had gifted him with a fine perception of the beautiful, keen sensibility, and a profound desire to attain the reputation of a brilliant and eloquent speaker; but she had denied him the power to clothe his thoughts in such glowing language as carries with it a spell of power to the soul. The intense longing—the yearning desire to reveal the inner workings of his spirit was ever with him as a haunting specter, but when he essayed the attempt, the words died away on his lips, and the despairing consciousness came to his soul that to him the glorious gift of eloquence was denied.

He recalled the ambitious aspirations of Florida, and he grew heart-sick as the conviction darkened slowly around him that he could never realize the beau-ideal of her fancy. Many scenes of reproach on the one side, and skillful defense on the other, had already taken place; and the unhappy young man bitterly felt that he was so deeply infatuated that he had no power to extricate himself from the thrall of this syren. She was his promised bride, and he madly clasped this hope to his heart, and waited until the time should pass by when he could claim the fulfillment of the engagement. That she would ultimately prove false to a pledge solemnly given, he could not believe. She wounded his heart, and often trampled upon his cruelly lacerated sensibility, but she would yet be his, and then his happiness would repay him for all he now suffered.

He was unfortunately called on to deliver an address on the anniversary of our Independence. After the most assiduous preparations he arose before a vast crowd, confident that the eloquent pages so assiduously conned, would be remembered. His address had been carefully prepared, and was really a very creditable performance for so young a man. Amid the brilliant audience collected to honor his maiden speech, he saw but one face, and that was wreathed in smiles of anticipated triumph. He pronounced his exordium in a clear sonorous voice, and thunders of applause greeted him. Suddenly his memory seemed to desert him; his tongue refused to obey his efforts to articulate, and his lips remained mute as if touched with the hand of

death. In vain did he struggle to release himself from the terrible night-mare that chained his faculties. His inmost soul was wrung with mortification and anguish, which words are too feeble to portray. He felt as if some demon had cast a hideous spell over him, from which he would have given his life to be free. Amid all his bitter agony he beheld that one face losing its bright expression in a look of dismay, which finally settled into something very like contempt. This crowning anguish alone was wanting to complete his humiliation, and the youth fainted.

Sudden illness was alleged by his friends as the cause of his failure, and many consoling voices spoke to his awakening senses of a future opportunity of displaying his fine powers. Poor Arthur turned away in bitterness of spirit, and felt that for him that hour would never arrive. To aspire to soar as the eagle, and to pine as the caged bird, was his immutable destiny. Yet life still offered one sweet hope: he might be happy if he could not be great, and with a trembling heart he sought Florida. In the first surprise and disappointment occasioned by his failure, if they had met, Miss Cleveland would have unvailed her true nature, and the blow, though a keen one, had it then fallen, might have been less fatal than it ultimately proved. But, unfortunately, she had several hours for reflection: to her vain spirit the delicate homage of Malone had become necessary, and until that morning she had cherished some vague intention to reward his devotion at some future day, provided no other offer combining so many worldly advantages presented itself. But from the hour of his failure his fate was sealed: her haughty spirit recoiled from the thought of uniting her fate with that of a man whose self-control had deserted him in so signal a manner.

"Money I possess," thought the worldly belle; "and the man I shall choose must confer upon me distinction, and that of no common order. Poor Arthur! I wish he possessed such great gifts as confers immortality, for the poor fellow truly loves me; and he is one of the most amiable creatures in the world. But he must not read my heart now: it would wound him too severely. No, I must

console him for his failure, and let him dream of success in his love yet a little longer. On reflection, I do believe I like him too well to suffer him to break my bonds just yet."

With this thought, she decked her lips in smiles, and half-veiled her splendid eyes beneath their long lashes, as Malone drew near her, with a weight like that of death pressing upon his heart. She read his sufferings in the ashy paleness of his cheeks, in his bloodless lips, and the dark circles beneath his heavy eyes; and with a fascination all her own, she placed her hand upon his throbbing brow, and whispered such words as his fainting heart had not hoped to hear again from her lips. "Oh, truth! where was thy divine influence in that hour? Alas! without thee, what are beauty, fascination, and power, to the soul of woman?"

From that hour Arthur was more completely enthralled than before. Disappointed in his ambitious aspirations, love was all that remained to him; and could this coquettish girl have looked into his heart, she would have shrunk back appalled at the torrent of impetuous affection which she could neither understand nor return.

During the lapse of this time, the correspondence between the friends had not slackened, though insensibly to himself, that of Malone became more reserved in its character. He rarely spoke of his betrothed, and at times there was a tone of sadness pervading his communications, which touched the warm friend to whom they were addressed.

These two young men had not merely been friends in name. The self-sustained and energetic Grafton had been as a tower of strength to the more impressible and volatile nature of Arthur; and that strong attachment which illustrates the attraction of contrast, had sprung up between them. Grafton's course had been steadily onward, and his noble talents, and fine energies soon opened for themselves a brilliant prospect of future success in his native town. He had never met with Miss Cleveland, though he was quite familiar with her reputation. So convinced was he in his own mind, that the ultimate result of Malone's suit would be disappointment to his long-cherished hopes, that he had no desire to behold

the beauty which had enthralled him so completely, that the manly independence he had once possessed, seemed utterly bowed before the spell.

Malone had visited him several times, but seldom spoke of Miss Cleveland, and Grafton possessed too much delicacy to press a subject which he felt to be painful. When he heard of his failure as a public speaker, though pained at the mortification to one so sensitive as he knew Arthur to be, he felt that some good might grow out of it; for his ultimate success with the fair Florida would be at once decided. It was with true gratification that he received a letter from Malone, written in somewhat of his former buoyancy of style, in which he claimed from Grafton the fulfillment of a promise long since made, to attend him in the capacity of groomsman on the occasion of his marriage.

"In two more months," he wrote, "Florida will be able to unite her fate with mine under the conditions of her aunt's will; and I shall not permit a longer delay to take place. I have borne too long already that sickness of the heart which no language can portray, and she owes me a reparation that should not be tardily granted. After all, my dear friend, I have been foolish to torment myself, as I often have done—for I have every assurance that Florida loves me sincerely. In a recent and bitter trial, she proved herself an angel of goodness, and I can never forget her charming words of consolation. They fell upon my soul with a soothing power which seemed to hush this war of feeling in my tortured breast. I have discovered that a man may be happy without being great. In the enthusiasm of youth, I demanded too much of life. To one man it offers fame, to another happiness: he is wise who prefers the enjoyment of existence to the hollow and unsubstantial praises of the million. You see I am becoming a philosopher."

Grafton wrote his congratulations on the happy prospect before him, and set out in fine spirits on a professional tour which would fully occupy him until the proposed time elapsed.

CHAPTER IV.

On the evening Florida Cleveland completed her twentieth year, a magnificent festival was given at her father's mansion, and Malone was warmly congratulated on the event which placed his betrothed in possession of a fine property.

The smile with which he listened had something of scorn in it, as he compared the worldly wisdom of his friends with the warm disinterested attachment which glowed in his own heart. Florida herself, in his estimation, was of more value than the wealth of the Indies; the affectionate, the true, the pure-hearted woman was the object of his pursuit; and not the well-endowed heiress.

Before the arrival of the company, Mr. Cleveland stood alone in his brilliantly lighted saloon; suddenly his daughter glided before him in all the triumph of a successful toilet, with all the brilliant gems glittering upon her brow and bosom which had been his own gift upon that day.

With a smile of conscious beauty, she made a few graceful steps, and said,

"Am I *belle comme ange* 'cher, papa? for I am bent on conquest to-night."

He gazed on her with the pride of the man, united with the tenderness of the father, as he replied,

"Florida, you are indeed very lovely; and I marvel not at the admiration you elicit. But remember, dearest, that beauty does not last forever. Methinks it is high time to settle your future destiny. I should not like my daughter to illustrate the old fable of going through the canebrake."

Florida laughed gayly as she tripped to a mirror which reflected the whole of her dazzling figure, and sang a stanza from "I'm o'er young to marry yet."

Mr. Cleveland shook his head gravely.

"You complete your twentieth year this evening; not at all too young, believe me. You are by two years your mother's senior when she became my wife. Appropos to your settlement in life, Arthur Malone has been with me this evening, urging me to use my influence with you to induce you to name an early day for your union. You have kept him

dancing attendance on you for three years; and, on my conscience, I believe if you have deceived him, it will be the death of him."

A shadow passed over the bright face of Florida, and she became slightly pale, but she answered in a mocking tone,

"Men have died, and worms have eat them, but not for love. My dear father, do you really wish to see me the wife of Arthur Malone?"

"Why not? He is young, rich, highly cultivated, passionately in love with you. What more can you desire?"

"I am capricious, perhaps, but I have long since made up my mind not to marry any man to whom nature has denied the gift of that eloquence which sways all things by the magic of words. Oh, such a gift! being as I have imagined, I could worship! I am called a coquette, but it is because the deeper cords of my soul have never been touched by the homage offered me, that I play so poor a part. I am beautiful, rich, and by no means stupid; therefore I accept the adulation offered me as queen accepts the homage which is due to her position. I am afraid I have been to blame with Arthur, but then the poor fellow looked so forlorn if I frowned, or exhibited the least symptom of coldness, that my heart always relented."

"Am I to understand, Miss Cleveland, that you have merely been a consummate actress in all the love passages between you?" asked her father, with unusual sternness.

Florida threw her arms coaxingly around his neck, and kissed him tenderly.

"Do not look so coldly upon me on this day above all others, dearest father; and I promise you to be very good in the future. I believe I did once endeavor to make Arthur understand that friendship is the only feeling I cherished for him, but his emotion frightened me from my purpose. After all, I believe I should have married him, but for that unlucky failure."

"Pooh!—nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Cleveland, softening, in spite of his effort to look stern. "Many a man has met with as bad luck in the beginning, and ended by becoming distinguished at last. What is it we read about

that old Greek, who was so great a man? the one that ranted up and down the sea shore with pebbles in his mouth—a strange way to make a man's speech clear, in my opinion."

"I am afraid that Mr. Malone possesses little of the spirit of perseverance which made Demosthenes distinguished," replied the lady, with a smile. "Once for all, my dear father, I dare not accept him. My nature is imperious and haughty; I must respect the man to whom I give my hand, or there would be little peace in our household I, am afraid."

"Florida," said her father, seriously, "all these objections should have been thought of before, and candidly stated to Arthur Malone. You have not acted by him with that truth and ingenuousness which I trusted would not fail you there, although I know you have trifled with others. I have always desired to claim Malone as my son, as you well know; and until this evening, I have considered your future destiny as settled. His devotion, his susceptibility of temperament, should have appealed to your better feelings; and I am afraid that the result, to him, of this terrible disappointment, will fill your mind with remorse. Is your determination not to accept him irrevocable?"

"It is," replied Florida, firmly. "I do not love him."

"Then God help him, for he has trusted implicitly in your faith. I can not force you to marry against your inclinations; but the only atonement now in your power I command you to make. As you value my affection, reveal the truth to Arthur the next time he names the subject to you. Let him know positively what he has to depend on."

"You shall be obeyed, dear sir; for such is now my own wish," she replied, as she turned from her father, to welcome some of her expected guests.

Florida Cleveland felt indeed that she dared not unite her fate with that of Malone. Heartless as her conduct was, she knew that her character was not all artificial; that there was an under-current of feeling which had been repressed and outraged, by the artificial training she had received, but never destroyed; and it foretold woe to that haughty spirit and

impulsive temper, if she linked her fate with that of one who held not over her the sweet control of affection. She liked Arthur Malone; had been flattered by his devotion, and interested by his high-toned character; but love had never even cast the shadow of his rainbow wings over her spirit.

The evening passed in the enjoyment of song and dance, and the heart of Malone beat high with hope and happiness. There was an unconscious softness in the glance of Florida whenever she addressed him, for she felt nervous and sorrowful when she reflected on the blow she was about to strike upon that true heart which had loved her so long and fervently. She dared not disobey the command of her father, even if Arthur would have permitted himself longer to be trifled with; for fondly as Mr. Cleveland indulged her, she knew that on some subjects he was inflexible. Beside, she feared to continue her heartless course toward Malone, and with a heavy weight on her spirits acknowledged that the dreaded interview must come; and she must stand unvailed in all her duplicity, before the noble and true heart she had so long deluded with false hopes.

At length the last guest departed, and with a sigh Florida turned from the lighted rooms, and stepped from a French window which opened on a terraced walk, on which a flood of soft light was poured from a full, unclouded moon. She paused a moment, and then quickly descended a flight of stone steps which led into the garden. After threading a wilderness of shrubbery, she emerged into an open space sheltered by a single willow tree, beneath whose shade a rustic fountain cast its crystal waters high in the air. Florida stooped toward the moss-covered brim, caught a few drops of the silvery spray in her hand, and applied them to her throbbing brow.

"Thank Heaven!" she murmured, "I have escaped that dreaded interview for this night. I feared, from what Arthur said, he would remain until the last one, and claim from me the renewal of the pledge I once so madly gave him. Oh, how my poor head aches!"

"You are suffering, dearest Florida," said a voice close beside her, which drove the crimson flush from her cheek, and left her cold

and white as marble. She shuddered, although she lightly answered—

"Suffering—oh no, it is nothing. My brain only throbs from over-excitement; but I am afraid you will think me sadly romantic, Mr. Malone. Pray, let us return to the house; I merely fancied that bathing my brow in this transparent water would allay the dull feeling of pain I have been enduring for several hours."

She turned as it to leave the spot, but Arthur took her hand, and drew her gently but firmly back.

"I will not detain you many moments, Florida; but I have that to say which must be spoken now. Before we leave this place I must learn my fate: I have been too long in uncertainty; if you really intend to accept my hand, name the day which shall witness our union."

Florida saw that there was no escape, and, with a slight shudder, she leaned against the huge trunk of the tree, as if seeking to conceal beneath its shadow the expression of her features from her agitated companion. He continued speaking rapidly and earnestly for some moments. At first his voice was tremulous with emotion, but he gradually regained his self-control, and never was a more eloquent or manly appeal made to the heart of woman. That of the vain coquette grew faint and sick, as she listened to the glowing expression of hopes her own conduct had inspired, and she trembled with fear.

Malone at length paused, and Florida felt herself compelled to speak—to utter the words which would forever dethrone the shrined divinity of a noble heart—to crush the sanguine spirit with the avowal that vanity, not love, had lured him on in the deceitful pursuit of that vainest of all phantoms, a coquette's affections.

Her words were broken and unconnected, and Arthur was compelled to bend down his head to catch their meaning. At first he listened incredulously; but as the truth slowly dawned on him—as he fully realized that he had been but the sport, the victim of the insatiate vanity of the being he had considered as but little beneath the angels of heaven, his veins felt as if a current of ice flowed through

them, while his brain seemed on fire. His slight frame shook with the tempest of passionate despair which raged through his soul.

There was a pause of such length that the excited Florida thought it would never end. She dared not look upon him; for she feared to meet the accusing glance of that eye which had lately expressed such different feelings toward her.

Malone was struggling for the mastery over his bitter emotions, that he might speak in an unflinching voice; and when the first tones of his reply reached her ears, so deep, so unnaturally calm were they, that she startled at the sound.

"Florida Cleveland, may God forgive you for trifling with feelings whose depths you are incapable of understanding. Heartless yourself, you can not measure the anguish you have this night inflicted on me. How madly—how inexpressively I have loved you, words would be powerless to tell: they would now be useless. But should you ever love—should you ever lavish what soul you possess on one being, until you feel that hope, happiness, life itself, are centered in that one object, then, and not till then, can you know the irremediable wrong you have inflicted upon me. Till that hour arrives, I leave you to pursue your career of conquest; but should such knowledge ever come to your heart, and, beautiful as you are, you should love in vain, then think of the stricken soul whose dearest hopes you have laid in ruins—then may you be able to appreciate the despairing anguish with which I have listened to your words to-night."

He turned, and strode away with rapid steps, without one backward glance toward that beauty which had been the dream of his life, and its curse. Death was in his heart, but Florida knew it not, and with a deep sigh, as if a heavy weight was raised from her mind, she retraced her steps toward the house.

Miss Cleveland reflected, with surprise, on the calmness with which Malone had received his dismissal, and congratulated himself on the termination of an unpleasant task. She did not know that there is suffering so acute, so overwhelming, that for a brief space the soul is stunned by the severity of the blow which has been dealt upon it; but it is only to awake

from this apparent torpor to a sense of despairing desolation for which there is no hope, no light.

The lip, in after years, may curl in scorn, over the memory of such suffering, but no creature of deep and high-toned sensibility, who has experienced it, can feel the mockery they assume. The anguish, when felt, was as deep and real as the human soul may endure, and the recollection of it, even to the world-hardened spirit, is not without a pang.

Florida could not sleep, and she seated herself beside a window in her apartment which looked toward the garden, and watched the effect of the moonlight upon the shadowy masses of verdure before her, while her mind retraced again and again the emotions of the late interview with Arthur. Several times she thought she saw a figure rapidly traversing the walks, but each time it vanished so swiftly that she concluded she must have been deceived. It was near dawn when she sought her pillow, and it was late on the following morning before she awoke from her feverish and unrefreshing slumbers.

As she descended to her late breakfast, Miss Cleveland heard her father in earnest conversation with some one at the hall door. She lingered a moment to ascertain who it was, but recognizing the voice of the most popular physician in the city, she was passing on when his words arrested her steps.

"I have just left poor Arthur Malone raving in the delirium of a brain fever," he said. "He spent the latter portion of last night in the open air, and this morning returned home so ill that I was summoned immediately."

"Do you consider him in much danger?" asked Mr. Cleveland, with interest.

"The attack was so sudden and violent, that I greatly fear the result. I am compelled to make a call in the country, but I shall return immediately, and remain with him until the case is decided."

The physician rode on at a rapid pace, and Mr. Cleveland heard a heavy fall. He turned, and found his daughter lying senseless at his feet.

He raised her tenderly, and bore her into the breakfast-room. In a few moments she

revived, and starting from his sustaining arm, she exclaimed,

"Oh, father, if Arthur dies, I shall feel myself branded before earth and Heaven as his destroyer. Last night we met beside the fountain; he referred to his hopes, and I obeyed you. I made him understand that I could not accept him; and he seemed so much calmer than I expected, that I—stupid, blind, heartless that I was—I congratulated myself on being so easily released from his attentions. And he all the time was suffering martyrdom. Oh, if this results in his death, I shall never know happiness again—and wretch that I am, I do not deserve it."

Mr. Cleveland made every effort to calm her violent agitation, but without effect, and we will leave her to her too tardily awakened remorse, and seek the darkened room, where the watch of affection hold its vigils over the beloved and early doomed.

CHAPTER V.

ARTHUR Malone had passed the remainder of the night in wandering in those grounds, every spot of which was hallowed by some cherished memory that pressed the shattered links of the past with a keener anguish into his lacerated heart. How deeply he had loved the false and beautiful syren, only the young, passionate, keenly-feeling heart can appreciate. Enthusiast in all things, in love he had been a devotee. His fancy had pictured a vision of the future, colored with all the hues of heaven; and at the moment his heart, in the full flush of hope and happiness, believed it about to be realized, the glittering *chateau en Espagne* faded before him, and he beheld the idol he had placed within it, no more as a divinity, but as a mocking fiend, who poured upon his burning brain and crushed affections the lava flood of disappointment, disdain, and despair.

The wild wanderings of that night—the excitement akin to madness which burned in his veins, wrought terrible effects in the course of a few hours. The progress of disease in a southern climate is so rapid, that when Ma-

lone felt his body sinking beneath his sufferings, and turned his faltering steps toward his own abode, he was already struggling in the paroxysms of a fatal attack of fever.

He was fortunately met by his own servant, who, alarmed at his protracted absence, had been several hours in search of him. He was instantly conveyed home, and medical assistance summoned. While Arthur yet retained sufficient command of his mind to act for himself, he caused a lawyer to be sent for, and dictated to him a brief will conveying the bulk of his property to his friend Grafton. With difficulty he wrote a line to that beloved brother of his soul, summoning him to his bedside.

When this letter reached Grafton, he had just returned from a wearisome journey, and he had availed himself of his first hour of leisure to visit Anna Wallace, who, for several months, had been his betrothed bride. They were enjoying a delightful ramble in the picturesque country around her residence, when Grafton's servant rode up with a letter directed in a wavering hand, which he recognized as resembling Malone's. It was marked "immediate," and he grew pale as he hastily tore open the envelope and glanced at the few words it contained:

"Come to me, Henry, for I am dying a disappointed and deceived man."

Grafton crushed the letter in his strong grasp, and said,

"Just as I expected—she has played him false at last. Oh, Arthur, my brother, if you die the victim of this heartless girl, I will seek to punish her fatal levity as it deserves."

Turning to his servant, he bade him hurry back, and have every thing in readiness for an immediate journey, by the time he returned to town. The man galloped away, and Grafton turned his rigid face toward the young girl, who clung apprehensively to his arm.

"What is it, Henry?" she asked. "Why are you so deeply moved?"

"Anna, my first friend—my dearest one, is lying at the point of death, a victim to a too great sensibility, and the consummate treachery of a woman he believed an angel; of her

he loved with all the strength of his noble and affectionate spirit. It is three years since she betrothed herself to him, and now she has cast him off."

"It is then Mr. Malone who has summoned you from me. He may recover, dear Harry—do not yield to your fears at once."

"God grant that he may be restored, Anna; but if he should not, tell me, pure and genuine womanly spirit, tell me what retribution that girl deserves, who has been the means of destroying such a man?"

Anna looked into his pale face while he spoke, and she shuddered at its expression.

"Will it not be sufficient punishment to feel that she has been the cause of so fatal an event?" she softly asked.

"If she can be supposed to retain the delicate susceptibility which you possess, my dear Anna; but in the mind of this worldly girl, sorrow and remorse will soon be swallowed up in the vortex of folly and vanity, in which she habitually exists. No—the poisoned chalice which she has held to Arthur's lips, must be returned to her own."

"What can you mean, Henry?" inquired his betrothed, apprehensively.

"If my friend dies, to avenge him, even on a woman," said Grafton, with an expression of such gloomy determination as awed his trembling companion.

"How can such a thing be accomplished?"

"It will be time enough to ascertain the means when the fate of Arthur is decided. Under any circumstances, Anna, you feel the assurance that my heart is only yours; and so soon as I am in a situation to claim you as my bride, my hand will also be yours. You have as perfect trust in my faith as I have in your affection?"

"Assuredly—yes Harry—that has long been understood."

"It is well. Continue to trust me, love, is all I ask. I may have a painful duty to perform, but let it not cast a shade over our faith in each other. I will write," he continued, as he sprang upon his horse, and waved a last adieu to his betrothed.

He reached Charleston on the second day from his departure, and in a perfect fever of

impatience and apprehension, drove at once to the residence of Malone. The servant who received him, informed him that life yet lingered, but no hope of his master's recovery was entertained. No hope! stern sentence which conveys all of sorrow that the human heart may know!

With light and cautious steps, Grafton entered the room in which reposed the pale and wasted form, that so lately was buoyant with youth, health, and the promise of a useful future. A faint gleam of intelligence flitted over the wan features as Grafton bent over him, and he believed that he was recognized; but immediately his mind again became clouded, and he raved of the past. One image seemed ever before him—one name dwelt on his fevered lips, and Grafton listened to his muttered sentences until he fully understood the full extent of the perfidy of which he had been the victim. His heart grew hard toward her whose unprincipled conduct had caused such suffering, and the half-formed purpose of his soul gained consistency as he sat in that darkened room and watched the passing away of one of the truest and tenderest of human spirits.

With a heart filled with the bitterness of grief, Grafton beheld the last flicker of the expiring taper—the last quiver of the lip, whose latest articulate sound was the name of Florida Cleveland. "He died and made no sign" of recognition, and in the solemn stillness of the death-chamber, Grafton knelt beside the couch, and placing his hand upon the pulseless heart which once had beat so wildly, he made a vow which he religiously fulfilled.

On the following morning he wrote to Anna Wallace.

MY BELOVED ANNA,—This letter comes to inform you that all is over, and the man I have loved with an affection passing that of brotherhood, is no more. I have now no other friend in the true sense of that sacred word, save yourself.

A few more hours, and Arthur will have been consigned to his native dust; and I shall immediately return to you. How deeply this unexpected event has affected me, I can not express; I have so long regarded Malone as a very dear younger brother, whose fate I was

bound to watch over, that I bestowed upon him even warmer affection than such near relatives often feel for each other, and I will confess to you, my Anna, that a fountain of bitterness is stirred within my soul, when I think of him thus cut off in the flower of his youth.

You do not know the wiles which so long held him captive—the fascinating semblance of truth which beguiled him into such blind and utter devotion to one unworthy of him—but I do, and but for my knowledge of your truth and simplicity of character, I believe I should forever abjure all association with that sex which has produced so false and fair a piece of duplicity as this syren who held my poor friend captive. I hear that she is also ill, but it is only occasioned by a passing feeling of remorse. She will recover; she will again go forth to dazzle and fascinate a giddy world, forgetful of that narrow spot where rests a noble heart, broken through her unwomanly treachery.

And now, Anna, comes my confession. You are as a second self to me, my beloved, and therefore, I shrink not from revealing to you the settled purpose of my soul. You know me well; you know that where I have made a determination, it is inflexible; and however your gentle nature may condemn, you will feel the uselessness of remonstrance.

I love you, dearest, more tenderly, more confidently than on that summer eve when we plighted our faith to each other, and I feel how sacred such a vow should be held. Yet, Anna, I am about to act toward another, all the love I feel for you. I fancy I see you start and grow pale, yet be reassured—resume your trust in my honor, for it will only be acting.

I have a spark of vindictiveness in my nature, which I have never been able entirely to repress: "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," seems to me at times to be strict justice. It was this which led me to kneel beside my friend and vow that I would return to his false mistress the bitter pang of unrequited love. If she has a human heart, I will so wind myself within it, that all its love shall be mine; and then—oh, triumph! I will cast back the affection so vainly lavished, and

bid her remember my poor lost Arthur. I thank Heaven that I possess those very qualities most highly valued by a vain, worldly woman. I will study her character—I will win her confidence, will make myself necessary to her happiness, and then I will reveal to her the motives which moved my soul to put on the semblance of affection to attain revenge.

Say not a word, Anna, to move me from my settled purpose, for this girl deserves all I can inflict on her. Think how far less intense will her sufferings be, than those which had power to deal a mortal blow to my unhappy friend.

WRITTEN A DAY LATER.

Arthur is in his grave, and I am alone in that desolate room which his presence has so often brightened. If these walls could speak, what hopes, what raptures, what despair, would echo from their cold surface! I place myself upon his favorite chair, and imagine them all. I steep my spirit in the reveries of a successful and a blighted affection, and a stern sense of the sacred duty I owe to him comes upon my soul.

My sombre fancies were interrupted by the entrance of the lawyer, who drew up Arthur's will, and to my great surprise, he informs me that I am almost the sole legatee of his handsome fortune. I had some scruples about accepting such a bequest, but Mr. — informs me that Malone had no near relatives, and those who might be benefitted as heirs at law, are already in possession of wealth. At all events, I shall defer taking possession of this property until a year has expired. That time will suffice to accomplish my vow, and then, my Anna, I am thine alone.

Arthur bequeathed to Miss Cleveland a velvet bound volume, clasped with gems, in which are recorded all the poetic conceits and tender fancies of a man madly in love. Can she read it without tears of blood? But she will not read it. She will either destroy it, or place it where her eye will never rest upon it. She dare not evoke the phantoms of the past, which the sight of this book would bring before her.

Adieu, my Anna; in a few more days I shall be with you. HENRY GRAFTON.

CHAPTER VI.

It was long before Florida Cleveland recovered from the unexpected blow of Arthur Malone's death. Her health and spirits both suffered severely, and her father removed her from the scenes which, to her morbid fancy, brought his image before her at every turn. She spent the following winter in a gay northern capital, and change of scene and new companionship effaced from her mind, in a measure, the memories from which she sedulously endeavored to escape.

It was the early summer-time when we again bring her before the reader. The morning was delightful; a soft wind stirred the leaves of the old trees, and gave motion to the fleecy clouds which spread their gossamer wings between earth and sky, softening without obscuring the brilliant sunshine. The windows of a spacious room opened on a lawn, shaded by forest trees, which sloped toward a sparkling stream dancing by, its waters flashing back the sunbeams, or sweeping with soft murmurs beneath the golden willows that fringed its banks.

The draperies of the windows were drawn back, and gushes of sunlight which the waving branches of the trees admitted ever and anon into the room, made a cheerful mosaic of light and shade upon the delicate Brussels carpet which covered the floor.

Near one of the windows, in a luxurious chair, sat Florida Cleveland; her head thrown back, and her large, bright eyes following the shifting clouds as they floated by; her fancy plunged in one of those dream-like reveries which, on such a morning, are so delightful. A book lay at her feet, and the hand which had held it, hung listlessly over the arm of her chair. There was just enough of the languor consequent on ill health apparent in her appearance, to soften the brilliancy of her beauty, without destroying its effect: and nothing could have been more becoming than the white muslin morning-dress, with its trimming of exquisite lace relieved by ribbons of a delicate rose color.

Florida had not quite forgotten Arthur Malone, but she was in a fair way of doing so. Her present residence was within a short dis-

tance of a gay city, and a lady of her pretensions could not fail to be followed, and her love of admiration gratified by the attentions she received. Day by day, vanity resumed a portion of its former despotic sway over her; and the sorrow that should have brought forth better fruit, was passing from her mind, as a shadow from the face of a mirror.

On the previous evening, Miss Cleveland had attended a musical soiree, and had there been introduced to a stranger, whose appearance and manners exerted a singular influence on her imagination. She was recalling his conversation, so brilliant and picturesque, in comparison with that of others; and the full and flexible tones of his pleasing voice seemed yet ringing in her ears; she muttered,

"'Tis passing strange, that my fancy should thus be impressed with the appearance of this stranger. Grafton—Grafton, that name sounds very familiar: where could I have heard it?"

A sudden paleness overspread her features, and she buried her face in her hands, as the painful consciousness came to her mind, that Arthur Malone's voice had first uttered that name in her presence. Yes, such was the name of his dearest friend; therefore this could not be the same person. The friend of Malone could never be likely to seek an acquaintance with her. After a few moments, she impatiently added,

"Why should my mind thus pertinaciously dwell upon the image of this sombre-looking man, with his mourning dress, and mournful air? I have seen many others as noble in appearance, yet his face recalls some undefinable association. I am certain I have never met with him before last evening, yet I seem to have known him throughout my whole life."

Her musings were interrupted by the announcement of two gentlemen, and a vivid blush mounted to the temples of Miss Cleveland, as the object of her thoughts entered.

"We have called at an unfashionably early hour," said the young man who accompanied him, "but Miss Cleveland will excuse us when she learns that my stay in this charming place is limited to a few more hours; and I could not depart without paying my farewell respects to her. My friend Grafton embraced the opportunity of calling before the daily

worshippers approach the shrine of their divinity."

Florida bowed, and Grafton addressed her with that air of deference and chivalrous respect which is peculiarly acceptable to a woman of an imperious and exacting temper. She listened with charmed attention, and no longer wondered that she was so completely enthralled by the graceful eloquence which invested the most common-place topic with an interest they had never before possessed.

It was not singular that Miss Cleveland's fancy should have been haunted by that noble face, for Grafton was a man who could not be passed over by the most careless observer. In a crowd he would have been distinguished for extraordinary elegance of appearance, and for that lofty and commanding expression which nature sometimes stamps upon her favorite children. These advantages, aided by a rich and full-toned voice, which at will could soften into tenderness, utter the most cutting sarcasms, or swell in sonorous periods as he denounced treachery or meanness, rendered him a most attractive companion to all persons capable of appreciating his rare gifts. A highly accomplished education had given full development to the powers of a vigorous intellect; and Grafton felt within his own soul a strength of purpose, which would enable him to accomplish whatever he undertook.

He had vowed to win the love of Florida Cleveland, and he felt as secure of final success, as if it were already within his grasp. Since the death of Malone, he had sedulously followed the steps of Florida. He had watched her at a distance with the keenest interest, until every weakness of her nature, every impulse of her wayward soul, had been thoroughly analyzed; and when perfectly acquainted with the surest avenues to her favor, he presented himself before her, with the assurance in his own mind of entire success in his proposed object.

He wore deep mourning, and around one of his arms a badge of black crape was always fastened. At moments, even amid the gayest conversation, there was a sadness and pre-occupation of manner, which deeply impressed so imaginative a person as Miss Cleveland.

The conversation during this first call, turned on the party of the previous evening, and Grafton showed that he was a good musician by his judicious criticisms on the performance. Florida at length said,

"I do not think we ever can have met until last night, Mr. Grafton, and yet it seems to me that I must have seen your face before."

Grafton glanced at his companion, and seeing that he was absorbed in a portfolio of drawings, he said, in a low, but studiously respectful tone,

"It is not strange, Miss Cleveland, that a person who has followed your footsteps for months past, as the shadow follows the sun, should have attracted a vague occasional observation. It is my happiness to know that I have not been entirely unnoticed amid the crowd of your distant worshipers. I frankly tell you that I have been unwillingly drawn within the magic circle of your attractions; for she who captivates all who approach her, must look with disdain upon her conquests. But you know 'there is a destiny which shapes our ends,' and I bow before it."

Florida blushed, and repeated,

"Disdain—oh, no, you misjudge me cruelly. Adulation from the heartless, the mercenary I may disdain; but the homage of truth, genius, nobility of soul, is the most valued incense which can be offered at woman's shrine. I see, Mr. Grafton, that you have yielded to the common impression that I am a mere coquette. One gifted with your powers of observation, should be able to penetrate beneath the artificial surface which a worldly education and fashionable associations have in a measure forced upon me, and behold the true woman's nature beneath. I seem doomed to hear the voice of flattery alone, while my heart yearns to respond to that of sincere affection."

Grafton felt that her eye was fixed on him, as she uttered these words, and for an instant he dared not look up. Too much of the thoughts that stirred within his soul, would have been read in his own speaking orbs. He asked,

"Does Miss Cleveland judge my sex so harshly as to assert that *all* who have proffered

love to her, were equally destitute of sincerity? She is strangely gifted with humility, if such is really her opinion."

A shadow passed over the expressive face on which his full gaze was now fixed.

"Oh, no—I have been deeply, truly loved. I know and feel that I have *once* been the object of sincere affection; but unfortunately, the one who offered that love, was a being before whom my own spirit could not yield. Heartless as you may think me, I know that I can bestow no ordinary devotion on him who comes up to my ideal standard, and to no other will my proud heart yield itself captive."

"But what human being can hope to realize the dream of an imaginative woman?"

"Oh, I am far from expecting perfection. A person noble looking, rather than beautiful; with that expression of command which Heaven bestows alone on the gifted in mind. He must possess eloquence; yes, my soul could bow in homage to him who can clothe his aspirations 'in words that burn,' to complete the charm, he must have a rich and flexible voice. Behold my ideal. The love of such a being could make a heaven upon earth."

"And yet you speak of mere externals," said Grafton, his lips slightly curling as he listened to this portrait of himself, and as he glanced at the fair flatterer, the vivid blush which mantled her cheek was all that saved her from his utter and irremediable contempt.

"Such a man as you have portrayed, may be capable of the darkest treachery—the most cruel oppression. Miss Cleveland has not invested the hero of her imagination with a single noble principle, or elevated feeling."

"Ah, I have a theory of my own, that nobleness of outward appearance indicates elevation of soul. Of course I wished you to understand that he must possess all those attributes."

Grafton thought as he looked at her,

"Can this girl fancy that any man superior to the fools and coxcombs, who daily surround her, is to be won by such flattery?"

But Florida knew well that all persons are accessible to praise, especially from the lips of a beautiful and admired woman, and she felt that the secret of much of her power over

others, lay neither in the beauty of her person nor in the cultivated mind, but in the tact with which she could adapt herself to the various shades of character with which she came in contact. A few adroit words of flattery, brightened the dull, encouraged the timid to exert their best powers for the amusement of her who could so justly appreciate them; and had she paused there, the voice of censure would have been unheard.

Grafton, with all his noble gifts, was not entirely superior to this weakness, and had not his whole heart been devoted to his betrothed, he might, in the ensuing weeks of daily association with the fair Florida, have been won to forget his vow, and suffer the past to be buried in oblivion, while he left her to the retribution of Heaven. But he loved Anna Wallace exclusively, and all the fascinations of the practiced coquette only gave firmness to his determination to accomplish his vow.

CHAPTER VII.

We can not trace step by step the progress Grafton made in winning the affections of the spoiled beauty. His lofty and noble nature was dimmed by this single stain: a desire for vengeance for all wrong committed against himself, or those he loved. For months he had nursed this purpose, until it had become a feverish passion, which he must accomplish, cost what it would to himself or his victim.

He followed her step by step—he wound himself into her confidence; he became her friend, her adviser; and with strange, wild joy, he saw this imperious girl turn from the smiles that wooed, to listen to the voice which often condemned. He felt that the net he had thrown around her was gradually narrowing its limits; and the imperious heart had at last been aroused from its indifference, to pour its tide of vivid passions and newly-awakened feelings on a spirit that to her was marble.

If he ever faltered in his course, the remembrance of the bright spirit crushed, the young head so early laid in the dust, through her agency, again brought back to his soul all

the stern determination of that solemn hour in which his vow was uttered.

Had one feeling of remorse appeared to darken the mind of Florida, he might have felt a momentary relenting; but as water closes over its prey, leaving no trace on its placid surface, so had the memory of that fatal event passed from her mind. In contemplating the brilliant future which seemed to spread before her, she forgot her remorse, her fatal levity, and thought alone of her own great happiness in being the chosen one of so noble a being as she considered Henry Grafton.

When he beheld her gay, sportive, flattered by the homage of others, his resolution never to depart from his purpose hardened into sternness. While these conflicting feelings swayed his mind, his spirits were at times deeply depressed, and his manner so variable, that Florida knew not how to account for his sudden mutations from grave to gay; but to her, there was a charm even in this seeming waywardness. It was something new to her to meet with one who professed to love her, yet who would not become a slave to her every caprice.

At length, Mr. Cleveland decided on returning to his own southern home. His daughter's health was perfectly restored; and her spirits seemed gayier than ever. With him, Grafton was also a favorite, though he did little to commend himself to the good graces of the old gentleman. He had no suspicion of the identity between Henry Grafton, the wooer of his daughter, and that Grafton who had been the bosom friend of Malone; for it had chanced that during Arthur's brief illness, and for the few days subsequent to his death, Mr. Cleveland had been too much occupied in watching over the sick couch of his own daughter, to enter the house of Malone. Knowing too well the cause of his illness, much as he regretted it, he shrank from beholding the ruin wrought by one so dear to him as his child, and he contented himself with sending to inquire of the progress of his disease.

On the evening before their departure, Grafton joined a gay circle, of which Florida was the center; but no effort seemed to possess power to draw him from the gloomy ab-

straction into which he was plunged. Miss Cleveland left the giddy crowd, and devoted herself to him during the remainder of the evening; but even her society seemed to have no power to charm him from his melancholy. Suddenly she touched the piece of crape which encircled his arm, and said,

"Why do you always wear black? and for whom is this mourning badge borne?"

"It is worn for one I dearly love, and until a vow I have made is fulfilled, I may not remove it."

"How romantic! It reminds me of the knights of olden time. To what does your vow relate? You are not a Catholic, and wear this sombre pendant as a penance?"

"No—it is a darker record—a vow of vengeance which must be fulfilled."

"Of vengeance!" repeated Florida, growing pale with apprehension.

"Fear not for me," said he, in a low and unnaturally mild tone. "Neither my life nor my happiness are involved in the issue."

"Thank Heaven!" said Miss Cleveland, sighing deeply, as if a heavy weight was raised from her heart—"then you will not be exposed to any danger. What magic have you used to subdue my proud, vain heart, until I tremble at the idea of danger menacing you? She who has never known fear for herself, now fears for one who, a few short months since, was unknown to her."

"And do you really love me thus?" asked Grafton, earnestly.

"Ah, I will not tell you, for I have read that men but tyrannize over those who love them 'not wisely, but too well.'"

For an instant, Grafton was softened, and he gazed admiringly on the face to which awakened sensibility added a new and more winning charm; but the dark record of the past came unbidden to his mind—the pale shadow of Arthur Malone seemed to glide between them, and he turned away.

"You are in one of your moody humors, this evening," said Miss Cleveland. "I will charm the evil spirit to rest, as David did that of Saul."

She touched the cords of her harp lightly, and played a gay triumphant air. The allu-

sion was unlucky, for Grafton recalled a portion of the same history.

"And the love of David and Jonathan was passing the love of woman," he muttered.

Florida overheard him, and she abruptly arose.

"No love can pass the love of woman," she earnestly said. "Although we read it in the sacred book, I fearlessly say that no love can be so deep, so enduring, so comprehensive as that of woman. We find her as the inspired poetess has said, 'watching the pale stars out by the bed of pain;' we find her not in the triumphal procession, binding the laurel wreath upon the brow of the victor; but in the sacred privacy of domestic life, giving sympathy to the sorrowing, smiles to the gay, assistance to the needy; among all nations, and in all climes, the presiding deity of the household gods. You look surprised to hear such eulogy upon my sex from one of the most artificial among them, but since I have loved, I only begin to understand the true destiny of woman. I have heretofore been as one in an enchanted palace, guarded by some malignant fairy, and forced by her malign influence to turn from the good and true, to the glittering but false and unsatisfying pleasures of life. You were the good genius that broke the spell."

"And do you really regard me as your good genius?" asked Grafton, abruptly. "Oh, could I flatter myself that to your fancy I have indeed been really such! Florida Cleveland, could I believe that you love me as I know you to be capable of loving, the dearest wish of my soul would be accomplished. I have thirsted for your love—I have asked it as the most valued boon fate can now bestow upon me, and I would give much to know that it is truly mine. You have said as much to others as you now say to me, and while your lips spoke of faith and truth, your heart was wrapped in the mantle of vanity and gratified pride. Oh, would that I dare believe your assurance!"

Florida turned away to conceal the tears that gushed from her eyes.

"I have merited this from others, but not from you. It wounds me to the soul to be doubted by you."

CHAPTER VIII.

FLORIDA CLEVELAND returned to her southern home a less gay, but a far happier woman than in days of yore. Grafton was to follow her immediately, and then she supposed he would press her to name the day for their union. That he had never yet spoken of their marriage surprised her, but she did not once dream of the true position they occupied toward each other. She awaited his arrival with an impatience that but added strength to the love she cherished for him.

In his presence she seemed endowed with a new existence. The full powers of her heart and mind were brought into action, and bright hopes and true aspirations sprang into being beneath the sunshine of his smile. She said to her own soul,

"If Henry had been my first lover, I should have been a different being. I should not so flagrantly have sinned against poor Arthur. By the way, I will look into that mysterious volume bequeathed to me by him, and then destroy it. Such a witness of my levity must never, never fall into the hands of my husband. I should cower before his calm eye with unutterable dread and shame, if he should ever suspect the full extent of my criminal levity—for a crime of dark dye, I now feel my conduct to have been."

With trembling hands, and bloodless cheeks, Florida unclosed a drawer and took from it the velvet-bound volume, carefully enveloped in tissue paper. It was the first time she had attempted to look over it, and now her courage almost failed her.

The leaves opened at a touch upon the first page, and she gazed with surprise upon an exquisitely finished picture of herself, painted on a square of ivory, and inserted in the lid. Beneath was written, in Arthur's hand,

"Life of my life, those vermeil lips
Seem ready to inclose with sweetest words
Of hope and happiness."

"Angel of my destiny! life without thee would be a wilderness—a waste of cheerless woe. Of every creature's best thou art compounded, my adored Florida, and I can not choose but love perfection in the form of woman. I recall your enchanting smile—your

"Forgive me," said Grafton—"I am convinced."

The next morning he penned the following letter to Anna Wallace:

"A few more weeks and I shall be with you, my beloved Anna, free to claim the fulfillment of your promise. I have accomplished what you term my unholy purpose—but one more interview with the fair deceiver must take place, and then she will know me as I truly am."

"After all, how insufficient will be the punishment! for neither life nor reason will be the sacrifice, while such was the oblation offered at the shrine of her heartless want of principle."

"I thank you, Anna, for your noble trust in me; for during the whole time that I have devoted myself to the fulfillment of this vow, which seemed sacred in my eyes, not a doubt of my truth and faith has been expressed; although you know that I was exposed to all the fascinations of this distinguished belle. The poisoned draught, though covered with flowers, has no temptation for him who is aware of the venom that lurks beneath; and had my heart not been previously filled with your image, it would still have been unscathed by all the attractions of this most fascinating woman."

"Rest assured of one thing, Anna—never was retributive justice more righteously exercised by human agency; and the lightness with which the dark record of the past has been cast into oblivion, has steeled me to my purpose. If she had exhibited one feeling of remorse—one lingering remnant of regret for the true and gentle heart she betrayed to madness and death, I might have paused. But no—she suffered for a brief season—forgot the cause, and swept onward in the same career of fashion and conquest, which has made up her existence since she entered the world."

"Adieu—within two more weeks we meet, and within the circle of the coming month, I shall claim you as my own. If I have erred in embittering a few brief months of one woman's life, to thee shall the atonement be made, oh, spirit of my brightest vision of home and happiness!"

voice, whose melody is so full of the sensibility of the soul, that no music which has ever fallen upon my ear has so deeply charmed it.

"And you, so beautiful, so bewitching, I am permitted to call mine. Yes, you are pledged to me sacredly—truly. As I write these words, my soul dilates, and it seems to me I could soar away on the wings of the wind, and purloin a sunbeam with which to write upon the shadowy veil which envelops human destiny, 'Avaunt, evil imaginings! Man is born to happiness.'" }

Florida grew pale and faint, as she read these words; she felt as if suffocating; but by a violent effort, she conquered her emotion, and turned over the leaves.

It was but going over the record of her flirtation with Malone. Every event was chronicled, with such comments from him as they naturally elicited; interspersed with snatches of poetry which indicated true inspiration, and a fine sense of the beautiful. Florida wept many bitter tears over her own perfidy, thus brought before her in calmness and privacy, when the seal of death had been placed upon the warm heart, and overwrought sensibility which had dictated the words before her.

On the last page was written, in a faltering hand,

"I had reserved this for the announcement of our union; but it was otherwise decreed. Adieu, Florida—too well beloved—too fondly trusted. I die, but not your victim; let not remorse darken your future; the fever was in my veins before I joined you last evening, before those cruel words were uttered. Yet not cruel, either—they were truly kind—for now, when I feel I must die, must leave this bright world, it gives resignation to my soul to know that irremediable grief will not be left in a heart I would have free from every shadow of sorrow."

He seemed to have made an effort to add something more, for several irregular lines were scrawled on the paper, as if the pen had fallen from his hand from inability to proceed.

"Unselfish to the last," she murmured. "Poor Arthur! will Heaven allow me to real-

ize the bright dream of happiness now nestling in my heart? I tremble when I recall the past, and then look upon my seemingly cloudless future. Ah, will no atonement be required at my hands?"

A fervent aspiration for pardon arose from her heart; and she approached the fire-place, in which she had ordered a fire to be lighted. With a sigh she laid the richly freighted volume upon the flames—they curled eagerly around their prey, and in a short time only a blackened and crumbling mass remained of that which had once been so fondly cherished by the unhappy Malone.

That evening she declined going to tea, under the pretext of a violent headache, but on the following morning the emotion had passed away with its cause, and she joined her father at breakfast, looking quite as blooming as usual.

"Do you know, Flory, that Mr. Callander has arrived in town?" he asked.

"Tiresome man! will he never believe that I do not intend to accept him?" exclaimed Florida, with some vexation, for she did not wish Grafton to learn that another admirer had also followed her home. It might again arouse the suspicions of her sincerity, which she had taken such trouble to allay.

Mr. Callander was but few years younger than her father; he was wealthy, distinguished, and looked forward to the highest political honors. Miss Cleveland had met him during her northern tour, and until she became acquainted with Grafton, had given him reason to believe that he might eventually succeed in winning her. He noted the change in her manner, after her meeting with his handsome rival, but still Mr. Callander did not despair. He was a man of the world, and fully believed that the vows of a coquettish woman are only made to be broken, until ambition with her syren voice comes to whisper of triumphs of a more enduring order, when the brief reign of beauty is at an end. He had already offered himself more than once, and been refused, but consoling himself with the proverb that "faint heart never won fair lady," he continued his pursuit with unabated spirit.

On the evening of Grafton's expected arrival, a brilliant company had again assembled

at Mr. Cleveland's mansion to celebrate the birthday *fête* of his daughter. Had Florida forgotten the termination of the last one? Oh, no—but she was absorbed by her own happiness, her own prosperity, and was heedless of appearances. Not so Grafton, however; and if any thing could have hardened his purpose to the painful task which lay before him, it would have been this apparent levity and want of feeling. He believed the fate of Arthur Malone to be as utterly cast into oblivion by Florida, as if all the waters of Lethe had swept over the dark remembrance.

Grafton arrived just after nightfall, and he was surprised to find the house brilliantly illuminated, and resounding with music. A servant conducted him to an unoccupied room, and with a painful contraction of the heart, he at once recognized the apartment Arthur had so eloquently described: had hoped he would one day behold. How little did either anticipate when that wish was penned, that he to whom it was addressed, would for the first time behold its tasteful embellishments when he entered that dwelling as a self-constituted avenger.

He had ample time to examine every thing before Florida tripped gayly into the room, with a radiant expression of welcome and happiness upon her features. She was magnificently dressed, and glowing in health and beauty.

The memories thronging on Grafton's soul could not for a brief space enable him to practice his usual self-control, and at a glance, Florida saw that he was displeased.

"A thousand welcomes," she exclaimed, "but where have you been for the last week, and now you are here, why do you look so cold, so gloomy? Ah, this separation, which seemed an age to me, was not after all, perhaps, as much regretted by you."

"Has it indeed appeared so long, beautiful Florida? I am flattered that you should think so; but I am wearied with a long journey, and this evening when I expected to have you all to myself, I find you surrounded by a crowd."

"It was my father's wish, and I could not gainsay it. You know that this is my birthday—it has never been permitted to pass with-

out a celebration, and he would not listen to my proposal to postpone the *fête* to a more auspicious time. To-morrow I will indemnify you—to-night, I belong to others. Come with me into the drawing-room; you will find my father there."

Grafton followed her, and Miss Cleveland felt piqued and wounded at the measured self-possession, the studied coldness visible in his manner. On her return to the ball-room she commenced a violent flirtation with Mr. Callander, hoping to pique him in his turn. After a few moments' conversation with Mr. Cleveland, Grafton withdrew from the heated apartments, and stood without, on the terraced walk on which they opened. His observant eye followed the figure of Florida as she circled through the mazes of the graceful waltz; never had he thought her so lovely, and he half-regretted the blow he was about to deal upon her heart. There was the haughty consciousness of triumphant beauty in the curl of her red lip, in the flash of her brilliant dark eyes, and Grafton felt that she was born to be admired.

It was a lovely night in the early fall, but in that balmy atmosphere the leaves had not yet begun to feel the influence of winter's chilling breath; and Grafton turned from the gay scene within, to the extensive garden which lay stretched at his feet, its deserted walks illuminated by a cloudless moon. He descended the terrace, and stood beside the fountain, and his brow grew dark as he looked back toward the lighted mansion, and harkened to the strains of gay melody which swept past upon the evening air.

"Yes," he muttered, "here he stood—his dying ravings told me that. Beneath the shade of the willow, while the waters cast their bright spray upon the moonlit air, he spoke of a love which to him was madness; while she—traitress to the best feelings of our nature—brought to him despair and death. Be still, my heart, for in this hour I grasp my dearly-prized vengeance. Here comes this girl to meet the avowal I came alone to make."

He pressed his hand upon his heart, and awaited her approach. Florida stood alone upon the terrace, and after a moment's pause

she lightly descended, and soon stood before him.

"I missed you, and seeing a dark figure here, when I came out, I concluded it must be yourself, indulging in a romantic dream, and"—

She look up, caught the expression of his stern brow, and ashy features, and the words of gay reproof she was about to utter, died away. She recoiled a few steps, and said, in an apprehensive tone,

"Good heavens! what is the matter? You are surely ill, for you are as pale as the sheeted dead."

"Pale—am I indeed pale? Ah, the phantoms of the past have been flitting before me. Florida, holds the past no power over you?"

"Until I knew you, I may have dwelt upon its memories, but now the present suffices to me. If I now recall the past, it is but to dream of the time when we first met, when we first spoke of love. All my reminiscences form a circle of which you are the center."

Grafton listened with the air of one too self-absorbed to understand her words, flattering as they were. He took her hand, and drew her toward the fountain; a slight shudder shook her frame as she stood beneath the old tree—on the same spot on which she had listened to the avowal of Arthur Malone's love.

She struggled to speak calmly.

"Let us leave this place; I dare not remain here."

Grafton laughed wildly, as he tightened his clasp upon the hand he felt growing cold within his grasp, and his voice sounded almost menacing, as he said,

"You have not, then, utterly forgotten what occurred beside this fountain, on this night, but one brief year ago?"

Florida felt as if a dagger had been plunged into her heart. She uttered a faint cry.

"Ah, have you no mercy? Why do you recall that cruel remembrance? and why, oh why do you look at me thus?"

Grafton stood before her, pale, motionless, rigid; his large eyes beaming with any other emotion than that of affection. Well might the guilty Florida shrink from the baleful expression of that marble face. He at length

spoke, and the deep ringing tones of his voice seemed to pierce her throbbing brain.

"Florida Cleveland, I recall that remembrance to pour upon your heart the bitterness, the untold agony which, on this very spot, you inflicted upon him, who was far dearer to my heart than you, perfidious woman, ever could have become, had you even been innocent of this fearful wrong. Know that I was the bosom friend, the beloved companion of Arthur Malone—the confidant of his mad passion for you. I know all your wiles to keep him at your feet, to dupe him into the belief that he was the chosen of your false heart. Know that I sat beside his dying bed, listened to his dying ravings, which revealed all I had not previously been informed of. When life had passed away, I knelt beside him, and placing my hand upon his pulseless heart, I vowed to return to your own soul the suffering which slighted love and crushed affection had caused to him. I have succeeded—I feel—I know it. You do love me, even as I love another, to whom my vows were plighted before we met."

Florida listened at first with a feeling of bitter humiliation and anguish; but the native pride of her spirit came to her assistance, and the dissimulation she habitually practiced, enabled her to assume an appearance of calmness she was far from feeling. She crushed back the struggling emotions which threatened to suffocate her, and spoke in tones so clear and silvery, that Grafton was startled into the momentary belief that he too had been only the dupe of a well-feigned attachment.

"And you have never loved me? All this time that you have played the devoted lover to such perfection, you had only hatred and contempt in your heart. Now hear me, Henry Grafton, and in future take heed in playing with poisoned arrows that you wound not yourself, while aiming to turn them against others. You know that I am a coquette; never have I valued a conquest after it was won. You seemed to struggle against my power; and in aiming to make you more completely my slave, I have permitted you to believe that I would marry you. Learn that if you had waited a few more hours, this scene

might have been spared to us both, for you would then have known that Florida Cleveland places no more value on your love, than that of a dozen others who bow before her. Ambition is the only shrine at which she offers incense, and the lapse of another month will behold her the bride of one the world calls great. Adieu—we meet no more."

She turned, and lightly sprang up the steps—when she had ascended them half-way, she paused, waved her hand toward Grafton, and exclaimed,

"Outwitted!—ha! ha! ha!" and a laugh of such mirthful mockery rang over the silent garden, that Grafton stood confounded.

CHAPTER XI.

FLORIDA gained the shadow of the house, and turning down a side path, she threw herself upon a seat placed beneath a tree, whose drooping branches offered her a shelter from observation. Stifling the cry of mortal agony that rung through her writhing soul, and pressing her fingers over her eyelids to prevent the burning tears from gushing from them: she tried to think, to realize, the terrible and unsuspected blow which had fallen on her. At first, her mind was a chaos, over which anguish and humiliation swept, in triumphant mockery of her recent dream of bliss; but soon the indomitable pride of her nature came again to her aid—deep and bitter was the struggle, but the haughty heart conquered; though the drops that stood like rain upon her brow might have told how thrilling was the sense of suffering and desolation which bore her to the dust. She arose sick at heart, for the sound of voices recalled her bewildered senses, and pressing her hand over her eyes, as if to clear them from the blinding mist that hung upon the drooping lashes, she muttered,

"I must go. I shall be missed, and my absence commented on. I must be gay—gay! ha! ha! Well, I shall not be the first one who has carried a smooth brow, and light demeanor into the world, when all that made it bright or beautiful to them, lay crumbled into ruins at their feet. The rainbow, the most gorgeous

object in nature, was first thrown over a lost and desolate chaos of ruin, and thus will I too mask my heart with jesting words, and gay smiles. Now to meet the gaze of others unmoved. To listen again to the wooing of one I care not for, yet whom I will marry, to prove my words to Grafton true. Oh, Father of mercies, what will be my hapless fate!"

Unable longer to control her feelings, she gave way to a burst of passionate emotion. It lasted, however, but a few moments—the long habit of self-control returned—she gained her own apartment by passing through the boudoir, and soon removed all traces of sorrow from her features. Half an hour later, when Florida Cleveland stood within the lighted hall, with gay words upon her lips, and radiant in smiles, who among that throng would have dreamed that the shadowy brightness of her eyes was caused by the tears of bitter agony that sprang up to them, and were forced back, falling like drops of liquid fire upon her quivering heart?

Mr. Callander had been devoted in his attentions throughout the whole evening, and at its close he found an opportunity to offer himself for the third time, and for once proved the truth of the proverb, that "perseverance gains success," even in a lover's suit. Miss Cleveland accepted him, and authorized him to request the consent of her father to a speedy union.

Florida stood with Spartan firmness until the last guest was bowed out—she passed her father with a smiling good night; and she even prevented herself from exhibiting any impatience while her attendant remained in the room. When the door closed on her, she sat motionless until the sound of her footsteps died away. Then starting up, she threw herself forward on the bed with a low wailing cry so full of the wretchedness which blights and withers the very spirit, that had Grafton heard it, he must have recoiled from the contemplation of the misery he had wrought.

"Despised—disdained—insulted—made the merest dupe, to flatter the vanity of this terrible man! Oh, how can I live and know this?" she wildly exclaimed. "Oh, Henry! loved, worshiped, as only such as I can love, and yet you trample on me—madden me with

the cold malignity of your words. God have mercy on me, for I am wretched enough this night to die."

Then she arose and paced the floor with rapid steps, hoping to allay the feverish tumult within her by constant motion.

The next morning at a very late hour, Florida sat beside her untasted breakfast, feeling so worn out and wretched that she had no thought even for appearances. Mr. Cleveland said to her,

"Well, Flory, Mr. Callander has been with me this morning, and, I must say you have acted much more wisely than I have fancied you would. The Honorable George Callander is a much better match than this handsome Grafton, who has been dancing attendance on you for the last three months. He has already distinguished himself, and this winter you will shine as one of the brightest stars in our capital. You know that Mr. Callander is already elected to the senate."

Florida made no reply. She felt too wretched to attempt to keep up the mockery of a conversation. Mr. Cleveland looked up at her, and for the first time noted her extreme paleness and depression.

"Why, what is the matter with you, child? Our ball last night was too much for you. Go to your room, my darling, and endeavor to sleep, or Mr. Callander will find few of the charms which captivated him, when he calls this evening."

Florida endeavored to smile, as she replied, "I am not well, dear father. My head aches very much, so I think it will be best to follow your advice."

The plea of headache satisfied her father, who was not very quick-sighted in affairs of the heart. Had he noticed the passionate paleness of that cheek, the large eyes so full of unspeakable sadness, the tremulous motion of the feverish lips, he might have seen that more than a common sorrow had thrown its blight upon her spirit.

Mr. Callander was anxious that their marriage should take place as soon as possible; and to the surprise of many, within four weeks from the birthday fete, Miss Cleveland

actually fulfilled the engagement, and became the wife of the Honorable George Callander.

Florida had passed the intervening time in a pitiable state of mind. In company she was so wildly gay, that many marveled at her exceeding levity; in solitude, brooding over her fatal passion, and the bitter penalty which had been exacted for her former heartless conduct, until her brain seemed a chaos of conflicting passions, and despairing thoughts. It was her first disappointment—judge then how hard to be borne it must have been, by a wayward and spoiled girl, who had never known contradiction, even in her veriest whim.

She recoiled from the fulfillment of the rash engagement she had made, to such a degree, that once she was on the eve of breaking it, when a paper accidentally fell into her hands containing the marriage of Grafton to Anna Wallace. She read it with flashing eyes, and curling lips, but her heart writhed anew in all the anguish of that first moment in which the bitter deception which had been practiced on her became known to her. From that moment her fate was sealed. She no longer wavered, and with an apathetic calmness she could not once have believed it possible she became the bride of a man for whom she had not one feeling of regard.

The experience of a few weeks revealed to her the fatal mistake she had made, in uniting her fate with that of one with whose character her own had not a single point of sympathy. Self-sufficient, dictatorial, and obstinate, Mr. Callander was soon converted from the subservient lover into the overbearing husband. His wife's temper was not such as to bear his exactions with meekness, and a stormy *menage* theirs was likely to prove. Mr. Callander had an only sister, who resided in the same town in which Grafton lived. He had promised to visit her, and thither Florida was compelled to go within a few weeks after her marriage. Opposition she found to be useless, and an open rupture with her husband must have ensued, if she had not yielded; though it was torture to her to visit the place of Grafton's residence—to risk a meeting with him, and what was even worse, an encounter with the woman who was preferred before her, she

was forced to give her consent to the proposed visit.

During the first week of their stay, they were in one continued round of gayety, for Mrs. Cresswell was wealthy and fashionable, and wished to give her vain brother every opportunity to show off the distinguished beauty he had won from so many competitors. In defiance of her sufferings, Florida sustained her part with that consummate tact which had become habitual to her, and no one would have dreamed that the stately bride carried within her own breast the sting of an incurable sorrow, which her unhappy marriage had only embittered.

By some happy chance, she had hitherto escaped a meeting with Grafton, and she began to hope that her visit would come to a close without the dreaded encounter, when her sister-in-law said to her on the morning of a grand gala-day, given in her honor, by an old friend of Mr. Callander,

"You will not be the only bride at Mr. — to-night, Florida. Mr. Grafton has just returned from a visit to some friends in the country, and will introduce his bride into company for the first time since his marriage. I understand that she is very lovely."

Florida merely uttered the word "Indeed," and turned away to conceal the sudden pallor which overspread her features.

"Ah," remarked Mr. Callander, who happened to be listening to their conversation, "it is the same Grafton, I believe, who honored you with his addresses last summer, Mrs. Callander? Am I not right?"

Florida answered with apparent calmness, for her husband's eye was on her,

"Mr. Grafton was one among many who paid me attention. The fact that he has so soon consoled himself, proves that his devotion to me was never very serious."

"Ah-h! when he found you unattainable, he was wise to bestow his attentions elsewhere."

"I am surprised to hear that Mr. Grafton was a lover of yours, Florida, for his engagement to Miss Wallace was one of long standing, and I had thought him too honorable to trifle in such a manner," remarked Mrs. Cresswell.

"Do you not know that a belle has many meaningless attentions shown her?" asked Mr. Callander, with slight bitterness. "It was perhaps with him the mere vanity of having his name linked with mine, in a gossip of the world."

"Still I think it was not right, and I have considered him as superior to such motives."

This conversation was torture to Florida, and she would have been happy to have been able to invent an excuse for not attending the party, but to a proposal of the kind Mr. Callander would not listen. The gentleman who gave it was an old friend, and a political associate, whose assistance was valuable to him; therefore, his wife must smooth her brow, and deck herself in her splendid bridal robes, while she sought to nerve her heart for the meeting she dreaded worse than death. Before joining the party which waited for her in the drawing-room, she took a vial from her toilet, poured from it a small quantity of the liquid it contained, and hurriedly swallowed it.

"Now," she murmured, "I can utter the light words which spring from a happy heart. I would sooner die than suffer my true feelings to be a moment suspected. He shall see and hear of me only as the gay and brilliant Florida he once knew."

The entertainment was very magnificent, and the crowd so great that Florida hoped among the throng to escape actual contact with Grafton and his bride; and she grew more assured as the evening waned toward its close, and she had seen nothing of them. The dancing had ceased, and many of the company gathered around a very lovely woman, and solicited her to sing. As she moved toward the piano, Florida was rather unwillingly forced to retain her position near it, for in the present state of her feelings, she feared to listen to fine music. It too powerfully affected her at all times to be welcome now, when all her self-command could scarcely enable her to preserve the outward semblance of calmness.

The voice of the songstress was one of rare flexibility and sweetness, and she sang as if music were to her not so much an art as a medium of expressing the concentrated enthusiasm of a sensitive and feeling heart. Florida consciously clasped her hands over her

brow, to shut out the light and the crowd; and when the voice ceased, and she removed the gentleman who stood beside her was surprised to see that her cheek was wet with tears.

He offered her his arm, and remarking that the crowd was oppressive, he drew her toward an adjoining apartment, which was comparatively deserted. Florida moved a few steps, and suddenly paused. She felt as if turned to stone, for directly in front of her stood a gentleman with a lady leaning on his arm: she was speaking earnestly to him, and his head was bent slightly forward to catch the meaning of her words. The turn of that noble head, the graceful figure, were all too familiar, too unlike any other she had ever seen to be mistaken. The next instant he looked up, and her eyes met those of Henry Grafton!

A mist passed over her sight, she felt as if she were suffocating, but she would not yield to her overwhelming emotion. She raised her stately form to its utmost height, passed with unfaltering step to the door, and requested her companion to call her carriage, as she felt the crowd too oppressive to remain longer within it.

A half hour, which seemed to her an age, passed before the vehicle was in readiness, and reckless of her husband's displeasure, or what might be thought of her sudden departure by Mrs. Creswell, she stepped into it alone, and requested the gentleman who had accompanied her to it, to return and inform Mr. Callander that a severe headache compelled her to return home without the remainder of the party.

During that solitary ride, the sufferings of the unhappy and ill-disciplined woman reached their climax—that one glance, brief as the meteor's flash, had revealed to her all that was in her own soul. She a wife, still madly loved that man who was also no longer free!—who had always preferred another!

"What refuge had she now from such bitter degradation?" she asked herself, and the delirium of passion prompted the reply which arose over the desolation of her spirit—"Death." She dwelt upon the thought, and when she gained the solitude of her own apartment, it had assumed a tangible shape.

Hastily dismissing her sleepy servant, she carefully closed the door after her, and approached the dressing-table.

"I can endure this life no longer," she muttered, "My heart is breaking under the weight that is pressing upon it. 'Tis but one courageous effort, and soon all will be ended: better—better to die thus, than suffer the torture of lingering wretchedness."

She seized the same vial from which earlier

in the same evening she had taken a small quantity, and with reckless haste swallowed the whole of its contents.

When Mr. Callander returned in rather an ill humor, he was surprised to find his wife apparently sleeping in a large chair; but the fixed and colorless features alarmed him, as he looked at her more closely. He touched her brow and hands, and found them covered with a cold and deathlike dew. A glance at the empty vial informed him of the cause of her condition, and though utterly confounded, and at a loss to account for so tragic a catastrophe, he lost no time in summoning assistance.

Skillful physicians were soon around her, and every exertion used to restore life: they succeeded, but in the fearful struggle of that night a cord of the brain had been too rudely jarred, and many weeks of delirium ensued. From her ravings Mr. Callander learned the mortifying fact that she had only accepted him in a moment of pique. Such a conviction was not likely to render him a more agreeable or attentive husband, but his moroseness was compensated for, by the tearful gratitude of her father as he clasped his recovered darling to his breast, and wept such tears over her as softened her own heart, and made it feel that one pure and true affection remained to her, amid the wreck of all her early hopes.

She gradually recovered, and as the past slowly dawned on her recollection, she shuddered at her unhallowed attempt to rush on an unknown and terrible future; and felt grateful that it had been frustrated through the interposition of that Providence in whose beneficence her rebellious heart had not taught itself to trust.

But she was still the same Florida, who, in seeking to escape from present suffering, had dared to face a fate at which she now trembled. The hand of God had been vainly laid upon her: the suffering was past, and from its ashes sprung the desire to become again the brilliant woman of the world.

United to a man to whom she can never be otherwise than indifferent, no children formed a bond of union between the ill-assorted pair; and vainly does the restless and discontented spirit of the lonely wife seek to create for itself an interest in the frivolities of fashion. Her house, her dress, her entertainments, are unexceptionable; but she finds not happiness amid the baubles that surround her, for this nobly endowed woman was formed for better things. The immortal mind will not thus be defrauded of its rights, and amid her most brilliant triumphs, the elegant and admired Mrs. Callander may indeed say, "Vanity of vanities—all is vanity."

THE END.

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