

# WHY DID HE MARRY HER.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE PLANTER'S DAUGHTER," "WAS HE GUILTY; OR, THE WARNING  
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OUTLAW'S BRIDE," "THE LIFE CURSE," "THE DEAD HEART,"  
"THE WHITE TERROR," "THE FAMILY SECRET," ETC.

"There is a comfort in the strength of love,  
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else  
Would upset the brain, or break the heart."  
WORDSWORTH.

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

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## WHY DID HE MARRY HER!

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### CHAPTER I.

#### NEWS FROM ABROAD.

Two ladies sat in a lofty apartment in a large mansion in one of the most aristocratic streets of New York. The frescoed ceiling, silken curtains, and velvet carpet harmonized in coloring; but the costly mirrors which lined the walls reflected nothing so attractive as the living occupants of that elegant reception-room.

A lady of three-and-twenty, stately and composed, sat with her noble head leaning against the crimson cushion of a divan, the dark, shining bands of her hair, and marble white complexion, contrasting with its deep-toned hue. Her dress was rich, and in good taste, and her hands, that played idly with a bunch of charms which hung from her *chatelaine*, were of exquisite symmetry and fairness.

Upon her delicately sculptured features there was an expression of soul weariness, and the red lips were slightly compressed, as if resolute not to express in words that which might give pain to her companion. This was a lady in half mourning, distinguished by a certain air of calm simplicity, which marks the high-bred and refined woman, on whom nature has bestowed a gentle heart, and to whom fortune has also given gentle nurture.

The reception was over, and the mistress of the house sank down in a velvet *fauteuil*, as the door closed on the last guest, and exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! the weary hours are gone, and I have time to break the seals of my foreign package. Oh, Nelly, you do not know what I have had in my possession for the last hour."

There was a sudden start, and uplifting of the drooping lids, which veiled a pair of magnificent dark eyes, and a faint streak of crimson flashed upon the pearly cheek.

"Letters from abroad — from Ernest?" she quickly asked. "Is there one for me?"

"Of course; when did our wanderer ever forget to send a volume to you, Nelly? I declare, I am half jealous sometimes."

"You need not be, Cornelia; for, of the two, I suspect he loves his sister far better than his friend. *Only* as his friend, remember, did I consent to correspond with him. Ernest is free to write to me, or to let it alone."

"Of course," replied Mrs. Gaston, half smiling.

"I understand all about that. But this pique will pass away before my brother returns, and, in time, your old relations will be established. I hope yet to see you the wife of Ernest, Nelly."

"It is not likely that I shall ever stand in that relation to him," replied Ellinor Graham, in a low tone, and the sudden fading of the flush that had leaped to her cheek betrayed that she was moved by some very painful emotion.

"Tell me, how did this package reach you?"

"Col. Ramsay, the tall man in military undress, who came in with Mrs. Gilmore, gave it to me. He is just from Washington, and he informed me that it came with despatches to Government last night. A box will also arrive some time to-day, with presents, no doubt, for us all. Col. Ramsay has just returned from Europe, where he saw Ernest,

and something I did not distinctly hear, that he said about a Mrs. Ernest Linden, made me think he is in my brother's confidence, though it sounded odd to me; perhaps, after all, I did not understand him rightly."

"There may possibly be a lady of that name in existence," said Miss Graham, with affected lightness; but her heart fluttered wildly as she spoke, and then grew sick and faint with a sudden, sinking dread, which with her was always the forerunner of evil tidings.

"Ellinor, how can you speak thus!" exclaimed Mrs. Gaston, indignant. "Even in thought I would not deem my brother capable of dishonor. I hold him bound to you. Nay, do not shake your head, and look so defiantly. The love of years is not so easily set aside; and my poor Ernest is your devoted slave, in spite of his strangely inconsistent conduct before he left the United States."

"Enough! enough!" was the almost imperious reply of Ellinor; "let us not discuss that subject, Cornelia. It humiliates me to recall those bitter days in which I learned the sad lesson that a woman's peace can be set at naught by him who professes to love her. I have forgiven Ernest, so let it pass. Pray, open your package, and if there is a letter for me, let me have it."

Mrs. Gaston broke the seals, and two letters were taken from the envelope. One was for herself, the other for her father. She hastily unclosed her own, but there was nothing within for her companion.

It was the first time Ernest Linden had thus slighted her, and Ellinor sank back with a pain so quick and sharp through her aching heart, that it seemed as if a dagger was piercing it; but she made no sign of suffering. Like the Spartan boy, she could clasp the wounded side, and stifle the cry of anguish, which betrays less self-sustained natures.

"Mrs. Gaston hurriedly glanced down the page before her. At the first sentence she uttered an exclamation, and



raised her eyes toward her companion; but her impassive appearance betrayed nothing. Hastily dropping them, she read and re-read the incredible contents of her brother's epistle.

Ellinor Graham furtively watched the changes in the face familiar to her through all the years of girlhood, and she saw in them that which confirmed the fear of evil that had hovered as a dim shadow over her throughout the whole day. She apprehensively asked:

"What is the matter, Cornelia? Is Ernest ill?"

Mrs. Gaston buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

"Oh! if that were all, I could bear it! But to have my idol dethroned—my brother, whom I believed the soul of honor and truth, false to himself, to you, is more than I can bear."

"What can you mean?" syllabled the white lips of her friend, but the words were rather breathed than uttered.

"Cornelia, you wrong him. Speak not thus of Ernest."

"And you—you defend him! Oh, Ellinor, sister of my heart, my brother has proved himself unworthy of you, for he has married another! Col. Ramsay was right; there *is* a Mrs. Ernest Linden, but I will never receive her as such—never!"

She might have gone on uttering passionate denunciations, for no voice was again raised in defence of the absent one. Ellinor Graham, for the first time in her life, had fainted. She lay white and cold before her friend, who fortunately, had too much delicacy and prudence to expose her condition to the rest of the household; she knelt beside her, chafed her hands, and used her vinaigrette, until she showed signs of returning animation.

Consciousness slowly returned, and Ellinor sat up and recalled what had reduced her to this condition. All the great pride of her nature, the reserve of her womanhood,

were called in requisition, to bear with outward calmness the blow, which had so unexpectedly fallen upon her, and to conceal its effects, as far as possible, even from the friend of her life.

When she again spoke, Mrs. Gaston was surprised at the even and quiet tones of her voice.

"Tell me the particulars of this sudden marriage? Where did Ernest meet his wife? Let me hear all that I am interested in knowing, and then let us put aside this subject forever. You see that I was right, Cornelia, to consider myself only in the light of a friend to your brother. As such I will prove myself now. He is not to blame in this, for I freed him from all ties to me before he left his native land. Read his letter to me, if you please. I wish to hear what he says of his bride."

Mrs. Gaston kissed her tenderly.

"My dear, I always said that you are of the material of which heroines are made. Read for yourself. I cannot stifle my indignation and disappointment sufficiently to read his verbiage aloud."

Miss Graham took the letter, though its touch sent a thrill through her frame. Making a great effort, she steadied her vision sufficiently to read the lines in which Ernest Linden communicated the fact of his marriage in Paris, on the twentieth of the preceding month, to a young English lady of great accomplishments, who was also the possessor of a large fortune secured to herself. He expressed the hope that his family would not be displeased with his union with a foreigner, for Miss Waltham was too charming to be resisted. He had sent over a box containing several specimens of her skill as an artist, with which he hoped his father and sister would be pleased.

Enclosed was the printed account of the marriage, cut from a newspaper, and with a painful species of fascination, Ellinor read the annoucement, which ran thus—

"Married in Paris, on the 20th of October, Ernest Gordon Linden, attaché to the American embassy, to Amelia Caroline Waltham, only child and heiress of George Waltham, Esq., formerly of Dorsetshire, England."

Below were the comments of the editor—

"The *distingué* American who has so largely figured in our *beau monde* for the two past years, has distanced all competitors, and carried off the brilliant prize of the day from the numerous aspirants to her favor. Miss Waltham is the undisputed mistress of a large inheritance, which comes untrammelled into the possession of her husband. The jewels worn by the fair bride on the auspicious occasion were of extraordinary beauty and value, forming in themselves a magnificent dowry."

The reader folded the letter again, and repressed the deep sigh that struggled for utterance, as she thought—

"Ernest has yielded to his old temptation, and recklessly gambled away his resources. In a moment of desperation, he has married this poor girl for her wealth. I *know* that he loves me alone—will love me to the end of his wasted life. Ah, me, my dream has vanished—my hope is dead. I prayed that he might become worthy of the love I gave him in those days when I was little more than a child. *Now* I am a woman, with strength to endure, to conceal the torture that is wringing my soul, and I *will* conceal it, or die in the effort."

Mrs. Gaston watched her as she read, and she marveled at the still calmness with which the lover's raptures were perused: the white cheek did not flush, the flexible lips did not tremble, and when the letter was tendered back without comment, she said, with some surprise—

"Well, Nelly, have you nothing to say about this mysterious marriage?"

"Nothing, except that I sincerely hope that Ernest may be happy in his choice. He seems not to have neglected

what the world considers the main things in marriage, family and fortune. I trust that his bride brings with her also a dower of sweet womanly affections, and gentle temper."

"He deserves to get the most outrageous virago for his conduct towards all of us. What will my father say? I own I dread to break this news to him."

"Permit me, then, to take this duty on myself. Your father will listen to my arguments in favor of his son's sudden choice, sooner, perhaps, than to yours. When Mr. Linden sees that I consider it well that Ernest has married, he will soon begin to think with complacency of his new daughter, endowed as she is with accomplishments and fortune. Leave to me the task of breaking the tidings to him."

"My poor Nelly, it will be too much for you. I should be selfish, indeed, to suffer you to go through such an ordeal. I must carry the letters to father, myself, and do the best I can towards excusing my inconsiderate brother."

"You will do no such thing," replied Ellinor, gently but decisively. "'Suffer and grow strong,' says the poet of the heart. I have done that Cornelia. Nay, do not shake your head, and look incredulous, because the suddenness of the news overcame me just now. I assure you, my dear friend, that I gave Ernest up, as a lover, from the hour of our last parting. I have not ceased to love him, but the feeling I now have for him is far different from the girlish passion which I once cherished for him. There was a time, when I would have given him my hand in defiance of the opposition of every friend I have; but now, I am older, I have seen more of life, I understand my own nature better, and I could never promise to love and *honor* a man who is an infatuated gambler. Nay—hear me out, and then let this subject be forever tabooed between us. But once can I bear to allude to it, and I do it now, that it may hereafter be at rest. I now know that I have unconsciously cher-

ished the hope that Ernest would reform his habits, but this precipitate marriage convinces me that, after desperate losses, he has bartered his freedom for the means of extricating himself from some terrible embarrassment. Now I am afraid he will never rescue himself from the terrible infatuation that at times possesses him. Ernest was fully aware that the knowledge on my part, that he has broken his pledges to me, would prove as effectual a barrier to our union, as the existence of his wife. Our compact was that he was to return rescued from his vice, or never seek me as a lover again."

"Oh, Nelly, how *can* you speak so calmly, when I know your heart is bleeding cruelly from this blow? Your pride is too great—seek the sympathy you need lest it break in its lonely struggles."

Ellinor laid her cold hand impressively upon that of the speaker.

"No earthly comforter can avail *now*, Cornelia. I must seek help where the weary and sorrow-stricken are told to apply, 'Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden;' I carry my burden there, and if God cannot help me, I need look for aid from no earthly comforter."

"You are right, as you always are," said Mrs. Gaston, in a subdued voice. "Oh, Nelly, may this wayward brother of mine, never have bitter cause to contrast your upright, noble character, with that of this artful English woman who has evidently entrapped him into a marriage with her."

"Hush—hush—do not speak so harshly of one you know so little of. The pride of Ernest is too great to permit him to be won by an inferior woman. When your new sister becomes known to you, no doubt she will win her way to your affections, as she has done to those of Ernest."

Mrs. Gaston would have protested against this possibility, but Miss Graham took from her hand the letter addressed to Mr. Linden, and left the room.

The task she had undertaken was a painful one, for she had long been considered by the old gentleman in the light of a cherished daughter, and he looked forward with certainty to her future union with his son.

Ellinor Graham was an orphan ward of Mr. Linden, and from early girlhood she had resided beneath his roof. She possessed an independence, but was not sufficiently wealthy to tempt a fortune-hunter to seek her for her worldly endowments. At the age of ten years, she was left without any nearer tie than that of a cousin, who had been married but a short time to a man many years her senior. Mrs. Euston gladly took the fatherless child under her protection, and her husband was contented to receive the young girl beneath his roof as a permanent inmate.

All that a tender and considerate elder sister could do for her young charge, was performed by the lovely woman who understood the duty, and until she was sixteen Ellinor was happy as a bird beneath her fostering care. To Mrs. Euston she owed her fine perception of right, her truthfulness of nature, and, above all, her firm christian faith; and with tender reverence she cherished the memory of the angel in Heaven, whose teachings had formed her character. This labor of love was scarcely completed, when Mrs. Euston was called from her earthly sphere to one of wider scope.

She left a child of seven summers, and towards her Ellinor assumed the duties vacated by her mother's untimely death. The little Clara was never permitted to feel the loss she had sustained, and in a short time the child clung to her young cousin as fondly as she had lately done to her mother.

General Euston wished to console himself for the loss of his wife by a tour to Europe, and he gladly accepted the offer of his half-brother, Mr. Linden, to receive Ellinor and her young charge under his roof, till the former should

make a suitable marriage. Miss Graham had been a schoolmate of Cornelia Linden's, and it was the influence of the latter which induced Mr. Linden to make the proposal, which was at once gladly accepted.

At the time of her removal to Mr. Linden's house, Ellinor Graham was in her seventeenth year. Ernest Linden was six years older than his sister, and his absence at college had prevented him from having any familiar acquaintance with her most intimate friend. He had occasionally seen Ellinor as a child, and thought of her only as a shy, demure little miss, who was utterly undeserving of the notice of a young gentleman who had graduated at Harvard with *éclat*.

After a lengthened summer tour, he was surprised on his return home to find a lovely and accomplished young lady installed in his father's house as a permanent inmate.

At first Linden neglected her, but soon some inexplicable charm, which he could not analyze, attracted him to her side, though he made manifest efforts to escape from the fascination. In a few months he became passionately enamored of her, and in a fitful, morbid manner sought to win her love.

Sometimes for weeks he would seclude himself from the family circle, appearing to be in a most depressed and miserable state of mind; then he would suddenly emerge from his fits of despondency, and show himself the brilliant, sparkling Ernest of an earlier day. His family beheld his alternate fits of sadness and mirth with apprehension, and fondly sought to discover their origin. Nothing occurred to them so feasible as his newly developed passion for Ellinor, and they watched with deep solicitude for some token that he was beloved by her.

The human heart is a strange riddle, and this young and charming girl, who already had several adorers, turned from the siren tones of flattery to the moody and melancholy man, who seemed afraid to betray to her how much he loved her.

At length, in a moment of irrepressible emotion, he avowed his devotion to her, but protested that he was unworthy of a return to his passion.

Ellinor interpreted this as merely the high-flown language of romance, and in her deep heart thought him worthy of the gift of any woman's affection. Hers was given to him without a doubt of her future happiness under his guardianship, and the pair were betrothed.

Mr. Linden was delighted, and urged the completion of the marriage as soon as possible; but to the amazement of his friends, Ernest shrank back, declaring that Miss Graham was too young to entrain into a marriage with the son of her guardian. The world would condemn both himself and his family, if he hurried a girl of seventeen into a union with himself, before she had seen enough of society to compare him with others who might seek her hand. He insisted that no woman should marry under twenty, and a tacit understanding might exist between himself and Ellinor, that when she attained that age, free from any other preference, they would be united.

Ellinor gladly acceded to these terms, for she was too young and inexperienced to wish to fetter herself with so sacred a tie, before she had tried her own heart and principles in the fiery furnace of the world and its allurements.

The three years sped by on fleet wings; Linden was as devoted to her as was consistent with their mutual position, but at times his moody jealousy severely tried her forbearance. Through it all she clung to him with that devotion of which only a tender woman's heart is capable, outrage it as man will.

The stipulated time at length drew near, and the melancholy of Ernest Linden deepened and darkened until his friends began seriously to fear for his sanity. He was evidently madly in love with his betrothed bride, yet the approach of the period appointed for their union seemed to fill

him with anguish. No clue to his inconsistency could be found; and Ellinor suffered inexpressibly. His reserve did not yield even to her entreaties, and she finally told him that it would probably be better for the happiness of both parties if their engagement was ended.

Ernest protested against that as the last and crowning evil of his lot; and when his betrothed insisted that her freedom should be restored to her until his mind was in a calmer state, he rushed from her presence like a maniac.

Without the knowledge of his family, he sought relief from the gnawing restlessness that devoured him, in the excitement of gaming. In his moments of deepest despondency, he had buried his griefs, of whatever nature they might be, in the absorbing chances of cards, and after this decisive interview with Ellinor, he seemed possessed by the very demon of recklessness. Sleep scarcely visited his pillow, and his vigils were often prolonged till day reddened the horizon.

Of course he lost large sums, and the poor girl who had loved and trusted him found her remonstrances as powerless to stem the tide of recklessness as those of the merest stranger. Wretched himself, Linden seemed careless how much suffering he inflicted on her.

This was a season of deep humiliation and bitter grief in the house of which he had been the idol and the pride.

At length a pause came in his career of ruin. This was occasioned by a severe brain fever, which brought him to the verge of the grave. As he convalesced, all the cruelty of his conduct towards those who so tenderly loved him, seemed to dawn upon him. He declared his deep penitence, and his resolution never again to be tempted to gamble. His health improved very slowly, and his physician advised a sea voyage.

Ellinor secretly hoped that he would ask her to be the companion of his travels, for he seemed more devoted to her

than even in the early days of their betrothal; *but he did not intimate any such desire.* He was often restless and unhappy, and while those moods lasted Ellinor frequently detected him gazing upon her with an expression of mournful tenderness, that filled her mind with vague fears for the future. That he loved her with all the strength of his fiery nature, she felt assured; yet he refused to ask for that hand which he must know would not now be withheld.

So the days passed on till that one came in which Linden was to bid adieu to his native land. At the moment of parting, he would have wrung from her a promise to await his return; to permit no other love to come between the hope he had so long cherished, and its ultimate fulfilment; but the pride of Ellinor was aroused by his previous conduct, and she refused to give any distinct pledge. Ernest might trust to her constancy, and if he returned redeemed from his besetting temptation, and she were free, *then* he might ask and receive his reward. She insisted that only as *friends* should they consider each other, until it became expedient to resume their old relations.

Forced to be satisfied with this, Ernest made many protestations of undying devotion, and Ellinor was left to the dreariness of life without him who had occupied so large a space in her world.

Lovers came around her, for it was soon whispered that the engagement which had bound her to Linden was broken; but to them all she turned a cold ear. She withdrew in a measure from the gay world, of which she had been a bright ornament, and gave much of her time and means to the assistance of the wretched and outcast, of whom so many are to be found in every large city. Ellinor endeavored to cultivate the graces of forbearance, charity, and long suffering, that she might become worthy to fill the position of a noble and true woman, even if fate denied to her that which her solitary heart so earnestly

desired—a perfect union with the man she had so long and ardently loved. To be perfect, she felt that it must be founded on esteem, and she fondly hoped that her beloved Ernest would redeem himself from every reproach, and return with renewed health and restored spirits, to claim the hand that should never be given to another.

“The pair corresponded; Linden’s letters were those of a lover, and the passionate outpouring of devotion which he had habitually repressed when near her was uttered in those precious pages, which were treasured with more care than would have been diamonds from the mines of Golconda. Ellinor wrote only as a friend, but a subtle spirit of confidence and unwavering devotion pervaded her letters, delicately and guardedly as they were worded.”

His tour was lengthened to three years, at the end of which time he distinctly said he would come home to claim the troth of her who had so long and faithfully awaited his return. Just as happiness seemed almost within her grasp, the cup was dashed from her lips. The tenor of his letters suddenly changed; they became more cautious, less fervid in their expressions of attachment, and Ellinor felt that the old melancholy had laid hold upon him again.

Was it the prospect of a return to his native land, a meeting with her, that caused this sad relapse? How bitter was this fear, every human heart that has deeply loved can feel. A month had elapsed since the reception of that letter; days of self-torture; of racking doubt; of anguish almost too great to be borne; for the light of a great hope was crushed out in those hours of lonely struggle.

Ellinor knew that she must give Linden up. Mysterious as was the cause of their separation, the invisible line that divided them she felt to be impassable. Yet she did not *realize* that their lives were actually severed till that evening, when the sudden announcement of his marriage with another had struck her senseless.

During all these years of secretly cherished affection, Ellinor had permitted no one to read her heart; she spoke of Ernest as a very dear friend; resolute that if slighted and betrayed at last, no eye but that of her Creator should know the sad secret of her broken hopes and wasted love. It seemed as if some sad intuition warned her that only by acting thus could her pride be saved when the hour of desertion came. In the midst of her suffering there was some consolation in the thought that she was saved from the pity of her friends, and the sneers of her enemies, over that forlorn and wretched thing, a human heart whose altar fires are quenched—which looks down upon the dethroned idol and finds not only the feet of clay, but the whole form destitute of the divine spark with which to light the pure flame that warms, yet consumes not.

And now Ellinor Graham was alone in her desolation.

“Oh, weary heart that will not stop its beating.”

If such had been the first rebellious thought, it was stifled before the still small voice which made itself heard amid the greatest tumult of outraged feeling. “*Not for thy own happiness* alone was that mortal spirit breathed into thee, but to do the will of thy Master,” and the stately head was bowed in humility before the chastening hand laid upon her.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### AN OLD MAN’S WRATH.

ELLINOR GRAHAM walked like one in a feverish dream towards the apartment occupied by Mr. Linden. To accomplish the task she had undertaken without betraying the depth of her own suffering, was her fixed resolve. The

indomitable pride of her nature would not permit her to spare herself a single pang, lest those around her might have a glimpse into her sealed heart. She felt that she could sustain herself if the respect of others was still left to her; pity is akin to scorn, and she would have none of it—sympathy could never have sounded the measureless depths of desolation into which she had fallen; therefore she asked it not. Hers was not a sentimental sorrow, but a heart anguish which time alone could soften.

A light tap upon the library door was answered by a cheerful voice which bade her enter. She quietly unclosed it, and stood within a lofty apartment, the walls of which were lined with book-cases, filled with a choice selection of miscellaneous reading, for their owner was not a student, but a seeker after the honey hived by the labors of others. A man of fine taste, and poetic refinement of mind, his books, even in youth, had been his most cherished friends; and now the greater portion of his days were spent in their companionship.

A deeply embayed window looked out upon a miniature lawn, shaded by groups of ornamental trees, and through the amber-colored glass that filled it a flood of yellow light poured into the room. A venerable figure, with white flowing beard and silvery hair, sat in this recess, looking more like some ancient saint transfigured, and surrounded by a halo, than a mortal man of our day.

Mr. Linden was nearly seventy; his slender figure drooped slightly forward, and the thin white hands clasped in meditation over his book, reminded his visitor of the pictures of saints and martyrs she had seen. His faded lips relaxed in a smile, and his calm blue eyes lighted up with pleasure as Ellinor appeared.

"So—the fashionable folk have all gone home, and my darling Nelly has not forgotten me in my loneliness. Come, sit close beside me, and give me the daily bulletin. Did

Mrs. Lamode rival Miss McFlimsey in her display to-day? And did Mrs. Grundy approve of what was done for her gratification? Eh, my dear? You look tired."

"I believe I must confess to a little weariness. Who would not be tired after occupying three mortal hours in receiving people, the majority of whom would scarcely do more than utter a well-bred exclamation of horror if they heard one had been devoured by a Feejee Islander. Oh, dear, this everlasting round is wearisome to my spirits. The summer, with its country freedom, is gone; and here we are for six months chained to the fashionable galley!"

"Don't abuse the town, Nelly, because you are tired with your day's work. People grow rusty in the country. The mind loses its brightness, unless it is brought in collision with other minds. Grass, flowers, and purling streams are well enough in the season for them; but in cold weather give me my snugger here, with the gossip of the day furnished by you and Cornelia, the visits of the few friends I really prize, and my dear old books, with a sprinkling of new ones that have the true stamp upon them. Come, sit down, child, and tell me of your 'dear five hundred friends,' who came to see if you are in your usual good looks; if the parlors have been newly furnished for the winter's campaign; if Cornelia has taken off her widow's weeds, and is ready for fresh conquests. You see I have not forgotten the ways of the world, in which I once played my part with as much zest as the best among you."

Ellinor forced a smile in response to his cheerfulness, and went on to give him a humorous description of the reception, which evidently afforded him much enjoyment. When she paused, he heartily said:

"Really, my dear, you are an inimitable word-painter. As Shakspeare says, you can 'hold the glass up to nature,' and you do it well, for you never caricature. You are too high-toned for that, my dainty Nell. I wonder if all those



people forbear toward you as you do toward them. Charity hideth a multitude of sins, and you wear its broadest mantle, my love."

"Thank you, sir; I only endeavor to obey the rule that was early impressed upon me as the only true one to guide our conduct toward others: 'Do as you would be done by. But I have reserved the best thing for the last. We have received great news—news you never could guess.'"

He looked eagerly around:

"From my son—my long absent son? Ernest is coming home! nay, he is here now, and you seek to prepare me to receive him!"

"Oh, no, sir. Pray, do not jump to a conclusion so far beyond the reality. Ernest has not come—is not coming, but something that must add greatly to his happiness has occurred."

He regarded her doubtfully, and slowly said:

"You gave me a riddle I cannot solve, Nelly. There is but one thing that can increase the felicity of Ernest, and that he must cross the Atlantic to claim."

"That is the error, sir, into which you have all fallen, for I will not affect to misunderstand you. I have long since told you that your son and myself are only good friends, and the event I come to announce will at last convince you that I am right."

Mr. Linden grew perceptibly paler, and his blue eyes emitted a sudden flash of anger—so sharp, so keen, that it resembled the steely glare of forked lightning. He kept his searching glance fixed upon the shrinking girl before him, as he slowly said:

"And is it *you* who have taken it on yourself to announce to me the marriage of the man who should have been your own husband? who you know loved you above all created beings? Ellinor Graham, did you cast my boy off at last, or if—if it is not so, may the malediction of the father whose name he has dishonored——"

Ellinor started up and deprecatingly clasped his hands.

"Oh, sir—oh Mr. Linden, pause before that terrible denunciation is completed. Ernest, for three years past, has been as free as air, to woo or win whom he pleased. I gave him back his troth before we parted, see—I am calm—I voluntarily took upon myself the task of revealing his marriage to you. Could I have done this, if my own hopes had been disappointed?"

The old man was still trembling with excitement, but after a pause of some length, he said:

"I am bound to believe you, Nelly, for you have always seemed to me the very incarnation of truth; but you have wronged both myself and my son. I wished to have you for my daughter; you alone should have been the wife of Ernest. Ah, my dear, who can ever fill your place to either of us?"

"His new bride will doubtless be able to do so. See—here is his letter to you—read it, and see how glowingly he describes her. When she comes to your home, she will soon rival your poor Nelly, even in your heart."

"Never, child. Don't talk nonsense; no one else can ever come so near my own children, as you have contrived to do. Break the seal of my letter, and get me my glasses; or, better still, Nelly, do you read what he says, for this unexpected announcement has unsettled my nerves."

She gently suggested:

"This letter was designed for your eye alone, had you not better read it yourself, sir? I scarcely think Ernest would wish me to be the first to look on its contents."

"Who cares what he wishes?" replied the old gentleman, testily. "There can be nothing in it that you cannot see, and the wandering vagabond may be glad that I will permit it to be read at all, in my presence. What do I care who he may have picked up in his travels, and given our name to, since he would not give me the only daughter



"I ever desired him to bring me? Read it, child, I bid you, for I am getting out of patience."

Poor Ellinor, thus commanded, unclosed the envelope, and with a great effort steadied her voice sufficiently to obey. She scarcely knew how she read the lines that seemed to flicker and fade before her, but she did so without faltering. The letter was almost a counterpart of the one to Mrs. Gaston, but at its close was a message to herself which ran thus:

"I am aware, dear father, that you have long expected that Ellinor and I would finally cast our lot together, but I despaired of winning her. Tell her that in my heart of hearts her image will ever be worn, though, alas! nothing but this shadow can ever be mine. Had she been within my reach, no other woman should ever have been claimed as my wife. Ellinor will understand this, and you will both think of your wanderer and his bride, with kind wishes for their happiness."

Enclosed in the same envelope, was another epistle, written in a delicate female hand, and that, too, Mr. Linden silently motioned her to read. With even greater reluctance, Ellinor unclosed it, and glanced down a page closely written, in French; and, with a sort of self-mockery she read aloud the eloquent and graceful address of Mrs. Ernest Linden to her unknown father-in-law. It was composed with singular elegance, and was so charming a letter, that it was impossible to avoid being prepossessed in favor of its writer. Ellinor's heart contracted painfully, and she mentally said:

"This woman is worthy to be loved, and Ernest has evidently been fascinated by her. Well, I am glad that it is so; she may make him far happier than I could have done."

The listener was evidently pleased. His features relaxed in a smile as he took the letter and scanned its pages.

"A highly-educated woman could only have written this, Nelly; and Ernest says she is accomplished and rich. Well, well, since you would not have him, perhaps he has done a wise thing. But he does not say a word about coming home. I hope his foreign bride will not expect to keep him always in Europe. Eh, my dear, do you think she would be so exacting?"

"I cannot tell, I am sure, sir; but if Mrs. Linden has been educated in Paris, she probably shares the opinion of Madam De Staël as to the impossibility of living contentedly in any other place. At any rate, Ernest must bring his wife home to visit his family, though in the letters he has not hinted such an intention."

"I will write to him to return immediately. I must see his wife before I die, and I have not a great while to live. Three years is a long time, and my son has been away till my heart pines for his presence. But where are the pictures of which Ernest speaks? Did they not come with the letters?"

"Col. Ramsay brought the letters from Washington yesterday. The box will be sent by express, I suppose. Ah! here comes Cornelia; she may have heard something of it."

As Mrs. Gaston entered, she glanced apprehensively towards her father, but the calm expression of his face reassured her. She came forward, kissed him tenderly, and said:

"You have heard of this sudden marriage, father, and you seem reconciled to it. I am so happy that the news did not excite you, or give you one of your old attacks."

"Pooh, child! there is nothing in this affair to make me ill. Ernest has but done what he should have done years ago; only he has not taken exactly the right wife. But if Nelly here, would not say yes, the boy was right to find one

that would. Has the box come? I am impatient to see the evidence of my new daughter's artistic skill."

"Yes, sir; it has just arrived; and I gave orders to have it opened."

"Let it be brought in here, that I may see it done."

The command was issued, and the box was brought in. With the childish eagerness of old age Mr. Linden watched the opening, and aided in placing the pictures in the best light. Four landscapes, brilliantly colored in the style of the modern French school of painting, were taken out. They represented Alpine scenery; and as they were ranged side by side for inspection, Ellinor, who was also a tasteful amateur artist, felt the certainty in her own mind that they were from different hands. The drawing, coloring, and general treatment were entirely unlike, and a cold weight fell upon her heart at this evidence of deception on the part of Ernest Linden and his newly wedded wife.

Why was this done? What was the secret of this hasty union? She trembled for the answer time might give to these queries, and looked with deep compassion upon the father and sister, who seemed equally pleased with these evidences of Mrs. Linden's accomplishments. They had no fondness for pictures, and Mrs. Gaston had inherited from her father an eye defective in the judgment of colors; they saw not the discrepancy which was so glaring to the cultivated taste of Miss Graham; and Mr. Linden ordered them to be hung in the parlors, and exhibited to their friends as the production of his new daughter.

While the three were engaged in examining them, the servant drew from the box a smaller frame, and freed it from numerous wrappings which had been carefully placed around it. He placed it on the low marble mantel, and as Ellinor turned from her survey of the other paintings, she was startled to meet the dark, smiling eyes of a most life-like portrait. It represented a woman of five-and-twenty,

dark as a gipsy, with a full, well-rounded form, and features which, if not beautiful, were full of an indefinite attraction that she could not analyze. It was not the face of one to love or trust, yet the eye was fascinated, and returned again and again to scan its lineaments, and discover, if possible, wherein lay the spell that attracted it. There was in it finesse, strong will, and an expression of power, which seemed to give Ellinor a clue to the event which had so suddenly wrecked her own future.

This woman had loved Ernest Linden, and she had triumphed over his vacillating character through the strength of an unscrupulous nature. Such was her solution of his mysterious marriage, and she became heart-sick as she thought of all the misery that must grow out of this ill-assorted union. She had no longer even the poor consolation of believing that Ernest might be happy with the wife he had chosen.

A small card was stuck in the corner of the frame, on which was written, "From Amelia Linden, with her best love to her new father."

Ellinor had thoroughly examined it before the others turned and saw it smiling upon them. Mr. Linden exclaimed:

"Ah! here is the best gift of all. This shall remain here, that I may look upon the wife of my dear son every hour in the day, and become well acquainted with the shadow before the original comes to rival it in my regard. A very fine looking woman, really, but not of so delicate a type as his own countrywomen. Handsome enough, though; don't you think so, Cornelia?"

Mrs. Gaston replied, with some reluctance:

"Mrs. Linden is a different style of person from the one I imagined would please my brother. That woman will rule Ernest. Her face does not please me; and *why* Ernest has been fascinated by her sufficiently to marry her, I cannot fathom."

"Pooh! nonsense. Let her rule him if she can. Ernest has idled along through life, till he is nearly thirty, following only his own desultory whims. I am glad he has found some one to arouse him out of this dream of self-indulgence, and I hope this spirited woman will make him do something worthy of his talents."

"If she will do that," said the sister, gravely, "it would indeed be a blessing. My brother has disappointed me in many ways, but I own that this last step is the severest blow of all."

"Why, what would you have, Cornelia? Ellinor refused him, and he has sensibly chosen a woman of talents, family and fortune. What does he say of her family? She is the descendant of the younger branch of a noble English house. Her father was the younger son of a younger son, but he has built up a large fortune in commerce. The best kind of nobility, according to my republican ideas, is that true blood which will not remain dependent or obscure, but re-ascends by industry to the height from which misfortune had cast its possessor."

Mrs. Gaston gently said:

"Dear father, you are happy and pleased in this sudden marriage, and therefore I am contented. Let us take the wife of Ernest to our hearts, and ignore such faults as she may possess in common with the rest of the human race."

"Now you speak like a true woman, Cornelia. I will reply to Amelia's letter with my own hand, and you doubtless will say all that is suitable on your part."

Ellinor glided away, and left the two together, insensibly wounded by the cordial recognition of this new tie on the part of her guardian, for she loved and revered him as an attached child. She found an excuse for him, however, in the slight taint of worldliness, which is sometimes found even in the finest natures, and is a fault rarely escaped from by those whose existence has been passed amid the pomps and vanities of fashionable life.

That Mr. Linden was charmed with the high birth, position and accomplishments of his son's wife, she clearly saw, and his first emotion of disappointment at the choice made by Ernest was dispelled by his pride in the brilliant match he had made. Well, it was far better thus, but she still felt it acutely—unreasonably she thought.

Ellinor entered her own room; she locked the door, lowered the curtains, and then sat down in the darkened room, to realize the events of the day. At first all within her was a tumult of passionate despair—broken aspirations and bewildering anguish; but gradually the waves surged back, the lofty nature regained its lost balance, and she bowed her head and prayed earnestly for strength to lift this great burden from her life, and go upon the path appointed her, with faith and courage for that future which now looked so dreary.

The comforter came, and calmness succeeded the whirl of thought and emotion which had careered through her soul during the few past hours. It was not the apathetic calmness of despair, but that of resolute purpose, and suffer as she might, in her firm reliance on a higher power, she felt that she must at length triumph over this bitter blow.

Life is too great a boon to be permanently darkened by any sorrow, and already Ellinor was consoled by the certainty that other hopes would arise to cheer the path she must tread. As if to recall to her recollection one source of happiness which yet remained to her, a hand tried the lock of the door, and a fresh young voice called out:

"Ma Nelly, are you here? Please open and let Clara in."

Smoothing away the traces of emotion, Miss Graham put back the curtains, and admitted a girl of fourteen, carrying her bonnet in one hand, and a roll of music in the other. Health bloomed upon her peach-like cheeks, and joyous,

full, youthful life glowed throughout her elastic frame. Fashion had not been permitted to distort her graceful form, and her deep azure eyes beamed with mingled mirth and sweetness. Her brown hair hung in soft curls around a white and slender throat, and the delicately chiselled features promised great beauty in their full development. She eagerly exclaimed:

"Oh, Ma Nelly, you will be so glad, so proud, when I tell you that I am one of the few pupils elected by M. Morogini to compete for the gold medal he offers for improvement in music. I am determined to win if perseverance can gain success."

"I am glad to hear it, my child, since it pleases you so much."

The girl was so fully occupied with her own thoughts, that at the moment of her entrance she did not remark the wearied expression of Ellinor's face, but a vibration in the tone of her voice struck on her sensitively tuned ear, and she hastily said:

"Something has vexed you. What is it, Ma Nelly? Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing has vexed me, Clara; I am only wearied with the labor of the morning. You know we held a reception to-day."

"And *that* wearied you so much? Why Nelly *mio*, I think it will be the finest time of my life, when I can dress myself up as fine as a peacock, with its spread plumage, and have all my friends coming to see how grand I am. Only wait till I am eighteen, and see if I don't make a *sensation*."

A half smile flitted over Ellinor's face, and she gravely said—

"I hope you do not intend to become a fast girl, Clara, as some of our young ladies are accused of being?"

"Fast! what does it mean but enjoying one's self? Act-

ing out one's *own* character, and not being a Miss Primmy like some of the young ladies I have seen at the few parties you have permitted me to attend. I can never pretend to be what I am not; so, if being true to myself is fast, I suppose I shall be so when I am my own mistress. But one thing be sure of, Ma Nelly: I intend to hold fast all the good precepts impressed on me by your ruby lips."

"That is something gained, Clara. But pray tell me when you expect that important period to arrive when you will become your own mistress? I have never found a time yet in which a woman can act entirely as she pleases, without meeting the severest censure."

Clara opened her blue eyes to their fullest extent.

"Are women never free, then?"

"No, my dear. They are never free from the conventional rules of society. Never free to violate the deeper instincts of a true nature. I have endeavored to implant in your mind such principles of rectitude as will be your best guide in the future, and time will only prove to you the truth of my assertion, that women are never free from the trammels of public opinion; nor is it desirable that they should be so, if they wish to preserve their own self-respect."

Clara mused a few moments, and then said—

"I shall be very rich some day, and I am not very bad looking. Shall I not have more liberty to act as I please than other girls who are plain and poor? What is the use of money if it cannot purchase me the privilege of doing what I may think right, without caring what any one may say?"

"What is *right* you may, of course, do, whether the privilege be purchased or not. It is wrong-doing only that I am guarding you against, my love. You *may* be rich, Clara, but are you not aware that your future fortune depends on a contingency?"

"No—I did not know that. My nurse is always telling

me what a great lady my money is going to make me, but she never hinted that I might lose it. How is that, Ma Nelly?"

"Sit beside me, Clara, and I will explain your true position to you, for it is time that you should be made aware of it."

Clara settled herself in a listening attitude, and Miss Graham went on—

"You have not forgotten Mr. Lumley, the old gentleman with snowy hair and beard, who used to make so great a pet of you in your childhood?"

"No, indeed—I remember Mr. Lumley perfectly—I have many of his beautiful presents now."

"He had an only son, a wild, reckless youth, who ran away at the age of seventeen, and went to sea. Albert Lumley was heard of at intervals for several years, but at length all tidings of him ceased to arrive. Every inquiry was made, but only vague information was elicited which led to the belief that he had perished on one of the Pacific Islands. There was, however, no certainty that it was true, and when Mr. Lumley made a will in your favor, the gift of his fortune was conditional. If his son ever returns, and brings with him proofs of his identity, the wealth of his father returns to him, and my little Clara will only be entitled to ten thousand dollars from the estate."

The young girl listened with absorbing interest. An expression of disappointment swept over her bright face, but it was only momentary—she smiled sweetly as before, as she said—

"So my claims to the state of an heiress are in shadow land after all; for I shall look upon this money as absolutely belonging to another person, and I shall be afraid to appropriate any portion of it, lest the real owner may re-appear and demand an account from me."

"Your old friend guarded against that, Clara; for he

wished you to be really benefited by his bequest, even if his son should come back to his own. The property is to accumulate until you complete your seventeenth year; for your education fifteen hundred dollars were annually allowed, and after you have reached that age the income is to be used unreservedly by yourself. Should Albert Lumley ever return, he will only be entitled to claim the estate as it was left by his father. The accumulations from the income of the property will be yours, in addition to the legacy of ten thousand dollars."

"What a good man Mr. Lumley must have been, and how kind of him it was to provide against a claim which would have rendered his money nearly useless to me. I am sure I hope that Albert Lumley will come home some day and enjoy his own fortune. I shall have quite enough without it. How old is he, Ma Nelly, if he is still living?"

"Too old to make a romantic marriage between you and him, my dear. It is now sixteen years since young Lumley ran away from his father—he was seventeen at that time, so you see he is at least thirty-three years old."

Clara blushed vividly, and a smile dimpled her rosy lips.

"I really was not thinking of that, Ma Nelly, though it would be as nice as some of the things about which we read in books. Only Mr. Lumley is so *very* old—he will soon be quite venerable."

Ellinor laughed at her idea of age, and replied:

"He is only three years older than your cousin Ernest and you do not consider him such an antiquity."

"No, indeed. I am a silly child to talk thus. Cousin Ernest is young enough and handsome enough for any one—even for my pretty Ma Nelly; and I hope——"

"Hush, child. That subject is one I have never permitted you to discuss with me. *Now*, indeed, it must be of the buried past. Mr. Linden is married."

"Married!" and Clara looked wistfully into the face she

loved so well. It was pale, fixed—it betrayed nothing. “Oh, I hoped, I wished, but I dare not speak it now,” and she impulsively threw her arms around her friend, and burst into tears.

With much effort Ellinor steadied her voice, and rebukingly said:

“Silly child, why do you weep because one you love has found a wife to make him happy? Ernest has too long led an aimless, wandering life; his marriage will bring him back to his country and his friends.”

Young as Clara was, she had too much tact to attempt to explain the cause of her tears. She smiled through them, and said:

“You will pardon me, but I believe that I am jealous myself of this new wife. I hope she is not so beautiful as to eclipse all the rest of us.”

“She is not beautiful, but I am sure she is fascinating, elegant and high-bred, or Ernest would never have sought her. Her portrait hangs in the library, where it was placed this afternoon. You can go and examine it.”

Clara waited for no second permission; with her girlish curiosity on the *qui vive*, she went at once to the library. No voice responded to her light knock upon the door, and she ventured to enter noiselessly and approach her uncle. Mr. Linden sat in front of the fire, gazing with rapt attention upon the face of his daughter-in-law, as if a spell was laid on him by the subtle attraction it possessed, in spite of its want of beauty.

The young girl stood several moments silently contemplating the portrait, and then, with characteristic frankness, exclaimed—

“Did cousin Ernest have to go all the way to Europe to find that ugly little person for his wife? I declare she is not much better looking than the old apple woman who sits at the corner of the street near Madame Duchatel’s house.”

Poor Clara! she had disgraced herself for that day. Mr. Linden turned on her with his most awful frown.

“I am afraid that Madame has performed her duty very remissly, since you permit yourself such liberty of speech as this. Miss Clara Euston, is *this* the greeting you owe to the bride of my son, and the daughter of *my* house?”

The emphasis was perfectly overwhelming. Clara blushed painfully, then a half smile would peep out of the corners of her arch mouth, and she demurely said—

“Pray pardon me, sir. I did express myself too strongly, but with your permission, I must still think that cousin Ernest could have found a handsomer bride at home. Ma Nelly, for instance.”

The old man winced; he quickly said—

“I do not think your Ma Nelly, as you choose to call her, ever intends to marry. If she does, she would hardly have refused Ernest, as she tells me she did three years ago.”

Clara looked incredulous, but she did not reply. Her feminine tact taught her several things of which Mr. Linden would never have dreamed. After a pause, he condescended to ask the young girl—

“Does not this face attract you, Clara, after you have had time to scan it thoroughly?”

“No, sir, it does not,” was the prompt reply. “I have been studying phrenology and physiognomy lately, and I think I could analyze it, but you would not like me to do so, sir.”

“Both the sciences you refer to are humbugs, but what does this face reveal to you, as judged by their rules?”

Clara replied with reluctance—

“I would rather not, uncle. If I speak at all, I must tell you the truth, and it may offend you.”

“No, I shall not be offended; you may speak frankly.”

Thus urged, the girl raised her arm, and pointed to different portions of Mrs. Linden’s head and face, as she slowly said—



"Craft, guile, wilfulness—little conscientiousness and large acquisitiveness."

Mr. Linden started up, exclaiming, with great excitement—

"Child! child! do you realize that you are speaking of *Ernest's wife*? See how utterly false your judgment must be, for he could never have chosen such a woman as you describe."

"Oh, I hope not—I trust not, uncle; for I love him too dearly to wish him any evil. Forgive me, sir, if I have offended you."

"No, child, I told you I would not be offended, but I am hurt that all of you should depreciate my new daughter's appearance. You shall read her letter to me, little one, and when you can write such elegant French, I shall consider you a credit to Madame Duchatel's instructions."

Clara gladly accepted the permission, and after attentively perusing it, she confessed that her judgment of Mrs. Linden must be erroneous; a refined and cultivated woman only could have penned this charming epistle.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE DEATH BED MARRIAGE.

THE week following the announcement of Ernest Linden's marriage was passed by Ellinor in her usual round of employments. She did not seclude herself from company, nor did she neglect the claims of the destitute and afflicted. In ministering to the wants of the wretched, she found such consolation as genuine benevolence can always afford its possessor. Many a weary heart was cheered by that gentle voice and liberal hand, even while her own lay heavy and

desolate in her bosom; and she upbraided herself that she, whose lot was comparatively blessed, could not find happiness in the many good gifts showered upon her. It should not always be thus; time must restore to her the control of her own feelings, and freedom once regained, she would forever retain it; love again she would not—wed she never would.

In her deep desolation of heart, Ellinor every day became more tenderly attached to her young protégé. She did not consider it possible that any chance could sever Clara from her until she was of an age to be sought in marriage. She was, therefore, quite unprepared for the events which quickly followed the news of Ernest Linden's marriage.

General Euston heard it with ill-suppressed exultation, for he had long felt assured in his own mind, that the tie between Linden and Miss Graham was not utterly severed, though the world so believed. Save the bride of his youth, he admired Ellinor more than any woman he had ever known. He was still a handsome man, not much beyond middle age; then why should he not succeed in winning this charming woman to be the companion of his future life? He believed that through Ellinor's attachment to his daughter he could almost command success, for in the event of a refusal, it was in his power to separate Clara from her, and he had not the generosity to forbear doing so should she wound his vanity by a refusal.

Thus doubly prepared for conquest, Gen. Euston came one morning to Linden Place, and requested a private interview with Miss Graham. As it was often his habit to consult with her concerning his daughter, Ellinor received him with her usual cordial greeting, and great was her dismay when, after a brief preamble, he said—

"I have lately been newly fitting up my residence, Nelly, and I shall be glad if you will call in with Clara and see if

the upholsterer has done his duty. I desire also to consult your taste, as I not only consider it perfect, but I dare to hope that you will some day preside over my home as its mistress."

"I am quite satisfied to remain with Cornelia," she replied; "neither do I think I can assume the charge of your establishment; it would be rather an unusual proceeding."

"You wilfully misunderstand me, Ellinor. I said I desire you to become the mistress of my house. Only as my wife could you hold that position; consent to be indeed the mother of my darling Clara, and I shall be the happiest and proudest of men."

This was too plain to be misunderstood, and she quietly replied—

"My childhood was spent beneath your roof, Gen. Euston, and I have always regarded you as my best friend. Let our relations remain unchanged, for it will not promote the happiness of either party to assume duties which to you would be a burden—to me something more. I shall never marry."

"Never marry! Ellinor, recall those words, I pray you. You, with your large heart, your tender sensibility, must find a congenial soul to walk hand in hand with you through life, or waste the finer part of your nature. It is sacrilege to speak of never giving your hand to one who can appreciate the gift at its just value."

"It would be deeper sacrilege to marry where my heart is indifferent. Pray let us leave this subject, and forget that you ever spoke about it to me."

"Nay, Ellinor, for the sake of Clara you must hear me. I cannot live without her companionship any longer, and only as my wife can you retain your present relations toward her."

Miss Graham grew very pale; she hurriedly said—

"You do not mean it! You cannot be so cruel as to separate Clara from me? Ah, if you knew what she is to me—how fondly I cherish her, how tenderly she loves me, you could not speak thus."

He looked at her, and saw that he had stronger power over her than he had supposed. Resolute to use it to its utmost limit, he said—

"My daughter must come to *my* home; choose if you will accompany her as my bride. I have loved you long in silence, Nelly; I have not before spoken of my attachment, because I saw that some inexplicable tie bound you to Linden. Whatever it may have been, his own act has now effectually severed it, and you are now free to listen to me. Be sensible and accept the position I offer you. It will be impossible for you to remain here after Ernest brings his wife home. You feel that, I see, for you change color. Had you not thought of it before?"

"Yes, I had thought of it; but I need be in no haste to change my abode on that account, as Ernest does not hint any intention of returning to his native land."

"But he must return, Nelly, for his father is failing rapidly, and his only son cannot be so unkind as to remain in Europe till his death takes place."

"I do not know what Ernest's plans are, but they will not materially affect my actions. I have my own little estate of Ivy Cottage, where a portion of our summers are annually spent, and the house is always ready for my reception. Should I find it unpleasant to remain under the same roof with Mrs. Ernest Linden, I can go thither."

"And bury yourself in the dull neighborhood around a little country town! You were not born for such a fate, Nelly; accept my offered hand, and become the queen of the most brilliant *clique* in Gotham. With your intellect, cultivation and beauty, you can support the rôle of a *bel esprit* of the highest type."



She shook her head, for his words fell drearily upon her ear. To her wounded heart there was no temptation in the brilliant picture he placed before her, for

"Bleak and bitter, and utterly doleful,  
Spreads to HER VISION the map of her life,  
Hour after hour she looks in her soul, full  
Of deep dismay and turbulent strife."

She faintly said—

"I dare not. I should make you wretched, and become so myself."

"Nelly, don't let a phantom from the past stand between us. For the sake of my sweet Clara, you will give me a favorable answer, for my child *must* take up her abode with me."

"You are Clara's father, Gen. Euston, and of course you can reclaim her if you choose to do so, but I—I have been a mother to her, and she has now been with me many years. I cannot bring myself to believe that you can find it in your heart to separate us."

"I do not sever you from the child of your affections, Nelly. It is *you* who must decide to give her up, or to come with her to my home."

"And is there no alternative?" she asked, with pale lips.

"None."

Ellinor shivered, but she did not falter in her resolution; she said—

"Act as you think best for Clara's future welfare. Since I decline to accompany her, under whose charge is it your intention to place her?"

"My brother George has returned from Europe. Mrs. Euston is one of the most elegant women I know; under her auspices the education of Clara can be completed, and her debut in society be made."

This was an impromptu thought on the part of the speaker, which he considered a master-stroke of policy, for

he knew that Mrs. George Euston was a woman for whom Ellinor had no esteem, and it would be a bitter pang to her to know that the child of her affections was placed under the influence of a heartless devotee to fashion.

"You surely will not undo all I have endeavored to accomplish for your daughter's mind and heart, by giving her over to such a woman as you *know* your brother's wife to be?" asked Ellinor with emotion. "In the name of her angel mother, I entreat you to have compassion on her child, on me, for this transfer would be a severe blow to me."

"Avert it, then, Nelly, for you have the power. I *must* have Clara with me, and if you decline to accompany her, I must do the best I can without you. In the event of my death, George will be her natural guardian, and then she would, of course, reside with him. I only anticipate what may happen before Clara attains a marriageable age."

"Do not speak thus, Gen. Euston, for it is your duty to provide against such a contingency. After yourself, I have the strongest claim on Clara, and to me she should be left, even if her uncle controlled the management of her estate. I feel this very acutely, for I consider that I am fulfilling a sacred duty entrusted to me by the dead. I feel as if I am responsible to our lost Alice for the moral and religious training of her child. I ask you if Mrs. George Euston will be likely to impress upon her young mind any lessons better than those taught by vanity and folly? Excuse me—I feel strongly, and I must speak the truth."

"You are easily excused, Nelly, but if you are resolute in your refusal of my hand, what can I do? I am tired of the wandering life I have led so long, and I wish to have a home of my own, with a bright little mistress and a charming household fairy such as you and Clara can make for me. Put aside all sentimental nonsense, and say yes, Nelly darling. You shall do exactly as you please—you shall——"

"It is useless to plead. Gen. Euston, I do not believe that you can take my darling Clara from me, any more than I can consent to marry you without that strong affection which can alone hallow the marriage tie."

Gen. Euston was a man of strong will and irritable temper, and the impassive manner of Ellinor's refusal aroused his anger. He arose, and haughtily said—

"Am I, then, to understand that *no* inducement can be offered which will change your decision?"

She deprecatingly said—

"I can wrong neither you nor myself by giving false hopes. Forget this interview, and let us return to our old relations toward each other."

"Enough—enough. I understand the position we must henceforth hold toward each other. I profess no hollow friendships such as you propose. Inform Clara, if you please, that on this day a week hence I shall remove her to my own residence to remain there. By that time Mrs. Euston will be comfortably established in her new home. Good morning, Miss Graham."

With a chilling bow he left the room.

Poor Ellinor was stunned by this sudden shock, and she threw herself upon a sofa and gave way to one of those passionate bursts of weeping which come as a safety-valve when the feelings are too highly wrought to find relief from any other source. Like the sweep of a tornado was this wild tempest of emotion, but, like all violent things, it exhausted itself, and Nelly arose calmed, and ready for the painful duty before her. Bitter as was the trial, she must herself communicate the decision of her father to the child of her adoption.

She went to her own room, bathed her eyes, and prepared for the dreaded task. Toward twilight Clara came in looking so bright and happy that poor Ellinor shrank more sensitively than before from the duty she must perform.

"Oh, Ma Nelly, I am getting along famously; I think I shall certainly carry off the prize. You will be surprised to hear how well I begin to sing 'Hear me, Norma.' Listen now:" and she warbled in a clear, liquid voice the opening measures of that wail of anguish, each tone of which thrilled to the wrung heart of the listener. She hurriedly exclaimed—

"Oh, my darling, not now. I have something to tell you that is of importance. Sit here close beside me, and listen attentively, Clara."

"I am afraid it is something I shall not like to hear, Nelly *mio*, for your voice seems full of tears."

"And with good cause, child of my heart, for the fiat which separates us has gone forth."

"Never!—never! I say no—no—no. Who will attempt such a thing, Ma Nelly?" she asked, with dilating eyes and pallid lips.

"Your father alone has the power to do so, my child, and you are bound to obey his commands. Remember, Clara, that a failure of the duty you owe to him would render me more unhappy than even this cruel separation."

"Is he going to be married?" she abruptly asked.

"No—your aunt, Mrs. George Euston, will take charge of his house, and he naturally desires to have you under his own roof. I must give you up, Clara, though it rends from my heart the strongest tie it now claims."

"I do not like Aunt Emily, nor Uncle George much—I must change papa's determination, for I shall not be happy with them," replied Clara, quietly, for she saw evidences of the recent bitter struggle in Ellinor's face, and she did not wish to add to her suffering by uttering all the rebellious thoughts that seethed in her own bosom.

Poor child! she little knew how powerless all her resolutions would prove before the unbending will of a determined and implacable man. Her father had hitherto been blindly

indulgent to her, and she had not believed that he could refuse her anything on which her heart was set. But in this instance Gen. Euston did refuse firmly—almost fiercely, for Ellinor's rejection of his offered hand had stung his heart more deeply than he had thought possible.

Clara's tears and prayers availed not—apartments for her use were elegantly fitted up in Euston House, and her father informed her that on the appointed day his carriage would be at Mr. Linden's door to convey her to her future home.

No restrictions were laid upon her free intercourse with her beloved friend, but Ellinor felt that under existing circumstances it would be impossible for her to visit the house of Gen. Euston with any degree of freedom.

To the last moment Gen. Euston hoped that Ellinor would relent—that sooner than relinquish her protégé, she would consent to receive his addresses; but when the day of Clara's final departure arrived, and no sign from her came, he penned the following lines, to be sent when the carriage went for his daughter:

"Are you inexorable in your refusal, Nelly? It is not yet too late to relent. I have made my will bequeathing Clara and her fortune to the absolute control of her uncle, *unless I should marry*. In that event, my widow would become her guardian at my decease. Choose if you will now accompany my daughter; her future fate hangs in the balance, for some intuition whispers me that my life will not be a long one. Brighten its remnant, Nelly, and gain the blessing of a lonely and weary heart. WM. EUSTON."

As he penned this epistle the writer little imagined how brief that life was really to be.

Not caring to witness the tears of his outraged child, when she came alone to his dwelling, he despatched the

note, and stepped into his cabriolet, to take a drive on the Bloomingdale road. As he passed through a quiet cross street, a sign caught his eye and caused him to check his horse. After a few seconds of hesitation, he finally alighted and fastened him to an iron railing in front of a suburban cottage, shaded by a stunted looking tree. On the gate was a large plate, on which was engraved, Madame Latude, Clairvoyant.

"I wonder if the woman can really reveal anything to me," he muttered. "At any rate, it is a good time to test her powers."

The bell was answered by a young girl with fair, clearly cut features, and an air of grave pre-occupation, which gave the visitor the impression that the sibyl herself stood before him. She immediately undeceived him by saying:

"Madame is in consultation now; walk in this room, if you please, sir. She will be disengaged in five minutes."

He entered a small apartment which seemed to be fitted up as a species of museum. The walls were lined with shelves on which bottled reptiles, geological specimens, and dried flowers and leaves were promiscuously placed. He surveyed them carelessly, and then took out his watch to mark the passage of the minutes. The instant afterward his thoughts wandered from it to that sad separation he had so ruthlessly decreed, and he wondered what the decision of Ellinor would be, when this bitter trial actually assailed her.

Suddenly a voice of clear and singular vibration spoke close beside him:

"Why do you note the passage of time, when so little is left to you? Sir, I cannot unveil *your* future. Excuse me from attempting the task, and as soon as may be, I pray that you will leave me."

Startled, and half offended at this abrupt address, he turned toward the speaker and silently surveyed her. A

tall, fair woman of thirty, with light blue eyes, and a profusion of pale, silky, brown hair, stood before him. A broad brow, with the perceptive faculties of unusual development—a penetrating, far-reaching gaze, as if the vision could really pierce the misty veil of the future, and an expression of commanding intellect, stamped the woman before him as one of no common mould.

Her dress was simple and inexpensive, though it was neatly worn, and there was no appearance of the charlatan in either her appearance or manner. As her eye met his, it seemed to recoil, and a shiver ran through her frame.

"Excuse me, madame," said the visitor, coldly, "but this appears to me a very singular reception. I came hither to test the reality of your pretensions as one gifted with second sight, but I frankly tell you that I have little faith in them. True or false, however, I wish to ascertain what they are really worth."

"To *you*, they can be worth nothing. Therefore forbear to ask a revelation which cannot be given."

His proud lip curled scornfully.

"Are they, then, only for fools, or for credulous women? When a rational intelligence asks for some evidence which shall sustain your reputation as a seeress, it is refused. I understand you, madame, and retire."

He bowed low and would have passed her, but she waved him back, as she said:

"No, sir—you misapprehend me. It is only the future that I decline to unveil to you. Your past life lies mapped before me as clearly as the spots on this carpet are revealed to your vision by the light of day. Shall I tell you of that?"

"It is of the *future* I most wish to learn. The revelation of the past can only prove your own power—that of the future gives power to me, if it be accurately read."

Again there was that inexplicable shiver, and she slowly said:

"Be satisfied with the present; that alone belongs to us. Shall I show you my skill by unrolling the scroll of the past."

"Since I can get nothing more from you, let me hear of that," he moodily replied.

Fixing her eyes steadily upon his earnest face, the sibyl waved her arm thrice over the space which separated them, and once lightly touched his hand. A faint electric shock seemed to pass through his frame, and his gaze was fixed immovably upon the pale face of the speaker, who, in a few thrilling sentences, conveyed to him a brief and graphic outline of his life.

When she paused, though he felt surprise at the accuracy with which she had spoken, he was still incredulous. He said:

"You have made some shrewd guesses, I admit; but I still refuse to place implicit faith in the mystic power you profess to wield. Tell me only this much of the future. Will the most earnest desire of my heart ever be granted?"

An expression of deep compassion swept over her features, and she said:

"I read your wish; it is to wed one whose heart is not with you. I will reveal to you the fact that before the sun which now shines upon us, sets in the West, she will give you her hand. Beyond that, I cannot—*will not* go."

"Now I *know* you are merely a pretender, madame. What! before the day is gone, the hand which has been refused me, will become mine? Absurd! impossible!"

"I have said it. Look you to the fulfilment of my words," she frigidly replied. "Our interview is ended, sir. I have already said much more than I believed I could be tempted to utter when I came into this room."

Gen. Euston arose and took out his purse. The seeress waved him back with that same inexplicable thrill of repulsion, and loftily said:

"Excuse me, sir; from *you* I can take no money. The few words I have uttered are not worth a compensation especially since they are so evidently disbelieved. Adieu sir; yes—to God I commend you," and she swept from the room before he had time to reply.

Annoyed and half angry, he threw a dollar on a table, and left the house. As he went out of the yard, the young girl who had received him, said to her employer:

"It seems strange, madame, that you would not reveal the future to him. I never knew you to refuse any one before."

"Child," she solemnly replied, "that man has *no* future. In four more hours he will be in the better land. With this knowledge, how could I open the future to him? how take money from the hand which, even now, the dead are about to grasp in kindred companionship."

The girl looked at her with a frightened expression.

"And you really knew this? You believe it will come to pass?"

"Before the sun sets. Look in the papers to-morrow—you will see a casualty—sudden death—he who spoke with me, will be the hero of that sad drama."

"Why did you not warn him? A foreseen danger may be averted."

"Forewarn against *Fate*! Child, I may foresee evils, but I am denied the power of preventing them. *That* belongs to Omnipotence alone."

In the meantime Gen. Euston drove away at a furious pace, angry with himself for having called upon the sibyl, and with her, for affording him so unsatisfactory a communication. Pre-occupied in mind, he drove carelessly; scarcely half an hour had elapsed since his departure from the cottage when his cabriolet was dashed violently against a heavily loaded wagon; the frail vehicle was crushed into fragments and its hapless owner taken up in a senseless condition.

He was taken into a house on the roadside, where he revived sufficiently to give directions for his speedy removal to his own house. A messenger was despatched for his brother, and when the reluctant Clara reached the splendid mansion which had been fitted up with so much care, she found everything in the wildest confusion. Three physicians were in attendance, her aunt, Mrs. George Euston, in hysterics, and the mangled form of her stately father, lying pallid and nearly lifeless upon a couch which had been hurriedly placed in one of the parlors for his accommodation.

The young girl rushed to his side, and at the sight of her frightened face bending over him, an expression of anguish swept over the features of the dying man. He eagerly motioned to one of the physicians to approach him, and faintly asked,

"Tell me, is there life enough left to enable me to perform a sacred duty? Have I one hour yet?"

"I trust so—I hope so," was the evasive reply.

"The truth, doctor, for God's sake, the truth, in this crisis. I am not afraid to die, but I have something to do which is of the last importance before I go."

The physician, thus adjured, reluctantly replied:

"By the use of stimulants your strength may be sustained an hour."

Then write for me as I shall dictate."

In a few moments a note was despatched in great haste, and Ellinor's tears over the loss of her darling, were wiped away to read in appalled silence, the hurried words addressed to her by one in extremity:

"Come to see me *now*, Nelly, for I am dying—crushed to death under the wheels of my own carriage. Save my child from the future I dare not bequeath her to. I cannot die, and leave Clara in any hands but yours! Oh! Nelly, claim your child in the only way now left you; bear the

name which you have refused, for he who will bestow it cannot now live to render you unhappy.

WM. EUSTON."

The same messenger who brought this, also bore to the family the first intimation of the fatal accident which had occurred. Mr. Linden and his daughter accompanied the agitated Ellinor to the scene of distress which Euston House now exhibited.

A faint gleam of intelligence lighted up the face of the dying man when the three entered, and he made an effort to put forth his hand to Ellinor. She sunk upon her knees beside his couch, and he faintly whispered:

"Only as my widow, Nelly, can you claim Clara. My will is in my brother's hands, and he will never give up the control of the heiress and her fortune. Quick! we have no time to lose. I feel with every throb that my heart is beating a rapid funeral march. Shall it be, before I go, Nelly?"

Clara clung to her, and convulsively whispered:

"Save me from my uncle—give his poor heart what it asks, ma Nelly, and I will be your own Clara."

Ellinor could only find voice to say—

"It shall be as you wish. Gen. Euston, yours is an honorable and unstained name, and I will not refuse to bear it when so precious a trust is to be regained by so doing."

A clergyman had been summoned to afford dying consolation to the departing spirit, and he stood ready to perform his part in the solemn scene before them. Kneeling beside the couch, and clasping the rapidly chilling hand of the wounded man, Ellinor Graham pledged the vows which were destined to be dissolved almost in the moment of their utterance; for the ceremony was scarcely completed, when Gen. Euston sank back and expired.

Scarcely realizing the strange event of the last hour, the

widowed bride clasped her recovered treasure to her heart, and retired with Clara to the privacy of her own apartment.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LITTLE BROWN, UGLY, ILL-BRED CREATURE.

FOUR years have passed away since the day of that tragic accident which gave back her young protégé to Ellinor's companionship and control. They have been spent by her in seclusion from gay society, though the few chosen friends she claimed were received by her both at her house in town, and her cottage in the country, where all her summers were spent.

Time restored to her well balanced mind cheerfulness in the present, and tranquil confidence in the future. Her own lot in life was fixed, and she placed a true value upon the independent position she held, and raised a thankful heart to Heaven for the good which had been granted as her earthly portion. Without being the least fanatical, Mrs. Euston was a noble, true, and conscientious Christian woman, who clearly saw the duties before her, and lovingly performed them; for no cold sense of mere duty prompted that warm heart to the performance of the deeds of mercy which linked her name with all that was benevolent in her native city.

Her adopted daughter was all her fondest hopes desired, for, under the tender sunshine of judicious affection, Clara developed into a most lovely, high-spirited girl, incapable of comprehending a mean or ignoble emotion.

Mrs. Euston's old friends, Mr. Linden and his daughter, still lived alone; for Ernest had evaded all their entreaties to return to his native land. The form of the father was bowed with years, and his venerable head seemed to become



of a more silvery hue with every letter from the absent son, refusing the one yearning cry of his aged heart—the prayer for one last embrace, before mother Earth claimed her worn-out son.

A singular mystery still shrouded Ernest Linden's sudden marriage. It was known to his friends that he avoided his countrymen; that he had even, on more than one occasion, refused to receive those who had been well known to him before his departure from the United States. The few who saw him, described him as failing in health and depressed in spirits, but of Mrs. Linden nothing was positively known. She had not by any chance been seen by the few who succeeded in gaining an interview with her husband; but letters from her were regularly received, breathing the same refined delicacy of feeling and genial culture which characterized the one written on the occasion of her marriage.

The aged father cherished these missives until the desire to behold their writer became the strongest feeling of his heart. His replies to them were filled with entreaties to his son to return to his native home, that his eyes might rest upon his children once more before they closed on all sublunary objects.

To these entreaties Ernest was deaf, until his health failed him so utterly, that his physicians assured him, the only hope of prolonging his life, for a few brief years, was in a return to his native air. Even then Linden wavered; but the yearning heart would no longer be crushed down. "Let me look on them once more, and then die," was the cry that would be heard; and he wrote to his father that he would return upon the next steamer.

It was like the return of the Prodigal Son. Every preparation which could gratify his pride or his affections was made for his reception; the near friends of the family assembled beneath the paternal roof to offer him a cordial welcome. But, in the midst of their expectation, a brief

note came to Mrs. Gaston, begging that they might be received strictly *en famille*, as his wife had severely suffered from the sea voyage, and she was unwilling to see any one except his father and sister.

His wishes were regarded as laws in his own family. Those who had assembled to greet him hurriedly departed, and soon afterwards a carriage, with the blinds lowered, was driven to the door. From it alighted a pallid shadow, looking more like the unhappy wraith of the gay man who had left those walls seven years before, than a creature of flesh and blood. He handed out a lady so wrapped in furs that no portion of her person was distinguishable.

As they ascended the steps, he spoke, in a low tone:

"Amelia, you are an inimitable actress, and I conjure you to make an effort to realize the impressions I have given my family concerning you. For Heaven's sake curb your fantastic nature, and do not break my father's heart by showing——"

"My real self," broke in his companion, abruptly. "It was not *my* wish that you should have made me other than I am. They must see my true nature sooner or later, so where is the use of deception now. No—let all the horror of the little brown, ugly, ill-bred creature burst on them at once."

These epithets were uttered with such emphasis, as to lead to the belief that they were maliciously quoted from his own lips, and a livid pallor overspread the features of Linden, as he walked on in silence, endeavoring to nerve himself for the meeting he had long dreaded more than death itself.

As they entered the hall, the father and daughter met the long absent one with a welcome that melted his heart and drew tears from his eyes. Tender caresses were also lavished upon the fur clad lady, who received them passively, and did not utter a word in reply.

They passed into the brilliantly illuminated parlor, and

Mrs. Gaston aided her sister-in-law to divest herself of the wrappings which so effectually disguised her. At length she stood fully revealed beneath the bright gaslight, and a cold chill of repulsion passed over the high-bred, refined sister as she beheld the brother's wife she had so ardently desired to meet.

Mrs. Linden was a low, heavily made woman, with a very dark complexion, and a quantity of ill-arranged, lustreless hair. Some faint resemblance could be traced to the portrait which hung upon the library wall, but to the ideality of the artist the picture owed all the charms it possessed—for charms the original certainly had not, even the redeeming one of a bright expression was wanting; for a more unfriendly and disagreeable glare could not have flashed from the eyes of a foe than now met the gaze of her new relatives. There was a sharp shrewdness in those small, dark orbs, which revealed the fact that nothing escaped her observation, and that she was ready to catch and interpret disagreeably any expression of disappointment which might appear upon the faces of the two so completely taken by surprise by an apparition so different from the person they had expected to see.

In place of the elegant, stylish-looking women they were prepared to welcome, was this insignificant little dowdy, evidently ready to take offence at the slightest expression of disappointment.

The proud sister grew pale, and the father almost gasped for breath; but he glanced at the suffering face of his son, and recovered composure sufficiently to say:

"Kiss me, my daughter, and let me again welcome you to your husband's home. You have made my beloved son happy, and you have my thanks."

She did not move, but with a withering sneer, pointed to Ernest, and said:

"Happy! ha, ha! Look at him! Much happiness has

he indeed found with me!" and sitting suddenly down in a large rocking chair, she commenced oscillating to and fro with great rapidity.

The father and daughter looked at each other, then at the pale, gasping man, who had sunk upon a sofa, and they both burst into tears.

Ernest half arose, and, with an expression of anguish, said:

"Father—sister—I should have prepared you for this, but I could not—I could not."

"What does this mean? Is this person really your wife?" asked the old man, in bewilderment.

"That is Mrs. Linden. She *can* charm—she can render herself even fascinating, when she chooses; but she is ruled by the most capricious and perverse spirit that ever tenanted a woman's form. I implored her to show the fairest side of her character to you, and with this result. Father, I am dying, and that woman is thrusting me into my grave; yet I must keep her beside me. I cannot rid myself of her—behold the sad secret of my expatriation, and ask no further. For my sake, pardon the waywardness of my wife, and excuse her caprices: it is all you can now do for me."

There was such a depth of passionate anguish in his voice and manner, that the two he addressed were touched to the heart by it; but his wife sat impassive as if nothing unusual was going forward. Mr. Linden replied with emotion:

"My son, my poor boy, I am prepared to do anything for you that can contribute to your comfort and happiness. In time, your wife will learn to know and love us, and then the charming spirit breathed in her letters will reveal itself to those who are so anxious to appreciate her highly."

"I did not compose the letters," abruptly broke in the voice of Mrs. Linden. "If I'm ugly and unladylike, at least



I'm honest. Look at me, and judge if I should be likelier to write such sentimental stuff as was sent to you in my name? *He*," pointing to her husband, "never intended that you should see me, and he had them written by an accomplished Frenchwoman. I did not care so long as I had no trouble about them; but when he found that he must die unless he came into his native air again, he tried to persuade me to act the character the false things had given me. I refused, because I don't choose to do anything that does not suit me; so you see me just what I am."

This voluble explanation was listened to in appalled silence, and Mrs. Gaston turned an imploring glance upon her brother, as if to entreat an explanation of this painful scene. He feebly said:

"I am quite exhausted, Cornelia. Bear with me—with my wife; to-morrow her mood may be more agreeable."

With a significant toss of her head, Mrs. Linden seemed to hint the opinion that his expectations would be disappointed, but she said nothing; and with chilled hearts the family group drew near the cheerful fire, while the poor old father endeavored to introduce something like a conversation on the subject of their late voyage.

Supper was served; but Mrs. Linden sat in indifferent silence, tasting of the dishes that were offered to her, and then contemptuously rejecting them as if they were unfit to be eaten. When they arose from the table she asked to be conducted to her apartment, and Mrs. Gaston accompanied her herself, resolute that no show of courtesy should be wanting on her part, though her efforts at cordiality had been so ungraciously repelled.

When they were left alone the father and son, moved by mutual impulse, fell into each other's arms, and the weakened frame of the younger man quivered as if in the paroxysms of an ague. The broken voice of Mr. Linden asked:

"Ernest, my son, what does this mean? Why have you so bitterly deceived us in your wife?"

"She is better than she seems, bear with her, father, and ask me no questions for I cannot reply to them. I ask, as the price of reason, nay, of life itself, that the history of my foreign experience may be as a sealed chapter between us. Notice Amelia's eccentricities as little as possible; her temper is variable, and she puts no control upon it; therefore she is at times difficult to manage. In a moment of irritation, I unfortunately offended her just before we landed, and this humiliating scene has been the result. Pardon her, and disregard her vagaries. I assure you she can be a very attractive person when she chooses to make the effort."

Mr. Linden sorrowfully listened to this nervously uttered explanation; he gazed searchingly upon his son, as he asked:

"Ernest, did you ever love this woman?"

An expression of such utter and contemptuous loathing flashed across the pale face into which he gazed, that he hurriedly placed his hand over the lips that were half unclosed to reply, and said—

"Enough! Enough! I am answered! Let your secret rest between yourself and your God, I demand it not. From this hour this subject is banned. I will do my part toward this being you have taken to your heart, however difficult it may be to see you, the pride and idol of my life, thus wretchedly mated. Do yours also, my son, in the spirit of forbearance; for your wife is evidently a person whose temper will not bear exasperation. Thus we may, in time, obtain the blessing of working a reform."

Ernest sighed heavily, but he made no reply to this forlorn hope. He alone knew what he had to encounter in the perverse temper of his wife, and he cherished no such delusion himself.

Such was the first introduction of Mrs. Linden to her husband's family. On the morning after her arrival, the relatives and friends who had been so unceremoniously dis-

missed on the previous evening, again made their appearance; some, doubtless moved by curiosity to see the foreign wife, of whom so much had been said and written; others, really desirous of making the acquaintance of so elegant and accomplished a woman as Mrs. Linden was supposed to be.

She positively refused to leave her apartment, or to receive any one; excuses were made for her on the score of her recent voyage, sufferings from sea-sickness, &c.; but it very soon became known that the wife of Ernest Linden was eccentric; that her English prejudices against the native land of her husband were unconquerable; that she regarded the *élite* of New York society as scarcely worth her notice, and a strong feeling of dislike sprang up against her in the minds of those she must hereafter inevitably be thrown among.

Her husband warned her of this, but she only sneered defiantly, and asserted her power to brave them all; her recklessness as to the future consequences of her own rudeness.

After a week of such conduct she suddenly changed her mood; joined the family circle, assumed a most caressing manner toward Mr. Linden and his daughter; asked pardon of them for her waywardness with so much grace, with such an appearance of genuine feeling, that it was at once accorded. The truth of her husband's assertion was fully vindicated. Amelia could be charming when she chose. The play of her wit, the ripple of her joyous laughter, brought a new sunshine into the house, and the sombre spirit of her husband seemed to brighten beneath the spell she cast over him in those hours of gayety; but only to sink back into the deeper gloom when the old wilfulness reasserted its power, for the weird soul that animated her could not long remain at rest, or permit those around her to continue so. Mrs. Linden had a passion for excitement,

and human heart-strings were the playthings whose deep vibrations afforded her most intense enjoyment.

She still refused to receive calls, and declined going out until the evening of a grand party given by the Misses Stuckup. The name struck her fancy, and after ascertaining that Mrs. Gaston was too ill to accompany her, she declared her intention of attending the ball, escorted by her husband. He did not decline accompanying her; *why* was best known to himself.

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## CHAPTER V.

### A SMALL PARCEL OF NOTHING POORLY PUT UP.

THE party at the Stuckups' *was* a grand affair, a magnificent gathering of the snobs of finery.

There was the dashing Mrs. Pierre, whose dress was spangled with diamonds, or at least what passed for such, and the heart that beat beneath them was as hard and cold as the glittering counterfeits themselves; but the wearer was a *bel esprit*, and had the reputation of being a wealthy widow from Cuba, therefore she was one of the bright particular stars of the evening.

The Stuckups were just from Paris, and it was understood among their set that this brilliant party was given for the express purpose of displaying the elegant costumes they had brought from that city. Of course all the satins, laces, and jewels of the guests were put in requisition that they might at least make a respectable show beside them.

Such a brilliant display had seldom been seen in that arena of millinery, the fashionable saloons of Gotham. Laces that had done duty for several generations, and had consequently fallen into the "sere and yellow" tinge which connoisseurs profess to admire, but which, to the unsophis-

ticated taste, is certainly not pleasing, clothed the faded forms of those who could afford no new investment in that line, and several antique satins that had glittered in the stately minuets of the days of the Revolution were again brought to light.

In short, the party of the Stuckups was what it was designed to be, a congress of finery, in which censures were passed, resolutions made, and petitions meditated, if not actually presented. A suite of dancing rooms, with walls newly frescoed, and floors artistically chalked, were thrown open to the gayer portion of the crowd. Opposite to them a second suite was devoted to games, and lounging, while the wide-arched hall was filled with promenaders. Dodworth's band filled the walls with harmony, and outwardly all was brilliant enjoyment.

Internally there was much chagrin among the fairer portion of the guests, for the three Graces, as the fair Misses Stuckup were called among their admirers, appeared in a costume which might have been appropriate to those with whom they were named. Simplicity was carried to an extreme in the toilette of the three sisters.

Miss Stuckup, who was tall, thin and dignified, wore a Swiss robe delicately embroidered, with only a spray of natural flowers in her hair, and a sash of rose-tinted ribbon with long, flowing ends. The two younger sisters, who were red haired and dull, were dressed alike in blue glacé silk with no trimmings.

"What could they mean by giving out invitations for this party three weeks beforehand, and then appearing themselves in this simple toilette?" was asked among the fair ones who had spent time and thought enough in preparing for the display of this evening to entitle them to a diploma from Madame La Mode herself.

"Well, I will ask Seraphina Stuckup what it means," said one courageous lady, and she approached the second daughter of the house with her sweetest smile.

"My dear creature, you are really looking charmingly this evening. I never saw you dressed in better taste; but do you know we are quite taken by surprise to see you in so simple a toilette on such an occasion?"

The young lady slightly elevated her eyebrows, and with an almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders, replied:

"My dear Mrs. Le Bas, it cannot be unknown to *you* that in Europe it is considered in very bad taste to receive guests in full toilette. That is one of the things our countrywomen have not thoroughly learned yet, but *you* know that among the bon ton both in London and Paris it is imperative that they shall dress simply when at home to their friends."

"Ah-h," said the pretty Mrs. Le Bas, tossing her curls, and looking quite enlightened. "I had no idea that such would be *your* course, for it was whispered that you and your sisters have brought home marvelous dresses in which to-night you were to eclipse us all. Look around and see the brilliant costumes that make their first appearance here. Really, I should not be surprised if many thousand dollars have been spent on the display now made before us."

"So much the better for trade," said a young man who had been listening intently. "The extravagance of the rich feeds the industrious poor."

"Twade be hanged!" said another voice, in a curious drawl. "Can't you leave the shop behind you, Alsop, when you come into fashionable society? For my part, I weally think such allusions insuffewably vulgar."

"Ah, Boosey, is that you? Glad to see you, old fellow; *ewiticising* as usual, I perceive."

"Why shouldn't I be a *ewitic* if I find pleasure in it? Hav'n't I been to balls at the Twilleries, seen the world at Wome and Naples, and shaken hands with the Czar of all the Wussias in his own palace? I fwatter myself that I

am up to a thing or two, and I assure you that this is a vewy tolewable affair got up by the Stuckups, though I must say those two younger gẁirls look like blue cardinals with red topknots. 'Pon honor they do."

"S-h-h. Miss Seraphina will overhear you."

"If she does, they'll inwite me all the same, for these people consider it an honor to have me pwesent under any cẁircwumstances."

Here Mr. Gauche Boosey stuck his eyeglass in his eye, and sauntered on in his usual awkward, careless manner, confident that his presence was felt as an honor by his hosts and their guests.

Standing in the embrasure of a window were two ladies, who seemed to be viewing the scene with interest, while they as evidently were watching for the appearance of some person in whom they were interested.

The younger was a girl of eighteen, fresh, fair, and rosy, with an expression of refinement and grace breathing around her, which imparted an ineffable charm to all her movements, to every word that fell from her ruby lips. She wore a dress of white tulle, looped with white japonicas, and a single flower of the same species lay upon the braids of silky brown hair that were folded around her graceful head. No jewels, not even a bracelet, marred the pure simplicity of her toilette.

The lady who stood beside her was more mature in appearance, though she was yet under thirty. Her figure was tall and superb in carriage and proportions. A dress of black velvet set off the fairness of her neck and rounded arms, on which glittered bands of emeralds, whose sheen almost rivalled that of the diamonds which were so profusely scattered among the crowd. The noble head, the expressive face of this lady possessed an attraction superior to mere beauty, though there was enough of that to charm even those who most deprecated her superior intellect, and

the graceful serenity of a manner which never lost its repose. That mute evidence of powerful self-control which is denounced as coldness by the superficial and impulsive; yet how often are those who possess it, capable of a depth of passionate emotion incomprehensible to natures of a lighter calibre.

"Dear mamma, do you not see him yet?" asked the young girl, impatiently. "Cousin Ernest is so much taller than most other men, that, when he enters the room, his head will tower above the crowd."

"I have watched the door and he has not passed through it yet, Clara. Be assured, I shall discover him immediately, for I am as curious to see the wife he has chosen as you can be."

"And is it possible that you have not seen Mrs. Linden?" asked Mrs. Pierre, who had drawn near the two, unobserved. "I presumed, of course, that Madame *la tante* and the fair cousin had been admitted, though all the rest of the world was excluded."

"Mrs. Linden has been seriously indisposed, and declined receiving even her husband's connections," was the composed reply. "I can understand her nervous fears of us, for she is a stranger, and probably shy."

"Shy! Really, if that is so, she has chosen a singular ordeal. In making her first appearance in society in a crowd like this, she must be aware that she runs the gauntlet of criticism; for many jealous eyes are anxious to discover the charm that won the fastidious Linden."

"I fancy few men can tell what won them. Marriages seem to be controlled by Fate."

"And this seems likely to prove a fatal one to the husband," said the widow. "I could not have believed that the brilliant, fascinating Ernest Linden could have so wretchedly changed—that he could have been entrapped into marriage by such a—a——"

She paused, as if seeking a comparison sufficiently expressive, and Clara impatiently said:

"You have seen her then? What is Mrs. Linden like? How does she look?"

"Yes, I have seen her, for she has been in the next room half an hour. I have been introduced to her, have talked to her, and my opinion is——"

"What?" asked Clara, impulsively, as the speaker paused: she must be charming, I know, interesting, lovable."

"Shall I tell you what I really think of your cousin's wife, Miss Euston?"

"Certainly. I know that you seldom flatter, but I can hear your true opinion of my English cousin."

"Well, it is this—that the much-talked-of Mrs. Linden is a small parcel of *nothing*, poorly put up."

"Ha, ha! excellent, by Jove!" laughed Gauche Boosey, who had drawn near the trio unperceived. "'A small parcel of nothing, poorly put up!' Spicy, that. I'll spread this neat saying among those who can appreciate it, Mrs. Pierre."

"Be sure that you do not take the credit of it yourself," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"'Pon honaw, now, that is an insinuation that affects me nearly. It does, 'pon honaw, my fair belle Creole."

"Ah! well, you who sacrifice so much for effect, need not care about that."

As Mr. Boosey did not at all comprehend this reply, he thought it best to retreat; and the lady in black velvet spoke, in her most stately manner:

"I am surprised, Mrs. Pierre, that you should speak so freely, before my daughter and myself, of so near a connection as Mrs. Ernest Linden. I must assure you that her letters have given us a high opinion of her heart and mind. Benevolence, refinement, and cultivation of a high order

breathe through them, and I confess to a desire to become well acquainted with their writer. First impressions are often deceptive, and I think you must view Mrs. Linden through a prejudiced medium."

"She will soon appear to speak for herself," said Mrs. Pierre, significantly. "The victimized husband interests me more just now. Really, now, do you not think Ernest Linden is greatly altered, Mrs. Euston?"

There was a fitting expression of pain upon the calm face of Mrs. Euston, and she reluctantly replied:

"Seven years must change any one, and Ernest has suffered from bad health during many of them. He returned home for change of air."

"*That* will do him no good, and you will see it. It is his mind that is diseased; I see what passes before me, and my judgments are often pretty accurate. Ernest Linden is either dying of weariness, or he is fretting over some secret cause of sorrow the world knows nothing of."

"I did not give you credit for being so sentimental," replied Mrs. Euston with a half smile. "Ernest suffers from an affection of the liver, and not of the heart. He is not a romantic hero who wishes to impress the world into the belief that he has a silent sorrow that consumes his life."

"No—I am not sentimental; but I use my eyes to some purpose, and you will find out that I am right some of these days. Ah! there they come at last!"

The eyes of the three were turned toward the door, the crowd momentarily parted, and the two who had been so freely commented on by the widow, were distinctly visible to Mrs. Euston and her daughter. A painful revulsion of feeling caused them to shrink back, and glance with an expression of pained surprise into each other's eyes. The next moment the emotion was controlled, and they calmly waited the approach of Linden and his wife.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE ORDEAL.

ERNEST moved through the crowd with graceful ease, though there was an expression of lassitude upon his strikingly handsome face which spoke of ill health, and that gradual wasting of both mental and physical strength for which medicine has as yet found no remedy. His complexion, naturally fair, was now blanched to the hue of marble, and his broad brow showed the blue tracery of the veins upon the thin temples. The hand, also, which lay upon the breast of his black coat, was of a deadly pallid hue, with little appearance of life in the long, nerveless fingers, which looked as if they had not sufficient energy to grasp an object with such tenacity as would enable him to hold it firmly. He paused every moment, to reply courteously to the greetings that were offered him, and to present the lady who leaned upon his arm.

A greater contrast to her stately husband could scarcely have been imagined. Her dumpy figure, her coarse and inelegant features, could not be disguised by the arts of the toilette, even if these had been attempted; but Mrs. Linden seemed to be too well aware of her personal deficiencies to seek to conceal them by the exercise of taste in dress. She wore a crimson moire, with flounces of black lace, which the inquisitive eyes that rested upon her at once detected as an imitation. Diamonds were used in profusion on her arms, neck, and head-dress, but the fair critics having detected a sham in her lace, were disposed to pronounce her jewels the products of Parisian skill; and not the genuine articles.

With the air of a person who imagines she is conferring an honor, Mrs. Linden replied to the courtesies addressed

to her by her husband's friends, in as few words as possible. As they drew near Mrs. Euston, Clara whispered:

"Never mind, mamma; Madam de Staël was as brown and as ugly as Amelia is. She may prove as witty and fascinating as Neckar's daughter. Let us hope so, at all events."

"Does my face betray that I need such consolation, Clara? Then, I must put on a different expression," replied Mrs. Euston, in the same tone.

At that moment a voice, whose lightest tone had once the power to thrill her inmost heart, spoke calmly beside her, and she looked up to meet the ineffably sad eyes of Ernest Linden, as he said:

"Permit me, Ellinor—pardon me, Mrs. Euston—permit me to present to you Mrs. Linden; and from both yourself and my cousin Clara, to bespeak your kind regards for her; for she is a stranger in a strange land."

"That last claim would be sufficient in itself; but when to it is added the interest inspired by your wife, Mrs. Linden may feel assured of the warmest welcome, both from Clara and myself."

Mrs. Linden nodded her head carelessly, and volubly said:

"One of the inducements held out to me to come to America with Mr. Linden, was the acquaintance of his accomplished aunt and her lovely step-daughter. Can't you kiss me, Miss Clara? or is it not the fashion in this country, for I'm told nobody ventures here to do anything that is not fashionable?"

Blushing vividly, Clara stooped forward and touched her lips to the brown cheek of her new relative; which action, Mr. Alsop declared, reminded him of a stately rose vailing her queenly head to the common earth; for which poetic comparison he was indebted to a bottle of champagne, which he had surreptitiously imbibed.



"A warm welcome to our kindred is usually the fashion in all lands," replied Miss Euston, recovering from her momentary embarrassment.

"I trust you will find much to love and appreciate in your adopted country."

"I doubt it, cousin Clara. America can never be Old England."

"I was scarcely prepared to find you so much attached to your native land," said Mrs. Euston, "for I had the impression that you preferred living in France."

"Interest bound my father to that soil; but I always wished to go back to Albion, the land of the free."

"Then I hope you will find something to love here. We are certainly the descendants of old mother England, and have preserved much of her spirit, with many of her customs."

"Oh! as to the customs of any lands, I have emancipated myself from all such trammels. I think that people should act out their own individuality, without regard to the restraints of society. I always do exactly as I please, and I think everybody else should do the same."

"It would be a singular world, and very difficult to live in, if we did," replied Mrs. Euston, with a smile. "I have found that by forbearance, and mutual concession, we can alone get through life in peace."

"But if I don't care for peace—if I would rather be roused up by a stiff breeze, and rouse others up in my turn—what then? Life stagnates when there is too much quiet, and by doing my own way, I gain two ends—stir up others, and have a brisk northwester."

Mrs. Euston glanced at the fastidious and refined husband to see how he bore these remarks. A crimson spot glowed deeply in the centre of either cheek, but in other respects his self-command was perfect. He spoke with those who pressed around the group, and his tones were as even

as if quite unconscious of the unfavorable impression his wife was producing. But the tension of his nerves at last proved too strong for his physical frame; the conversation continued pretty much in the same strain, until Linden grew suddenly pale, and pressing his hand upon his heart, exclaimed:

"Air—air—I am suffocating!"

The curtains were drawn aside, the window thrown open and the sudden gush of cold air sent those around him shivering to one side. In another moment he had recovered his usual impassive self-control, but feeling that he had borne as much as nature would permit, he decisively drew the arm of his wife beneath his own, and sternly whispered:

"The ordeal is over. Come with me, for I must go home, or die in this vanity fair."

Mrs. Linden muttered some indistinct words, but yielded to the wish he expressed; and, bowing to the circle, the two hurriedly sought the fair hostess, to pay their parting compliments.

Clara pressed the hand of her mother, and softly whispered:

"What a blow to my uncle—to us all! Oh, mamma, what can be the mystery of this unnatural union?"

"Heaven knows, Clara. I dare not even attempt to guess. But, hush; our chagrin must not be betrayed to others. Oh! it is an incomprehensible affair. We had better go. Mr. Alsop, pray call for my carriage; it grows very late, and we must return home."

The young man went on his errand, and the ladies made their way toward the cloak room.

The departure of Mrs. Euston and her daughter was the signal for loosing the tongues of those who had witnessed the meeting between the wife of Ernest Linden and the woman who for years had been known to be his affianced bride.

Mrs. Pierre was the first to speak:

"What on earth could have induced Ernest Linden to marry that dowdy? Was she a millionaire? and had he gambled away all his fortune? I declare, I never was so puzzled in all my life."

"Very likely he *had* lost his means as you suggest, for he was a man of pleasure; but I should once have said that such a man would have preferred suicide to the necessity of taking such a wife as that. She is positively odious and vulgar. I think I can amend your judgment, pithy as it was. I should call her a parcel of malice put up in brass. To think that such a creature should have the assurance to look down on us, because we were born on this side of the Atlantic! I declare, I pity that poor fellow of a husband."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MIDNIGHT ENCOUNTER.

WHILE these criticisms were freely uttered, the two who occasioned them were seated in a luxurious carriage, rolling rapidly from the scene of gayety, in which one of them had most unwillingly borne a part.

Linden leaned back and seemed to breathe heavily and painfully, while his wife was nursing her wrath until it gained a sufficient degree of acridness to imbue every word she might utter with due venom. She at length spoke in French, but not the pure *lingua Franca*; a mixed patois spoken only by the lower orders in the provinces, flowed volubly from her lips, which we translate to suit ourselves.

"So, sir, the ordeal proved more than you could calmly bear, even with all your assumed stoicism. This Ellinor to whom you were so long betrothed, yet whom you never had

courage to marry, has seen your ugly, ill-bred wife. I could see that she was filled with amazement—perhaps with compassion for you, for in spite of her efforts to conceal them, I read her feelings as easily as I understood the rapid beating of your heart against the arm you unconsciously pressed to your side as we drew near her."

"Yet—yet you did all you could to torture me! Never did I see you appear to such disadvantage. Oh, Heaven! why should I be a martyr to such a fate!"

"Because weakness and want of principle have, in your case, met their just reward. I regard a martyr as a person with some strength of will and purpose; not a being ruled by circumstances, and tryannized over by—well, you know what, so I need not particularize."

"No—unfortunately I comprehend too well," and the sigh which closed the sentence was so deep that his tormentor paused a few moments, as if to afford him time to feel all the bitterness of a vain regret.

At length she asked, in a quick, fierce tone—

"Why did you not marry Mrs. Euston before your uncle took her from you? She loved you once; nay, I am not sure that she does not love you yet, in spite of her assumed indifference."

"God forbid! that so noble and true a woman should love one so fallen from his high estate as I am! So unworthy to remember that first manly dream of happiness with which she was so fondly linked. I did love Ellinor Euston with all the strength—all the power of my nature, but—but—I dared not wed her. My course toward her was criminal; but *you* have no right to an explanation of its cause. *Now*, madam, I trust that you are satisfied that in wringing this acknowledgment from me, you have gained nothing that you did not know before. If you deserved the name of woman, this is a subject on which your lips would have been sealed."

"Ah, indeed! Keep cool, Mr. Linden, for I, who have



the most cause to be indignant, am not at all excited. It seems to me very singular that this paragon of an Ellinor should have married a man who was old enough to be her father, simply because he was rich."

"Ellinor is not mercenary—she did not marry until she had obtained the certainty that I had degraded myself to *your* level. Then, to retain the child which her best friend had bequeathed to her, she gave her hand to my uncle. With his dying breath the words were uttered which gave Mrs. Euston the right to retain Clara as her daughter. Mercenary! No!—it was an act of self-renunciation—of tender love for the child of her adoption. Ellinor was already independent, wealth was no inducement, for she could have married others suited to herself in years, who were quite equal to my uncle in worldly goods."

"Of course this paragon is peerless and stainless," was the mocking response. "Everything she touches is transmuted into something rich and rare, and her most equivocal actions are dictated by the loftiest and purest motives. Yet before seeing me this evening she permitted one of the crowd of fools and flatterers who thronged around the rich widow, to say of me what I will never forgive."

"Well—what then? Mrs. Euston cannot be accountable for all that is said to her. Neither can she, as a well-bred woman, notice the efforts of malice to wound her through a new connection."

"And one so open to the shafts of malevolent wit, you would add if you dared. No one knows better than myself wherein I am vulnerable; yet I do not the less resent the impertinence when I become aware of it. This insult I shall not forget, I assure you."

"What could it have been that was so keenly pointed as to inflict an incurable wound?"

"A scandalous insolence! I heard it was whispered around more than once that I am a small parcel of nothing

poorly put up. The sneerers shall find out that I am a nothing that can sting; and poorly as I may be put up by nature, the trappings of wealth shall enable me to eclipse them all."

"As you did to-night with your imitation lace and real diamonds. A mixture of meanness and splendor, which my countrywoman tolerate as little as any in the world."

"How should such western barbarians know the difference? The lace was a good imitation, and what was the use of giving an enormous sum for a dress trimming to be worn *here* where neither nobility nor titles are to be found? My dress was quite good enough for the place to which it was worn, and the people I saw there."

"And *you*, with your antecedents, sneer at those you met to-night, and deem anything you choose to wear good enough for republican eyes," he disdainfully said. "Learn, madam, that among those you saw assembled to-night, were found descendants of as good blood as Europe may boast, judged even by their own standard; while many others were the sons and daughters of men who had vindicated the right of the human race to the title of noble; for they in their lives illustrated in various ways the value of man as man; as an emanation from the great nature which stamps the image of God's divinity upon his creatures."

"Hoity-toity, what a tirade! You would make out that the people I saw at the Stuckups to-night are descendants of the gods themselves. Your sneer at *my* antecedents I value at its true worth, since, as your wife, I am fully your equal. If this was a gathering of the *élite* of the land, why has the giver of the feast so absurd a name? Though I must confess that it was appropriate, for I never in my life saw people who seemed to be more stuck up above their original position!"

At this home thrust her antagonist felt quite crest-fallen, for he could not deny its truth. The Stuckups did deserve

their name, and he knew that in the warmth of his insulted nationality he had rather exaggerated the pretensions of the majority of their guests. He coolly replied—

"Absurd as the name may seem, the father of the family is Commodore Stuckup, and the children take a respectable position in our best society."

"Your best society!" sneered Mrs. Linden. "What is it but a collection of traders and their wives, who have scarcely a thought beyond cent per cent., and the display the dollars thus gained may enable them to make. What was this Stuckup Commodore of, I wonder? He owned a fishing smack probably in the days of his nobodyism; and now he has made a fortune, the skipper is termed Commodore. You see I know something about American pretensions, and the national habit of appropriating titles to which they have only the shadow of a claim."

As this random guess came very near the truth, Linden maintained a dignified silence, and his wife felt as if she had gained the victory. She sunk into a corner of the carriage, and wrapped her furs more closely around her, for the night was intensely cold, and snow lay heaped up in the gutters, where it had been thrown in masses of a repulsive greyish color, bearing little resemblance to the feathery crystals which had fallen to the earth a few hours before.

Suddenly the carriage stopped. With a shiver Linden lowered the window to inquire the cause. The driver answered—

"Not much, sir; only a woman has dropped down here at the crossing, and the horses started back when they saw her lyin' at their feet. Poor thing! she seems to have fainted like."

Obedying the first promptings of humanity, Linden opened the door and was in the act of springing out, when his wife grasped his cloak, and said—

"It's only some pauper. Let the driver go on; why

should you risk your health in looking after such as she is?"

He angrily shook off her grasp.

"Woman! no—no—the first impulse of a true woman would be to aid a suffering sister. Torment! Nemesis! whatever you may be, let go your hold, that I may lift this poor wretch from the frozen ground, which is scarcely colder than the heart that would prevent me from assisting her."

"Go, then," she muttered; "this keen wind will only enable the Evil One to claim his own a little sooner."

Linden had not waited for this ungracious permission; he tore his cloak from her yielding fingers, and hurried to the side of the insensible woman. The horses reared and threatened to become unmanageable, and the driver was too busily engaged with them to give his master any assistance. She seemed to have fallen from exhaustion, and as Linden raised her head with difficulty, the glare from a neighboring gas light fell upon a pallid face, so worn and emaciated by suffering and want, as to be pitiable to look on.

He stooped over the prostrate form, half rose with a stifled cry of horror, and his hair seemed to stiffen as his dilating eyes fixed themselves upon the wasted features. Then, with sudden strength he snatched her from the earth and held her closer to the light as he groaned—

"It is—it is! reduced to this! Lord, Lord, has retribution found me when I am least able to bear it!"

The woman unclosed her eyes—gazed wildly upon the face that looked upon her. Gradually a perception of his identity seemed to reach her clouded faculties; she passed her hand over her eyes as if to clear away a mist, and slowly said—

"At last we have met; *at last*, after years of weary searching, God has sent you to me in my extremity. My child is dying—dying of cold, of want, of wretchedness, and my heart is breaking. Come—come—I left him to obtain a

physician, for he needs help; but I was faint with hunger, and I must have fallen from exhaustion. Come with me, I conjure you, for heaven must have sent you to me in my dire need."

"Madeline, is it indeed yourself?" he hoarsely asked, "or art thou a phantom raised up to mock my misery—to make me feel that all my past sins are coming in the same hour to ask for atonement?"

By this time the woman had regained complete command of her senses; she lifted herself from his arms, as she slowly said—

"Deserted for years, I came to this city with no vain hope that my claims would be acknowledged. I know that I have no power to enforce them, but my child is bright, promising and lovely. Come with me where he lies ill, even unto death; let your wealth rescue him from the grim conqueror, and I give him up to you, while I seek some nook in which to lay me down and die, far, far away from you—from him."

Pallid, worn and wretched as the speaker was, there was a depth of desolate anguish in the tones of her voice, an expression of dignity in her misery, that commanded respect. Linden felt a pang of shame as he thrust his hand in his pocket, and drew forth his purse. He attempted to press it in her hand as he hurriedly said—

"It is impossible for me to accompany you now. Take this for the sake of the lad, and give me your address—tomorrow I will see you. I will make arrangements to have you properly cared for. I must go, for this night air is chilling me to the heart, yet you are exposed to it while I ride. Take my cloak."

He was in the act of removing it from his shoulders, when a shrill voice from the carriage window exclaimed—

"Would you give a cloak worth five hundred dollars to wrap a street beggar? Fie, Mr. Linden, are you mad?"

Who is this woman, and why do you hold so long a conversation with her on this freezing night?"

"She is one I once knew: she has claims upon me, Amelia, that cannot be set aside."

"Then give her money, and end this scene."

The stranger looked into the angry face of the speaker, and pointing to her, slowly said—

"And she—what is she to you, Ernest Gordon, and why does she address you by a name unknown to me?"

"Because that is his true name, and I am his wedded wife," responded Mrs. Linden, with angry emphasis. "How long is this disgraceful scene to last, Mr. Linden? What can this woman be to you, and why do you linger near her thus?"

A faint cry, stifled in its birth, issued from the pale lips of Madeline, and she turned swiftly away as she said—

"Enough! enough! the quest of years is ended—I have found but to lose you—degraded—lost—lost!" and her voice died away in the distance as she fled swiftly from his presence, unconscious of the weakness which had so recently overcome her.

Linden would have rushed after her, but his wife sprang from the carriage and grasped his arm, as she said in a commanding tone—

"Get into the carriage—this exposure will destroy you."

"I care not—Madeline did not take the money. She did not give me her address. She is perishing of want! Woman, do not detain me now: I must pursue her—must overtake her."

"It will be useless now; she is out of sight. Seek her to-morrow."

"Seek her amid the thousands of wretched poor in this city! How could I hope to find her in time to give her efficient aid?"

"It does not matter much, even if you fail. Really, it

seems to me I am greeted charmingly on my arrival in your native city. Presented in one evening to an old love in high life, and an ex—hem! *friend* in the lowest circles—I may be pardoned for placing the street beggar there, I suppose. Get into the carriage, Mr. Linden, and make such an *amende honorable* as you may be capable of, by explaining this very singular scene to me.”

Mechanically Linden obeyed, for this woman seemed to possess a power over him which he dared not defy. He sank back on the seat panting for breath, and buried his face in his hands. His companion closed the door herself, and called to the driver to proceed. She then settled herself comfortably in her seat, and in her most sarcastic tone, said—

“And now, my amiable *cara sposa*, what does this last scene mean? What relation does that ghastly-looking creature sustain towards the high-bred, elegant, aristocratic Ernest Linden? Make haste, I pray you, to unravel this knot of mystery, for my curiosity is on the *qui vive*.”

With a sigh that sounded like a groan, the unhappy man lifted his head, and defiantly replied—

“Except in public, I do not act a part towards *you*, madam, our mutual relations forbid it. You have no right to demand an explanation of this scene, nor will I give it. It is the one fatal concealment of my life, which has brought me to what I am—which formed the connecting link with the chain that binds me to you.”

“A bond which death alone shall break,” she vindictively replied. “Body and soul you are mine, so let the dainty Ellinor, the lowly pauper, beware how they interfere with my claims. I command you not to seek this woman or her child; let them perish in their misery; that fate is good enough for such as they.”

He gloomily replied—

“The command is scarcely needed, for it will be useless

to attempt to find them now. Madeline will afford no clue to her place of shelter; when she fled so abruptly from me, I knew that all was over. Such tardy atonement as I might now make is denied me, for God, the avenger, will not permit even this poor consolation to me.”

“I will see that you do not attempt to gain it, at all events,” she icily replied; then, with a sudden burst of passion, she went on, “Ernest Linden, I once loved you like an idiot, *now* I will torment you like a fiend. You might have turned me to your will, but you showed the loathing and the scorn of your imperious nature for the creature you were forced to wed, and thus have you aroused the deadlier passions which might forever have lain buried beneath the consciousness that my devotion was appreciated. If I am your Nemesis, it is your own fault. A pure incarnation of selfishness, you never yet have considered others, and the deep shadows on your future are but the work of your own hand.”

“It is true,” muttered the conscience-stricken man. “I accept the retribution, terrible as it is.”

The carriage drew up in front of the silent mansion, and the ill-assorted pair entered the stately abode, in which dwelt other sorrowful and dismayed hearts, whose pride was laid low—whose love mourned the change and degradation which had fallen on the idol of the house.

Mrs. Gaston rejoiced that the ordeal of her sister-in-law's introduction into society had passed without herself being present; for she was keenly mortified by the insignificance of Mrs. Linden, and she shrank with nervous dread from appearing in the critical set to which she belonged, with so bizarre a person as the chosen wife of that brother whose talents and social success had been the pride of her life.

On the following morning the three met over a late breakfast, and she hastened to inquire if the party of the previous evening had come up to the expectations of Mrs. Linden.

All the ill-humor of that lady seemed to have returned, and she curtly replied :

"For a New York party, I dare say it was a fair show ; but the rooms were too crowded, and the finery every one seemed anxious to display, had little chance to be seen. For my part when I wish to see an exhibition of jewels and laces, I think it is better to go to the shops in which they are for sale, than to such a jam as that great gathering last night was."

"Yet you were adorned with both, I presume," replied Mrs. Gaston with a conciliating smile. "An evening toilette cannot be made suitable for a party without their aid."

"Oh, yes ; I wore my bridal jewels, but in a crowd like *that*, I did not think it worth while to put on my point lace."

The emphasis called a quick flush to the cheek of Mrs. Gaston, and she said :

"Why not, Amelia? you could scarcely find better dressed women in any country, I fancy."

"True—but I am not ambitious of entering on that sort of rivalry with you Americans. It involves an expenditure of time, money, and patience, that I do not possess ; besides, I'm not handsome, so where is the use of troubling myself about what I shall wear? I am much more concerned about what I shall eat, for I declare I have not seen a dish dressed fit for a Vandal, since I left Paris."

At this sneer at her housekeeping, Mrs. Gaston bit her lip, and glanced at her brother ; she was justly proud of the elegant style maintained in the service of her table, for every luxury of the season was found there, prepared by a cook who perfectly understood his business. She constrainedly replied :

"I am sorry our cook does not please you. As a foreigner, you probably prefer dishes more highly seasoned. If so, all you have to do is to send your orders to Vance, and he

will serve you such dishes as you like, prepared to suit your taste."

"Oh, thank you ; I do not wish to interfere in any way, but some time when I have nothing else to do, I will step into the kitchen and show the cook how I like things done."

She lifted her eyes, and encountered a quick, keen flash of anger from those of her husband, but this only seemed to stimulate her, and she added :

"I am an accomplished cook, as no one knows better than my scowling husband yonder, for it was a *ragout* I made with my own skillful hands that first attracted him to——"

"Amelia!" thundered Linden, "are you mad to run on thus? What will my sister think of you?"

She turned on him with an air of comical surprise, and mockingly asked :

"Must one have no natural tastes, because one happens to be born to a fortune? Did not nature make Louis XVI a locksmith in spite of his royal blood? What wonder that she should have made Amelia Linden a cook? Yes, I avow it—making something nice to eat is my passion."

"It is one you will not indulge while you are my wife, I can assure you."

"We will see to that, sir," was the defiant reply. "I have always heard that your countrywomen neglect household economy ; but I see no credit in it myself. It is of more practical use to know how to cook a good dish, than to be able to execute the most brilliant sonata. It shocks your superfine ideas of elegance to hear me say this, I know, but then you, unluckily, are a specimen of refined porcelain tacked to a fragment of common delf."

"Your estimate of yourself seems to have wonderfully fallen," he contemptuously retorted. "It is the first time I ever heard you admit your inferiority to any human being."

"I am far from admitting it now. I am ashamed of no taste with which nature has endowed me, therefore I have no snobbish fear of lowering myself below my true standard, as are some of the pretenders to gentility I could name, if politeness did not seal my lips."

With this parting thrust, she skipped from the room, singing a barcarole in a tuneless voice which she knew always grated on the sensitive ear of her husband.

Mrs. Gaston lingered over her breakfast, hoping her brother would speak of the entertainment of the previous evening, that she might form some idea of the impression made by his wife; but he made no allusion to it, and he looked so ill and depressed this morning, that she forebore to refer to what she knew must have been a severe trial to him.

Linden at length aroused himself from a painful reverie, and asked:

"Sister, do you not belong to several societies for the relief of the destitute in this city?"

"Yes — Ellinor and myself have interested ourselves in such efforts as have been made to alleviate distress. I think we are connected with every one in the city. Do you wish to recommend an object of charity?"

At the word charity, a disagreeable qualm arose in the breast of the listener, yet he felt that the word was not misapplied. He repressed the emotion, and replied:

"I have. Last night I met one I formerly knew, who is in poverty and sickness. She has claims on me, on the score of old friendship, and I wish to aid her. It must be done without her knowledge, or the service would probably be refused. Ask me no questions, Cornelia, but serve me discreetly, and my heart will bless you. Let it be known at every one of your charitable associations that if a person calling herself Madeline Gordon is known to them, or applies to them for aid, *you* will take on yourself the

care of supplying her with all she may need. Draw on my purse freely, it shall always be open to you in this sacred cause. Her son is ill, and she does not seem strong enough to do much toward making a support."

"I will do as you wish, Ernest, and even more. I will cause inquiry to be made for Mrs. Gordon among my own particular *protégés*, for in this vast city there are many suffering creatures who would sooner perish in their destitution than ask aid of a public society. This poor creature may possibly be found among such, since you have known her in more prosperous circumstances."

This assurance seemed to lift a portion of the heavy weight from Linden's mind; already had he sent his servant to the Herald office to insert an advertisement to the effect that if Madeline Gordon would call at the banking house of Drew & Co., she would hear of something to her advantage. Immediately after breakfast Linden drove to the office of those gentlemen to deposit a sum of money with them, and explain the use to which he wished it to be applied.

Then having done all that lay in his power to aid the unfortunate mother and child, he repaired to the Astor library, and in the lore of books, endeavored to bury the growing sense of desolation and remorse that preyed upon his spirits.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### STARTLING NEWS FOR CLARA.

THE residence of Mrs. Euston was on one of the quiet streets leading from Fifth avenue toward the upper portion of the city. It stood upon the corner of a closely built

block, and was shaded by thrifty looking trees; a narrow strip of ground planted with evergreens, separated the house from the street.

A flight of stone steps led to the massive door, on which the grim lion's head of a past day glowered in the shape of a knocker, but his day of usefulness had departed, and a bell now usurped the duty of the thundering summons which had once aroused the house.

It was a city mansion, built on the common model—a hall running the whole length of the house, with a suite of rooms on one side for the reception of guests. These consisted of lofty parlors, divided by a double row of fluted columns. At either end of the narrow passage thus formed, stood a marble nymph poised in such an attitude as might induce one to believe her about to spring among the guests, and mingle with the festivities of the hour.

Carpets representing the floral luxuriance of a tropical clime covered the floors, and flowing draperies of velvet fell in gorgeous folds from the lofty windows; but the eye turned from the mere accessories of wealth to examine the pictures that hung upon the walls, and the various objects of taste scattered over quaintly shaped tables which stood in every convenient spot.

There was a third room divided from the others by folding doors, the upper panels of which were filled with ground glass of a delicate rose color. This apartment was the family sitting-room, known as the "snuggery," into which only the privileged few were admitted who claimed to be the friends of the mistress of the mansion, and her young daughter.

The rest of the house was warmed by heated air, but in this room burned a glowing anthracite fire, and a wide-arched window admitted the cheerful sunlight upon vases containing flowering plants which stood on a wire stand in front of it.

The furniture of this cosy nook was covered with scarlet brocatelle, and the same warm hue prevailed in the carpet and curtains. A few highly finished engravings, interesting from their subjects, hung upon the walls, and a wire cage in which warbled a canary, was placed among the flowers.

Clara Euston, looking fresh and bright in spite of the dissipation of the previous night, stood beside the cage, clipping the dead leaves from her plants, and occasionally joining in the song of her bird with a clear thrilling tone which frequently caused him to pause and listen, with his bright eye growing brighter, and his plumage ruffling with pleasure.

Mrs. Euston sat in a large chair in front of the fire, with her head resting upon her hand, apparently absorbed in deep thought. Suddenly the bird chimed in with its mistress, uttering a strain so loud and clear as evinced his resolution to attempt a rivalry with her musical skill. Aroused from her pre-occupation by this sudden burst of melody, Mrs. Euston turned to Clara with a smile, and said—

"Ziska will break his heart yet, Clara, trying to emulate your voice. Are you not afraid to test his powers so severely?"

"Oh Ma Nelly, the little creature seems to enjoy it so thoroughly that I cannot refrain from giving him a lesson every morning. To see him throw his head to one side, swell his throat, and try to follow me, is too delicious. Listen now," and another gush of melody filled the room.

Mrs. Euston looked amused, as she said—

"Excellent; but I scarcely expected to find you thus employed this morning. A young lady who is required to decide on her first offer of marriage, is scarcely expected to occupy her time in giving her bird a music lesson. Have you seriously thought of Mr. Alsop's letter, and weighed its contents?"



"Really ma, I beg pardon, but I forgot all about it. I do not think that my adorer is very much in earnest—at least I trust he is not, for I can give no encouragement to what he calls his dearest hopes. I suspect he will bear their disappointment with sound philosophy—and soon find some other fair girl on whom to set them."

"Upon my word, a very summary way of dismissing one of the wealthiest young merchants in the city. Do you know that Mr. Alsop will probably be a millionaire one of these days?"

"It is all the same to me, Ma Nelly, I want neither him nor his dollars. Thank heaven! I have enough of my own to save me from making fortune an object when I marry."

A shadow crossed the expressive face of Mrs. Euston, and after a thoughtful pause she asked—

"Suppose your fortune should prove a shadow, Clara? that you should be called on to relinquish it to another claimant? could you willingly exchange the brilliant position of Miss Euston the heiress, for that of little Clara in her step-mother's cottage, with barely a competence?"

The young girl turned quickly to her, and the rapid changes in her complexion showed that she was far from listening with indifference to her words; she said almost in a whisper—

"The event I often dreamed of has then occurred? Albert Lumley has returned to claim his own."

"A person claiming to be Albert Lumley is now in New York: he has yet to prove his identity, which after so many years of absence, will not be a very easy thing to do."

Clara came and sat down on a low ottoman at the feet of her mother. She took her hand in both her own, and looked inquiringly into her face, but she did not speak. Mrs. Euston saw that she was paler than usual, and her eyes seemed to dilate with emotion.

"You are deeply moved, my child. Is our new mode of

life so much more attractive to you than that we led in Ivy Cottage, that you cannot bear to relinquish it?"

"Oh no—it is not that; but this is so unexpected—so strange; after being absent twenty-one years, it will indeed be difficult for Mr. Lumley to prove his identity; but we must not avail ourselves of that to do him an injustice. For you, Ma Nelly, I shall regret the change more than for myself, for you are in the sphere you were born to fill."

"Splendor has little charm for me, Clara; but your future promised so brilliantly, that I own I should have desired that Mr. Lumley had remained contented to lead the wandering life he has so long preferred."

"Fie Ma Nelly; do not cloud your natural sense of justice on my account. I shall have enough left, at any rate, for the accumulations from the income of the property were to become mine."

Mrs. Euston looked distressed, but she firmly replied—

"They amount to nothing, I am afraid; for the estate has not been well managed. You are already aware that on your father's death his estate was found to be so hopelessly involved that nothing was saved from it. There were debts still left that would have impeached his good name, had they not been discharged: your uncle, acting for you, applied nearly all the accumulations from the Lumley property to the liquidation of those claims. He did this with my sanction, for respectability is of more worth than money—and your father had risked something more than he should have done, in his wild speculations. I have never before told you this, Clara, for the fault of a parent should be held sacred to a child; but now I must speak the whole truth, that you may understand why your uncle and myself thought it best to pay those debts, even if we should thereby impoverish you in time to come."

"You were right, Ma Nelly, and I thank you from my heart. Name and fame untarnished, are far better than the

possession of gold. But where is Mr. Lumley? Have you seen him? What is he like?"

"He is a sun-burned sailor, who has passed the greater part of his life on the sea. I have not seen him myself, but I am assured that with a rough exterior he is a man of remarkable interest, and varied intelligence."

"How is it that he has been so long believed dead? What reason does he give for having deserted his father, and for not communicating with him even by letter?"

"Those questions must be answered by some one better informed than I am. I only know that Albert Lumley is now in New York, professing to be furnished with such evidence as will entitle him to the fortune I believed yours. His lawyer has already notified your uncle of these facts, and I had a note from him this morning, stating that Mr. Lumley will be prepared to submit his proofs of identity to him during the present week. I thought it best to inform you before the last steps are taken which will produce so great a change in your future prospects."

While Mrs. Euston spoke, she sought to read the face of her step-daughter, to see the effect this unexpected announcement produced; but Clara bowed her head upon her hands, and remained silent many moments. Her mother passed her hand caressingly over her shining hair, and waited for her to speak. At length she looked up with a faint smile, and said:

"For one so young as I am, I am afraid you will consider me very mercenary, for I cannot quite reconcile myself to the thought of relinquishing my fortune even to one who asserts a better right to it than I possess. I cannot bring myself in a moment to believe in the validity of this claim."

"Be assured, my child, that the proofs of his identity will be rigorously examined by those whose duty it is to guard your interests. All that remains to us is to submit to their decision."

"Do not misunderstand me, mamma. If this man is really the heir let him have his inheritance; I would not withhold it if I could; but he may be practising a fraud to gain wealth."

"My dear, his claims will be so severely sifted that he will have no chance to succeed in such an attempt. In the prospect of this loss, you feel the natural regret of one on whom life opened so auspiciously."

"Ah, mamma, do not believe that I am thinking of myself more than others. By this blow, our plans for the benefit of the needy are rendered comparatively useless. You have taught me the noblest use I can make of wealth, and I feel a pang when I think that my fortune must pass into hands that will probably spend it only in reckless self-indulgence."

"Darling child, we will still be able to spare the widow's and the orphan's mite. We shall possess a sufficient income for the rational enjoyment of life. Blessed with that, what right shall we have to complain even if our superfluity is taken from us?"

"None, none. I feel it, Ma Nelly; and now the first surprise is over, I can look on the possibility of losing it with calmness."

Clara quietly arose and again stood beside her bird, but his melody was unheeded; her face was serious, Mrs. Euston thought almost sorrowful, and she regretted the effect her revelation had produced. She had believed her step-daughter too young and careless of worldly interests to be thus nearly touched by the loss of fortune; but she could not fathom the source of the regret felt by Clara; the poor child scarcely admitted it even to herself.

Deep down in her young heart lay nestled a dream of generous, unselfish love, cherished from childhood, until it had unconsciously become a portion of her very being.

Young Willie Ashton, the son of a widow lady in narrow

circumstances, who dwelt near their country house, had been her companion, playmate, and protector in all her childish difficulties. He had lately graduated and commenced the practice of law in the great city with a prospect of succeeding after years of struggle had made known his talents to those whose appreciation of them could help him on in the race of life. The true secret of Clara's indifference to her first offer might have been found in the fact that it seemed to her an absurdity for any other man to make love to her so long as Ashton showed, by every act of his life, that he looked forward to a time when it would not be presumptuous in him to offer the position he could win, to her acceptance, together with the true heart that had never wandered from its allegiance.

Without the aid of spoken words, Clara knew all this, and the hopes of the two blended in that future which was to crown them with life's dearest joys. By this blow all her bright castles in the air were suddenly shattered; for she knew enough of life to be aware that years must intervene before her lover could rationally hope to be in a position to marry a girl endowed with so slender a portion as would now be left to her.

But Clara was too young, too hopeful, and too ignorant of the real adversities of life, to remain long cast down. She struggled successfully against her regrets, and presently turned her sweet face towards Mrs. Euston, wearing its old smile of affectionate trust. She approached her mother, and tenderly placing her arms around her, kissed her as she said:

"Pardon me, best of mothers, that I betrayed a momentary disappointment at the turn my affairs have taken. I submit myself to the will of 'Him who doeth all things well.' He doubtless saw that this fortune might become a snare to me, and he wisely wrests it from me. After all, Mr. Lumley is certainly entitled to the enjoyment of the

property that belonged to his father; and I trust he will make a good use of it."

Mrs. Euston clasped her to her heart, and lavished caresses on her.

"My own true-hearted child, I knew this would be the ultimate decision at which you must arrive. Does the prospective change in your fortune incline you to take a second thought over Mr. Alsop's proposal?"

"By no means: Mr. Alsop can be nothing to me. End his suspense at once, if you please, mamma."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CLAIRVOYANT AND HER MYSTERIOUS PATIENT.

IN the same room in which the singularly fulfilled prediction of General Euston's death had been uttered, sat two persons; one was the seeress, wearing the same inscrutable calmness of demeanor; the other a man of thirty-five, with the careless, defiant expression of one who had seen life in many of its hardest phases, and snatched such pleasures as came within his reach, without much regard to consequences, either to himself or others.

He was quite six feet in height, with a complexion browned to the hue of the olive, with a thick suit of heavy black hair, and eyes of that rayless darkness which seem to absorb light and emit none. It was a pitiless, an unscrupulous eye, and wo to him or her on whom its fiery glance fell with a purpose of evil. A heavy moustache and whiskers covered the lower part of the face, concealing the sensuous lips and coarse jaw.

He spoke in a doubting tone—

"Your skill has been highly vaunted to me, madam, and

the service I require of you is of such importance to me, that I am willing to pay you any reasonable sum to obtain it."

"Speak, then, to the point, and if I *can* aid you I will do so. There is a limit to the power I possess, but so far as it extends, I will do your bidding."

"Tell me truly, can you place yourself in *rapport* with another person in a magnetic slumber, and wring from him a secret he is unwilling to impart?"

"That depends on the condition of his mind. If the secret desired is the one dominant idea at the moment of communication, I can reveal it."

"You feel assured of this?"

"I do, for I have done it more than once."

"I warn you, madam, that the test I require of you will, in a few hours, prove the truth or falsity of your pretensions."

She smiled disdainfully as she replied—

"I am no charlatan; the power that belongs to me was my birthright; I do not comprehend its mystery—I do not seek to fathom its origin. It is enough that I know I possess it for the aid of others, as well as to gain the means of subsistence for myself. When can I see your friend?"

"In two hours he will be ready to receive you. I must prepare his mind for the interview before it takes place, for he is an invalid, unable to leave his bed. From an accident which happened to him several years ago, his intellect is slightly shattered, and it becomes necessary to deal with him as a child. A lawsuit in which he is deeply interested is about to be instituted, and he capriciously withholds from me the knowledge necessary to the recovery of important papers. He is possessed with the idea that if I obtain them, his life, which is now important to me, will no longer be cared for—that once in possession of the property, I will leave him to perish. It is an absurd hallucination, for he is

as deeply interested in the success of the suit as I am, and the fortune obtained from it will enable us both to revel in wealth through all our future lives."

Madame Latude listened with intense interest, and her deep calm eyes never wandered from the face of the speaker; she seemed to be analyzing it with all the singular intuition with which nature had gifted her. An expression of painful doubt passed over her face, but she finally said:

"I will undertake what you wish, sir. Success, as I told you, depends on circumstances. Prepare the mind of your friend to dwell on the subject you wish to investigate, and I will do my best to serve you."

"Very well, madam. Two hours hence a carriage will be sent for you. It will convey you to a respectable boarding-house in the lower part of the city. I will meet you in the hall, and take care that no interruption occurs until our experiment is ended. I will pay you half your fee in advance, to prove to you how much in earnest I am. Get the truth for me, and I shall even be willing to double that."

She glanced with surprise at the amount of the note he handed her, and graciously said—

"It is not often that I find so liberal a patron. I will certainly aid you to the fullest extent of my power."

He departed, and at the hour named a close carriage drew up in front of Madame Latude's residence. Heavily muffled in a plain dark cloak, with a thick veil over her face, she took her seat in the vehicle, and was rapidly whirled to the place of meeting. She had no misgivings as to this course, for in the exercise of her vocation she was often called on to go alone to the most remote parts of the city. Relying on her power to read character and motives, she had never hitherto found herself deceived, and her confidence had increased with the exercise of her anomalous gift.

She was driven to a narrow, crowded street, near the Battery, and the carriage stopped in front of a shabby-look-

ing house, with a sign on the door bearing the single word "Boarding." Giving directions to the hackman to return for her in half an hour, Madame Latude alighted and entered a scantily-furnished hall, in which she was met by her late visitor.

Merely motioning to her to follow him, he ascended flight after flight of uncarpeted stairs, until they stood under the roof. Unclosing a badly-fitting door, the two entered a low-ceiled room, lighted by two dormer windows, and warmed by a meagre fire in a small Franklin stove. The furniture was old and begrimed with dust, and the bare floor looked as if years had passed since the purifying qualities of water had been known to it.

A couch, with wretched bedding upon it, was drawn in front of the stove, and on it rested the attenuated form of a man who had once evidently possessed powerful physical strength, but who now seemed reduced to the weakness and helplessness of childhood. His black hair, thickly threaded with grey, hung in neglected masses over his brows, and his wild eyes wandered restlessly toward the figures which had just entered. He feebly muttered—

"Who is this, Alfred? A nurse, at last? I don't want her—I don't want any new people around me. Take her away, and let me alone. I am going to sleep."

"My dear fellow, this is not the nurse—I have not been able to get a suitable one yet. This lady is only a friend who has come to visit you. You remember Roselands and the boyish days you passed there? Madam Latude knows something of the place, too, and she can talk with you about the home of your boyhood."

He made an effort to lift his head, but sank back as he angrily said—

"You have only brought her here to worm the secret out of me. No—I shall not talk with her on that subject. Let *you* gain the knowledge you seek and I may lie here and

die like a dog, or be sent to the poorhouse to fill a pauper's grave. No—no—take her away I say—I have nothing to say to her."

"But my dear fellow, am I not seeking to benefit yourself more than any one else? The money when gained, will be more yours than mine; but I do not believe that you really know where the will was placed. If you do, you would have told me long ago."

"You don't, ha! well it's no matter what you believe; but I could walk to the spot now if this cursed weakness would let me. I see it before me now, all matted over with grass and weeds, but safe enough—safe enough. Nobody will ever suspect its hiding place."

As he thus rambled on, Madam Latude drew near the head of the couch, put forth her ungloved hand and made a few mysterious motions over the brow of the sick man. His features rapidly began to settle into immobility, and even his lips remained half closed as if arrested in the act of speaking. His breath came heavily and gaspingly, and he seemed as if lying under some powerful spell.

She then moved around in front of him, like one walking in sleep, and laid her hand upon his corrugated forehead. She sank slowly to a kneeling position, and lifting his left hand placed it upon her own head; in a few minutes her eyelids drooped as if weighed down by fatigue, and vague broken murmurs issued from her lips.

At first they were unintelligible, but gradually the listener caught words that made his heart beat rapidly, for he knew that they were shaping themselves into reminiscences of the long buried past of the stricken, wretched being whose individuality the clairvoyant had for the time assumed.

"Roselands—my happy home—no—it should have been, but it was not—the rule was too strict for me. Ungrateful! Do you not see the white hair—the clasped hands of

that old man? What does he say? Come back—only come, and you shall be free as air—oh! too late! too late!”

There was a brief pause, and the voice assumed a different tone—it defiantly said—

“No—you shall not get it. It is my last hope—relinquish it to *you* and I am lost. I know your craft. Not know where it is, indeed! ha ha! Do you know the old summer house overlooking the Hudson? The enchanted arbor in which I used to sit with pretty Annie Lyle.”

At this name a strange shiver ran through the frame of the clairvoyant, and so deadly a paleness overspread her naturally fair complexion that the looker on thought she was about to sink back insensible. But she only spoke in a faint, far off voice, which seemed as an echo sent from the measureless depths of space.

“Annie Lyle, where did you know her?”

Her own voice again made the response to the question she had asked.

“In her mother’s home; in the woodland by the mossy spring, where we met almost daily. Sweet Annie! your image is the only pure thing left in my guilty heart. Oh! I have sinned—sinned fearfully. Am I not punished sufficiently, Annie?”

The listener was afraid his mind would wander from the subject of such vital interest to himself, and he laid his hand upon the arm of Madam Latude, and fiercely whispered—

“The will—the box—quit this drivelling, and make him reveal what I wish to know.”

A convulsion passed over her face, and she threw her eyes wide open, but there was in them the cold bright glare of unconsciousness; but the touch which shivered through her frame, seemed to thrill the pulses of the sleeper, and communicate to them an impulse from the iron will of the speaker. His own lips moved and he uttered—

“The will—aye—aye, the will which can give me back

my own. But I dare not trust you—I dare not tell. The summer house in the old garden keeps its secret well—ha! that seat up on the left—it was there sweet Annie Lyle sat with me long ago.”

The voice sunk away in an inaudible whisper, and the clairvoyant arose from her kneeling posture with the air of a person lost in a vague dreamy trance. She pressed her hands upon her eyes, and turned toward her employer.

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## CHAPTER X.

### LUMLEY REVEALS HIS PLANS.

“HAVE you gained what you sought?” asked the clairvoyant of her employer, when she had recovered her natural state of mind and feeling.

“Are *you* not aware of what has passed?” he searchingly asked.

“How should I know, when I myself am placed beyond my natural sphere? I only have a vague impression that he called a name I have not heard for years—a name with which I was once familiar. Was it so?”

“He spoke of his first love, Annie Lyle. He often prattles of her when he is delirious.”

Again that chill paleness swept over her features, and she turned toward the insensible man. Her eyes perused the worn and weather-beaten lineaments, with the sad power of reading in their grim repose the history of that reckless past which had brought him to his present condition of helpless suffering. She lifted the lifeless hand, held it clasped gently within both her own, and gazed pityingly upon the wasted features. Her companion recalled her to the scene before her, by saying—



"The revelation affords a clue to what I wish to find—a vague and unsatisfactory one, but it may suffice. Are you sure you do not remember what was said?"

"Why should I deceive you? I have told you the simple truth," she calmly replied. "If the revelation proves insufficient, another interview may produce a better result. This poor man seems to suffer here for want of attention. I have a vacant room in my cottage; let him be removed there, and if the clue you speak of proves useless, perhaps I can use my power with more certain results when he has fallen more completely under my influence."

He glanced suspiciously toward her, but she seemed absorbed in a dreamy sort of half unconsciousness, and he hastily replied:

"He does well enough here. Should his words prove insufficient to guide me in my search, I will ask your assistance again. In that event, we can think of the expediency of removing him."

"I only spoke of it because he reminds me of one I knew in past days. It was a passing wish, for now I can see the trouble and anxiety such an inmate would bring into my quiet home. Adieu, sir; should you need me again, you know where to find me."

He nodded, placed in her hand another note, and after making a few rapid passes over the head of the sleeper, she glided from the room; in a few moments she was proceeding toward her own home in a strangely bewildered state of feeling.

As the clairvoyant passed from the apartment, the spell she had cast over the sick man was removed, and he lifted his heavy eyelids, and looked around him as if just aroused from an oppressive dream. He wearily asked:

"Who was here just now? I thought I saw a fair face bending over me—felt a cool, dewy influence stealing over my feverish brow. Was it you, Alfred, who tried to

alleviate my sufferings? or have I dreamed something more pleasant than my usual dreary visions?"

"You did not dream; I brought a wise woman, as we used to call them in our boyhood, to examine your condition, and see if anything can be done to help you. But you rudely repelled her kind offices."

"A wise woman? what do you mean? You have not brought a clairvoyant or a spiritual medium to see me?" asked the sick man, with great excitement. "I comprehend your intention; those people can dive into the depths of the most reserved soul, tear from it the hoarded secret of a life, and lay it bare to the vulgar gaze—make it common property to all the world. You have not—you dared not do this!"

"How can you suppose such a thing? Would it be to my interest to proclaim our secret till everything is ripe for action? Pooh! don't lose the little sense you have left. I only sent for Madame Latude to see you in her medical capacity; I wished her to judge of your condition, and inform me if you will ever recover sufficient soundness of mind and body to prosecute your claim to the estate you have so long permitted others to enjoy."

"And what did she say?"

"She thinks your restoration to health doubtful. She kindly proposed to remove you to her own house, where you could be better attended to, but I declined."

"Why decline without consulting me?"

"My reasons I do not choose to explain. They are satisfactory to my own mind."

"But if she is really a healing medium, perhaps she might benefit me. I wish you had not refused, for I should at least have some one to look to my comfort in the long, long hours of your absence. Oh, it is very dreary to be here, helpless and hopeless."

"Do you believe in the pretensions of these people?" derisively asked his companion.



"I cannot say that I have any absolute belief, for I have given very little thought to them; but I need attention, I yearn for kindness, and this woman may give it to me. Seek her again, good Alfred, and let me go to her, I entreat."

A bitter, taunting expression gleamed in the eyes of the listener, and he sternly said:

"Never shall you leave this garret till you comply with the demand I have so often made. Tell me where I shall find the will, and everything that can promote your comfort shall be done. Refuse, and I will find means to discover it without your assistance, and you may then die like a crushed worm."

"If I tell you, that will be my inevitable fate. I dare not trust you, Alfred Lumley. We bear nearly the same name—we are, or were, before my cursed accident, enough alike to have been sons of the same father. I comprehend the game you would play; you would assume my identity, gain my wealth, and end my wretched life by violence; but so long as you hope to gain the secret, you will use your best endeavors to keep life in me; therefore I guard it from you."

"And because you fear me, you pine away the miserable remnant of your life in this wretched hole, when a few words would bring to you wealth beyond your dreams. Albert, that knock upon your head destroyed all that was manly in you, as well as all the sense that nature gave you. See, you are living on *my* resources, yet you refuse to claim what you need only put forth your hand to grasp; for the women who enjoy your fortune will not insist on keeping it, when once satisfied that the true heir lives."

"Bring me a lawyer, then, and let me make my revelation to him. I have offered again and again to do this, and your refusal convinces me that you intend to deal unfairly by me."

"You are not in a condition to give a statement that would be relied on. You can speak rationally enough at intervals, but you oftener fly off like a half-crazed lunatic. The pressure on your brain unfits you to give such evidence as would be listened to. I can see that there is method in your madness, though a stranger would probably regard your story as the ravings of delirium, and it is only through *me* that you can hope to succeed in establishing your claim."

"You could easily verify the truth of my assertions if it suited your interest to do so; but I see through your motives; you have some scheme in reserve for cheating me out of the property, and if I am not to enjoy it, let my father's god daughter retain it. Hers is the next best right."

"Even against the claim of blood? Am I not your cousin, and after you, my uncle's natural heir?"

"And his son's unnatural persecutor. Oh, evil was the hour in which I first fell in your power! My head! my head! it will be rent in twain with this agony! Call back that woman; let her pass her cool hands over my brow, and alleviate this pain."

His features grew livid, and he tossed from side to side as if frantic with suffering. The black eyes of Lumley gleamed coldly upon him, and he seemed to be calculating in his own mind the amount of physical endurance left in the writhing form before him.

At length he slowly asked:

"Have you forgotten that he who inflicted the blow which reduced you to your present state, is of the same blood as the possessor of your fortune?"

"Ha! yes—I remember now; but he was repaid for it—he thinks now—that—I—"

His voice sunk away to a faint whisper, and he fell into the state of lethargy which always succeeded any violent burst of emotion.

Lumley bent over him, and felt his pulse, as he muttered:

"Miserable, besotted fool! If this woman has told me the truth, and I find the box named in the memoranda I filched from you long ago, your story is soon told. A hindrance upon my path you shall not long be. Sue in *your* name indeed! Only in my own, as the true heir, will I move to claim this fortune. Then that fair rosebud who holds it will come within my reach. Let me lay my grasp upon her future, and she will struggle in vain to loose its tenacious hold. Once in my toils, forever mine!

"Sleep on, cousin mine! Soon may the sleep be eternal, that leaves me the unquestioned claimant of your wealth."

As he thus muttered, he took from a table a bottle containing a pungent aromatic liquid, and saturating a sponge with it, held it near the lips of the sick man. He kept it there until he saw that his victim was quite insensible. Then placing it upon the pillow, near enough to diffuse its subtle influence around him, Lumley went out, locked his door, and dropped the key in his pocket.

He had business for the night which would keep him away, and it was best to make everything safe before he left. In the house it was known that a sick man occupied the garret room, but the boarders had been informed that he was partially deranged, and it was necessary to keep his door locked to prevent him from attempting to wander away, though in other respects he was perfectly harmless.

Thus he was left entirely to the mercy of his unscrupulous kinsman, who took care to impress the truth of his statements on the servant who attended to the room, by admitting him only when the unfortunate man was in a paroxysm of delirium, brought on by excessive pain.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CLARA'S FORTUNE IN JEOPARDY.

IN a large, dim room, fronting the Park, sat two gentlemen, awaiting the arrival of the pseudo Alfred Lumley. One of them was dainty, dapper, and well preserved; the other was thin, wiry, and brown as his own parchment, with the eye of a hawk, and the suspicious expression of one habituated to detect frauds and deal with the darker side of human life. One was the uncle and guardian of Clara Euston, the other a distinguished lawyer, widely celebrated for his acuteness and success in his profession.

At the lower end of the room, standing in front of a desk, employed in arranging papers, was a young man of striking personal appearance, with an air of genial good humor in his clear eyes and expressive mouth, which at once made an impression in his favor. He paused in his occupation, and seemed to listen with the keenest interest to the conclusion of conversation between the lawyer and his client.

"And now, Mr. Spring, what do you think will be the best course to pursue?"

"Contest every inch of the ground, of course. I have little faith in the validity of this man's title; for if it was genuine, it would scarcely have lain in abeyance so long."

"That can be accounted for easy enough, by the wandering life he has led. I have not yet seen the new claimant to my niece's inheritance, for I was out of town when he called at my house. He informed me that he has employed a lawyer to prosecute his rights, but I have had no formal notification from one yet."

"He has probably thought better of it, and will attempt to extort something from you by way of a compromise. Have you thought of meeting him on that ground?"

"We can temporize until we find out on what proofs he relies to sustain his cause. Half the estate would still be a handsome portion for Clara; but I must be very thoroughly convinced that the son of Mr. Lumley is really the claimant, before I yield a single advantage."

"Very right; we must guard Miss Euston's interests with jealous care; and it is strange, I must say, that after twenty-one years' absence from his native land, Albert Lumley should arise like one from the grave. It is very suspicious; though, after all, the man may not be an impostor. What means can we have of identifying him? Is there a portrait of him as a youth in your possession? I believe his uncle's effects fell into the hands of your brother?"

"Among them was a pencil sketch, taken of him by a young girl of obscure origin but great talent, who lived near Roselands. At the time young Lumley ran away from his father and went to sea, it was said that the old gentleman's opposition to this attachment was the cause of the rupture between them. It occurred to me that we might compare this with the person who will come here to-day, and see if any of his features are similar to those of the picture. I placed it on Mr. Ashton's desk."

"We will examine it before he arrives. Though he is probably little like it now, yet it may furnish some evidence either for or against him."

Ashton brought forward the picture, and laid it upon the table. It was only a crayon drawing, representing a well-developed youth of sixteen. The acute lawyer examined the features, and then said:

"There is nothing in this face to prevent him from pushing his claim to the very extent the law will allow. What is your opinion, Mr. Ashton?"

"That a hard, selfish nature gleams through it. If the original of that has an advantage he will surely keep it,"

replied Ashton, surveying the sketch, with a vague desire to dash his hand against the insensible card board on which it was delineated. "Even the magic touch of affection could not soften, or idealize, the repulsive traits there represented."

At that moment an imperious knock was struck upon the door, and in another instant it opened to admit the stalwart form of Lumley, wearing an air of confident success and unabashed impudence.

"Good morning, gents. Glad to meet you. Mr. Euston, I remember you, though it is so many years since I had the pleasure of meeting you. You can scarcely recognize the stripling, Albert Lumley; in the world-hardened man before you."

Mr. Euston barely touched the hand which the other extended, and stiffly said:

"You have quite the advantage of me, Mr. Lumley, for I am sure I should never have remembered you as the lad I once knew."

"Especially as it is not to your interest to do so, ha? Sorry to interfere with the brilliant prospects of so pretty a creature as Miss Euston; but right is right, you know; my father's son has the best title to enjoy the fortune he left."

"Certainly—when he has established his title to it," remarked Mr. Spring, drily. "We have met here, I believe, Mr. Lumley, to judge of the validity of your claims, before extreme steps are taken on either side to adjudicate them at law. Permit me to present to you my partner, Mr. Ashton."

Lumley nodded, and, without further ceremony, threw himself upon the chair which was offered him. Having tilted it back until it rested on two legs, he placed his feet upon the edge of the table, and coolly said:

"I'm going to make myself comfortable, old gents, before we begin this stupid investigation. I think it doesn't say

much for the honesty of some people, that a man has to prove himself his father's son to a couple of old fogies, who are determined beforehand that he sha'n't come in for his own, if they can help it."

At this rude address, Mr. Euston grew very red, and Mr. Spring pushed back his spectacles, and regarded Lumley with an expression of mute amazement which seemed to afford that person the most intense satisfaction. He returned the stare with a coarse laugh, and then said:

"Am I as curious a specimen of natural history as the horned owl, or the polar bear, old file? Come, give us your opinion now. I am anxious to hear it."

"It will not flatter your vanity much, sir; nor will it materially advance your interests. If you wish to impress me with the belief that you are the son of my old friend, Thomas Lumley, you should at least assume the appearance of possessing some of the instincts of a gentleman."

At this severe speech, Lumley colored, and affected to laugh. He roughly said:

"You'll find out soon enough that I can prove my paternity beyond a doubt. I should not have come here at all, if I had not felt sure of that."

"The sooner those proofs are laid before us the better for all concerned," said Mr. Spring in his driest manner. "We have not met here to bandy words, nor to listen to ill-bred speeches, but to transact an important business. Proceed in your developments at once, if you please, Mr. Lumley."

Thus admonished, Lumley drew from the breast of his coat a flat tin case secured by clasps, which he loosened with the point of a small dagger he wore upon his person. It opened and revealed several papers stained and yellow with time; laying his hand on them, he said—

"Before starting on my long cruise around the world I made a short trip to the West Indies. When I came back my father showed me this case, and said to me—'Albert, I

see with grief that you have a roving disposition, which will never permit you to remain contented at home. I am an old man now, and may die any day. Executors are not always to be trusted, and I have prepared this case in which are memorials that are infinitely precious to me, in it I shall also place my will; under the floor of the summer house at Roselands is an iron chest which my grandfather placed there years ago, in the war of the Revolution, for the concealment of important family documents. It has never been removed, and will again serve the same purpose.' You follow me, gents?"

"We do—your story is got up with minuteness, I perceive," remarked Mr. Spring.

Lumley's intense eye flashed, but he calmly went on. "My father proceeded to state, that if he should die in my absence, and be wrought on to dispose of his property to another person, there I would find the means to claim my inheritance: to baffle any attempted fraud."

"What do you mean to insinuate, sir?" asked Mr. Euston with much heat.

"Nothing—nothing—since there is a lady in the case," said Lumley, with an offensive leer. "Of course, all has been fair and above-board up to this time; but it seems to me now that if fair means fail, foul ones will be resorted to, to keep me out of the enjoyment of my property."

"You are mistaken, sir. *Prove* your right to it, and my niece would disdain to keep any portion of it. Pray, how have you recovered these long-buried documents?"

"Simply by looking for them where they were deposited," sneered Lumley. "They lie before you, gents, examine for yourselves. Their genuineness is indisputable."

Mr. Spring put forth his hand and slowly and composedly, for he did not choose to betray the eagerness he really felt to examine the contents of the box. The first paper he drew forth was the will: he opened it, glanced

down the page, and saw that it was a fac simile of the one which bequeathed to Clara Euston, with two very important exceptions. This one was of later date, and the revenue arising from the property was to belong to his son; a bequest of ten thousand dollars being left to his god-daughter.

Then came a packet of letters written by Thomas Lumley and his wife before their marriage. A lock of black lustrous hair, and a bunch of faded flowers now crumbling into dust. There were also a few articles of jewelry; a massive wedding ring, with the initials of Mr. and Mrs. Lumley on the inside; an old-fashioned breast-pin, with a landscape worked in hair on a white ground, and the family seal—a crest of heron's plumes sharply cut on the face of a Scotch pebble set in gold.

In the bottom of the box was a strip of paper on which was written in the hand of the elder Lumley:

"These family relics were deposited by my own hand in this box on the 7th of April, 1834, for the benefit of my beloved and only son, Albert Lumley, who by the will I shall hereafter deposit with them, will be declared sole heir to all the property I may die possessed of; and may evil come to him who seeks to keep him out of the same."

"THOMAS LUMLEY."

On the under side of the paper was a second memorandum.

"This to be sealed in the box with the letters that passed between myself and my deceased wife before our marriage, together with a few family relics of interest to my son. The box itself to be placed under the floor of the pavilion in the garden of my place on the Hudson, known as Rose-lands. Of this deposit Albert Lumley alone will know,

and if Providence should cast him on unknown shores, and detain him from his home for many years, his knowledge of the spot in which these family papers are to be found, will enable him to establish his identity, and claim his own."

"T. LUMLEY."

The two lawyers read over these words with great care, and the glance that passed between them showed that their belief in the falsity of the claim set up was at least staggered—but Mr. Spring was too experienced in his craft to permit his antagonist to suspect this. He drily said:

"It seems a great pity, Mr. Lumley, that you had not permitted this case to remain where your father placed it for safe keeping until you had stated the fact of its concealment before respectable witnesses, and had it removed from the iron safe before them. It is a misfortune for the success of your cause, that doubts can be thrown on the manner in which these things came into your possession."

"If I am not the son of Thomas Lumley, how should I have known where to find these papers? There are proofs that I feel assured will be convincing to any jury; yet you dare to express a doubt as to my right to their possession. I won't stand this, sir," said Lumley, fiercely.

"My dear sir, how can you help yourself? Lawyers do not fight about their client's claims with any other weapons than those furnished by their profession. We are a peaceful race, though we profit by lack of peace among others. Keep cool, Mr. Lumley, you will gain nothing by getting in a passion here."

This quiet admonition exasperated Lumley into a blind fury. He jumped up, kicked away the chair on which he had been sitting, and clenched his hands in a violent manner.

"You old brown mummy, I won't keep cool when I am insulted. How dare you attempt to exasperate me to this

degree, when your client is so entirely in my power? How should I have come in possession of the proofs before you, if I am not really the son of Thomas Lumley. Answer me that, if you can?"

"Certainly," replied the imperturbable lawyer. "I am ready to reply to any reasonable question. There are several ways by which this case may have found its way into your hands. You may have been a shipmate of Albert Lumley; may have seen him die, and possessed yourself of such information as would enable you to set up a claim to his estate, which would give you the power to extort money by way of compromise from its lawful possessor."

As Mr. Spring thus spoke, he fixed his penetrating glance upon the face of Lumley, and watched every change in it with the astute shrewdness which formed the basis of his character. As he proceeded, he detected a slight paleness creeping over the angry face that confronted him; a sudden twitching of the eyelids, and compression of the lips which went far towards establishing the conviction in his own mind that the man was an impostor.

His words had the effect of restoring calmness to Lumley, who courteously said:

"All these objections can be answered in the proper time and place. I came hither in the hope that this investigation would be conducted in the spirit of fairness, but I find that such is not your intention. War to the knife, is, I suppose, your unalterable determination?"

"If by that you mean that I will defend the interests of my client to the utmost, you are right. It rests with *you* to prove the validity of your claim, and dispossess Miss Euston of the estate. It is clearly my duty to act as if you are not the person you assert yourself to be, until you have proved to the satisfaction of a jury that you are the veritable Albert Lumley."

Lumley again sat down, looking much disturbed. He

leaned his head forward and reflected a few moments before speaking—then he asked:

"Are you really in earnest in your intention to carry so plain a case as this into court?"

"I never was more in earnest in my life."

"And you, Mr. Euston, have you no voice in this matter? As the representative of your niece, you surely will not subject her to the odium of defending a claim like this against the rightful heir."

Mr. Euston frigidly replied:

"I have placed Miss Euston's interests in the hands of her friend and lawyer, Mr. Spring. What he considers honorable and just, can reflect no stain upon his client."

"But is this acting fairly? Is it just for Miss Euston to withhold from me what is really my own, because the quibbles of the law may enable her to do so? I am persuaded that neither the young lady nor her mother would consent to defend the suit, if they could examine the contents of this box."

"Perhaps not," replied the lawyer. "They are women, and their sympathies are easily wrought on; but I have fortunately obtained from Mrs. Euston a positive pledge that I may act for my client as I shall think best. I shall defend her cause to the best of my ability, and save her from utter ruin. If this will were established, it would take everything Miss Euston possesses to pay up arrears, and still leave her burdened with a heavy debt, for it bears a later date than the one which bequeathes the estate to her."

A bright flash of triumph passed over Lumley's features, as he hurriedly examined the document.

"I had not noticed that—I took it for granted it was the same will I had seen. This gives me a double advantage, for it is of later date than the one which bequeathes the estate to Miss Euston."

"And the discrepancy between the date of deposit, and

that of the will, may prove that it is worthless," drily responded the lawyer.

Lumley mused a few moments, and then asked:

"Is it really your purpose, with these papers before you, to push this thing to a law suit?"

"Undoubtedly—I have already stated such to be my intention."

"If I had supposed you would do so, I should have employed a lawyer; but I came to you myself, in the hope of an amicable settlement. 'Half a loaf is better than no bread.'"

"Do you apply that proverb to yourself, or to my client?" asked Mr. Spring looking keenly at him.

Lumley changed color, but he carelessly replied:

"To Miss Euston, of course. It will be better for her to retain undisputed possession of half the estate, than to litigate a claim which every honorable person will pronounce an odious assumption of a right, to the prejudice of the real heir."

"But if her uncle and guardian, and I, her lawyer, do not consider it an assumption on her part, what then?"

"But you are both too keen-sighted not to see what is her real interest in this affair."

"You are right, sir. Her real interests, I shall guard faithfully. They are opposed to yours, and I decline all attempts to compromise them in any way."

"I warn you that you had better reconsider this decision," said Lumley growing very pale—and seeming to struggle against another outbreak of passion. "If you have the well-being of this young lady at heart, I earnestly advise you to accept my offer to relinquish to her an undisputed title to half the estate, while I take the remainder."

"Excuse me, sir; the very offer of a compromise only strengthens my conviction that you are not the person you assume to be. What is your opinion, Mr. Euston?"

"I coincide with you in every respect."

Lumley regarded them defiantly, as he passionately exclaimed:

"You neither of you know what you are doing, or you would grasp at my proposal. It is more than fair to Miss Euston, for it gives her a large sum of money to which she has no legal claim; and you unfairly wish to take advantage of the difficulty I may have in proving my identity, to defraud me of my inheritance."

"There need be no difficulty about that. You have shipmates who have sailed with you; they can be summoned as witnesses. You must have friends in the various ports to which you have sailed, who can be brought forward in your behalf."

"But those persons must be sought for thousands of miles from here."

"You can take your own time. It is you who bring the suit. You can postpone it until the evidence is ready by which it is to be sustained."

"And in the meantime Mrs. Euston and her daughter are in the enjoyment of my fortune."

"In its possession, but no longer in its enjoyment; for Mrs. Euston has notified me that until her daughter's right to the property is confirmed, they will draw nothing from it. Her own income will suffice for the quiet way she intends to live this year."

"I am glad that she at least has some sense of honesty," said Lumley insolently. "Though it is as little as she can do, to refrain from spending money to which another has a better right. Since you refuse all compromise, I shall take my measures accordingly, and I warn you that I shall exact my right to the uttermost farthing."

"Very well—you will find us ready with our defence."

Lumley gathered up his papers, secured them in the tin case, and with a cool bow, took his departure.



During this interview Ashton had said nothing, but he paid strict attention to what had passed, and had silently compared the features of the visitor with the sketch he held before him on the table.

Mr. Spring nodded towards him and asked:

"Is it like him?"

"There is a shadowy resemblance, but not sufficient to warrant any conclusion. One thing is strongly against him—I purposely placed this where his eye fell on it several times, and he evidently had no past association with it. If drawn by the girl he loved, it would at once have been recognized."

"That is a great deal—a great deal. No—this is not the true Dromio, and I will fight him to the last. Is Atkins at his post?"

"I presume so. I stationed him where he could see our visitor perfectly."

At a summons from Mr. Spring, a man entered from a small room adjoining his office which communicated with it by a sash door, shaded by a green curtain. He had a shrewd, intelligent face, and in reply to a question put to him by the lawyer, he said:

"Oh, yes, sir—I had a good view of him, and I should know him again among a thousand."

"Very well—follow him and make it your especial business to see where Mr. Lumley goes, with whom he speaks; in short, become a constant spy on all his actions. Your experience when a police agent, will teach you what to do. Your reward shall be liberal, if I gain what I seek through your instrumentality."

"I will do my best to serve you as you wish, Mr. Spring," and he bowed and departed.

Mr. Euston seemed to be lost in a doubtful reverie. At length he spoke—

"Perhaps after all, it would have been best to accept the

compromise Lumley offered. Clara would have secured a handsome fortune, and avoided the worry and scandal of a law suit."

"There your excessive caution speaks, my dear old friend. Can you not see that I have the game in my own hands? If Atkins ferrets out any evidence which will go to prove this man to be Tom Lumley's son, we can at any time close with his offer of a compromise; for he evidently cares more for ready money than for the acquisition of the whole estate. I can see that he is a reckless scamp, and at any time the bribe of fifty thousand dollars down, will secure the property to Miss Euston. On the other hand, if Atkins find him endeavoring to bribe evidence in his favor, we can quietly accumulate such proofs as will crush him."

"But I own I am troubled with the thought that he may be the son of Mr. Lumley. In such a case, the course you propose is scarcely fair toward him."

"I see nothing unfair in doing all I can to sustain the side of justice, at any rate. Our old friend was as much attached to your niece as if she had been his own daughter, and often spoke to me of his fortune eventually becoming hers. I know that for years before his death he had given up all hope of his son's re-appearance. Inquiries had been made for him in every quarter of the globe without any result."

"The man who was here to-day is known to be a gambler and spendthrift; he has few or none of the peculiarities of a sailor; he comes hither with effects that undoubtedly belonged to Lumley's family, but he may have obtained them fraudulently. Even supposing him to be the rightful heir, the fortune would soon be squandered in shameful profligacy, and it is my opinion that if the old man were now living, he would prefer that his young favorite should possess it, rather than suffer it to be squandered among sharpers by his son. At all events, I am Clara Euston's lawyer,

and I shall retain her inheritance to her if I possibly can."

"That is unquestionably your duty," said Ashton, with emphasis, "and I am ready to aid you in her service with both heart and hand."

"Thanks, my boy, and I hope your reward will be the heart and hand of the sweetest girl in New York," said the old lawyer, with sly emphasis—for he was too keen an observer not to have fathomed the secret of his junior partner from the day he first saw the two young people together.

Ashton flushed, and glanced toward Mr. Euston, but he was too deeply buried in thought to heed him. He was a man of policy, and his mind was busily revolving the chances in favor of Albert Lumley's ultimate success. It could do no harm, at any rate, if the new pretender to her fortune was treated with courtesy by Clara, and he would lose no time in warning her that if Lumley should call at Euston House, she had better make him her friend.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### A STRANGE WOOER.

LUMLEY walked slowly across the Park, with his head bent down in deep thought, and a few paces behind him sauntered Atkins, the ex-policemen, to whom the duty of watching his movements had been delegated.

"What to do next—what to do next?" muttered the baffled man. "Those fusty old fogies shall never checkmate me in the game I have undertaken to play. I must do all, dare all for such a splendid stake. Here am I almost moneyless in this great city, and in one week minus three thousand dollars of the five I got on poor Lonore's necklace.

But one more chance in that quarter—the jewel box is almost exhausted, so my prodigality must find resources in some other quarter. Desperate fortunes require desperate remedies; I must seek the pretty Clara, and let her know what an impression she has made on my heart by one glance from her bright eyes as she passed me on Broadway. Who knows what a woman's vanity may lead her to do?"

"Fools! demented and blinded fools, you had far better have accepted my offers of compromise, for then I should have left the girl to seek happiness in her own way. If I cannot secure the money without her, she shall surely become my wife, even if she says no a thousand times."

Revolving these dark and desperate thoughts in his mind he mounted the steps leading to Mrs. Euston's door. As the servant answered the ring, he smoothed his brow, and assumed a smiling aspect, and entered the house with the step of a master.

His card was taken into the snugery where Mrs. Euston and her daughter sat together. Clara was reading aloud to her mother, but she closed her book and grew slightly pale as Mrs. Euston read aloud the name of the visitor.

"Ask Mr. Lumley to walk into this room, and you, Clara, remain with me, for what he has to say is of most importance to you."

Clara sat down in the farthest corner of the sofa, and in another moment Lumley was ushered into the room. He paused in the doorway, as if to survey the scene before him, and in spite of an elaborate and expensive toilette, the first impression made on the two ladies was that he looked much more like a piratical brigand than a gentleman.

Clara started as her eye fell on him, for she recognized in him an individual whom she had of late several times encountered in her walks, whose intrusive attempts to gain a view of her features had been an annoyance to her.

Mrs. Euston received him with stately courtesy, and pre-

sented her daughter to him. Lumley fidgeted, seemed embarrassed, and finally said:

"I hope you will not consider it strange, ma'am, that I took the liberty of calling on you without a formal introduction. The fact is, I have seen the parties who are interested on Miss Euston's side of our dispute, and we could come to no agreement. As I have often seen the young lady there, and like her appearance very much, I thought in a personal interview we might come to some sensible understanding."

Mrs. Euston looked perplexed—she said:

"I am afraid I do not quite understand you, sir. As the son of the late Mr. Lumley, the friend of our family for many years, I admitted you here; I trust that nothing will be said to make me regret the civility."

"By no means, ma'am, by no means. I would not offend you for the world, but where no offence is intended, none should be taken; young ladies are not often offended at being admired, and the compromise that would be most gratifying to me is, that Miss Euston will keep the fortune bequeathed to her by my father, provided she will accept a slight encumbrance with it, in the shape of your humble servant."

At this abrupt proposal the two ladies looked amazed and indignant. Mrs. Euston haughtily said:

"Are you perfectly sane, sir? Yet why do I ask when you give so glaring a proof of mental alienation as to make a proposal of marriage to a young lady you have seen only within the last five minutes."

"Oh! you are mistaken, madam. I have seen Miss Euston many times, and I fell stupidly in love with her at first sight, even before I knew how intimately our interests are tied up together. I am only a blunt sailor, ma'am, and don't know how to go to work in a roundabout fashion to make love; but I mean to act honestly and fairly in this matter,

if you will give me a chance to do so. It seems a shame to take the fortune from the young lady without offering an equivalent, and I can think of no better way of settling the difficulty than the one I propose."

"That you have spent your life upon the sea, sir, and are comparatively ignorant of the usages of society, may seem to you sufficient excuse for this unwarrantable intrusion for so extraordinary a purpose, but it does not appear so to me. The youth and sensitive delicacy of my daughter have not been considered by you at all, and the proposal you came to make, can be regarded only in the light of an insult. Good morning, Mr. Lumley, my servant will show you out."

And Mrs. Euston arose, and rang the bell.

But the visitor was not willing to be so summarily dismissed. His face flushed, his eyes flashed, and he exclaimed:

"Zounds, madam! is this the way you treat the man who owns the very roof that covers you? Who came here with only the kindest intentions towards you and that young lady yonder."

"Remember, sir, if you please," said Mrs. Euston, with dignity, "that your right to this house has yet to be established. When the law has pronounced you the legal heir of the late Thomas Lumley, I will surrender it into—your possession, but not before. Clara, my love, this is no scene for you. Retire to your room."

The young girl had already arisen, and stood ready to fly from the presence of her bold wooer. She glided from the apartment scarcely knowing whether to laugh or to cry over the novel position in which she found herself placed. Mrs. Euston would have followed her, but Lumley said:

"Stop a few moments, Madam, and hear what I have further to say. If I have unintentionally offended you, you have wilfully repaid the affront; and I have now only to say, that if the offer I have made is finally rejected, I

have it in my power to ruin you, and the proud girl who has just left us without deigning to cast a second glance toward a man she has completely subjugated by her charms. I am not mad, Madam; but I am in earnest, and you had better listen to me."

"Excuse me, sir, I had rather not—I wish only to say, that if the estate belongs to you, take it to the uttermost penny, for the hand of my daughter is not to be bartered in exchange for it."

"It is easy enough to talk, ma'am; but when you learn the fact that Miss Euston's whole fortune will be absorbed by my claim, you may sing another tune."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Lumley, Clara has an independence aside from the fortune of your father."

"The whole of it will be more than needed to repay the money used to keep up this establishment—I am aware that for three years past, you have lived as if there was no chance of my return ever taking place; but now that I *am* here, I shall rigorously require an account of every dollar of mine that has been expended."

"The income from the property was to be used by Clara."

"By the will which gave it to her, but not by this one, Madam," and he took out the will he had that morning exhibited to Mr. Spring.

Mrs. Euston glanced at it, and grew pale, but she firmly said:

"Even if this is proved the true one, it is impossible to treat the absurd proposal you came hither to make in any other manner than I have done. I wish your father's son had spared me this scene, Mr. Lumley, for I would gladly have received him as a friend, if he had made my acquaintance in a different manner. Good morning, sir—Mr. Spring, Miss Euston's lawyer, will confer with you on this subject, and spare me the necessity of another interview."

"And am I to consider this cavalier dismissal as a final answer to my proposal? Will it not be even seemed worthy of a few hour's consideration?"

"Certainly not, sir. I have nothing further to say to you."

He arose, and his heavy brows met over his flashing eyes, as he said:

"You will be sorry for this, Madam. I came to you with the best intentions of a friend. I leave you with a sense of insult rankling in my heart that will not be easily appeased."

Without further adieu, Lumley strode from the room, and Mrs. Euston sank back in her chair to recover composure, and decide on the course she had best pursue. In a few moments she drew a writing table toward her and hurriedly penned the following lines:

MR. SPRING:—I have just had a most extraordinary interview with the person who claims to be Albert Lumley, and his strange conduct has awakened doubts in my mind as to the reality of his pretensions. A man who is perfectly sure of his ground does not bluster and threaten women.

The arbitration we spoke of seems now impossible. I take your view of the necessity of maintaining the ground we occupy, that a compromise may ultimately be gained which will not quite ruin Clara. Call this evening, as I wish to consult with you.

E. EUSTON.

The note was scarcely despatched, when Mr. George Euston appeared. He asked for his niece, and walked up and down the floor until she came in, as if much perturbed in mind. Mrs. Euston waited for him to inform her of the result of the morning's consultation, before she spoke of the singular visit she had received.

When his niece glided in, he nodded to her, and said:

"Blooming as usual, Clara. You had better keep all your good looks to fascinate this new claimant to your worldly goods, for I am afraid his pretensions are rather formidable."

"Is that Mr. Spring's opinion, too?" asked Mrs. Euston.

"If it is, he will not betray it. Spring is for a fight; I, on the contrary, think it will be best to compromise, and save something for my niece."

"Pray, relate all that took place at Mr. Spring's office this morning, and then I have something in my turn to tell you, that will either move you to indignation or laughter, I cannot tell which."

Mr. Euston sat down, and gave a brief account of the interview in which he had taken part, and ended by strongly advising Clara to use all her efforts to win the admiration of the new heir; to hold him, as women know so well how to do, as her slave, until she ascertained the ground on which she stood. Then, if his pretensions were worthless she could easily rid herself of him as a lover; if valid, she might still remain mistress of her fortune by linking her fate with that of Lumley.

Clara listened with burning cheeks and tearful eyes, for her pride and delicacy were both wounded by such advice from her nearest relative. She had always known her uncle to be worldly, but she had never thought him mean until now. She rather exulted in saying:

"What would you say if I told you that I have already refused Mr. Lumley?"

"What can you mean, child?"

"Only, that he has called here since the meeting with you and offered to share the disputed inheritance with me on the terms you proposed. Of course, I rejected them."

Her uncle stared at her, in mute surprise, and Mrs. Euston went on to relate the singular incident of the morning.

Mr. Euston laughed, rubbed his hands, and said:

"A plucky fellow, by Jupiter! I rather like his spirit. But you both have acted too precipitately. The game was in your own hands, and you have thrown your cards away; but by a little finesse we can gather them up again, and play it better. Clara, remember that an estate such as this is not picked up every day; and if the man who threatens to come between you and its enjoyment is a little rough, it does not matter much. You can polish him up, and the gilding of fortune will put the guinea's stamp upon him in the eyes of the world. If things come to the worst, you had better marry him, my child."

"Uncle! how can you speak so. I would rather die!"

"Pooh! stuff! So all romantic young ladies talk. But when it comes to houses and carriages, diamonds and laces, they come to their senses. A penniless young lawyer is well enough to sentimentalize with, but when the question is marriage, with a narrow income, and expensive tastes, it is quite another affair. Obey my injunctions, child, and lure back this man, unless you would bitterly repent it in the future."

This allusion to Ashton stifled the reply that arose to Clara's lips, and she turned for aid to her mother. Mrs. Euston took up her cause in her usual gentle, womanly spirit; but Mr. Euston would listen to no arguments that did not tend to sustain his own views of policy; and knowing him too well to contend with him, his sister-in-law finally promised to be guided by circumstances in her future intercourse with Lumley. Of course the idea that Clara could eventually accept his offered hand was absurd; still, if anything was to be gained by tolerating the visits of the new claimant on her estate, they should be received.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE.

WE must now leave the abodes of wealth, and seek the lower part of the city, in whose purlieus are found the wretched children of want and misery.

It was a narrow street, piled up with reeking mud, and garbage of various kinds. It was darkened by time-worn houses, on which neither paint nor repairs had been renewed until they looked like dens of darkness, dirt and squalor. Yet, human life swarmed there; every nook of these wretched tenements was teeming with women and children, for the street was filled with lodging houses for the poor; those who labor, from day to day, for the scanty pittance that barely sustains life, were there found in every stage of suffering and destitution. Yet this was far from being the worst locality in New York; for it was not known as the resort of thieves and criminals. The honest poor, who are willing to work, suffer, and die in silence, were its chief inmates.

In a rear building attached to one of these houses, in a room not more than fifteen feet square, dwelt four persons, and they esteemed themselves more fortunate than their neighbors in having this dreary little den to themselves. In many apartments in that house, no larger than the one they occupied, ten and twelve persons were found living together, glad to claim any shelter from the inclemency of the season.

The room had but one window in it, and the dim light that struggled through the narrow, funnel-like yard in which it was situated, fell upon the bed of a sick child. He was a lad of nine summers, and well grown for his years, but he was now emaciated to the last degree, with dark

purple shadows around his mouth and eyes, which told their own tale of suffering, perhaps of speedy death.

The bed on which he lay was clean, but everything about it denoted cheerless, hopeless poverty. The child slept, and over him leaned a woman who bore some faint traces of beauty, but time, suffering and hardship had told their tale upon her attenuated features, and imparted an air of perturbed wildness to the expression of her eyes which seemed to point to the cell of the lunatic as her final destination.

She had evidently not slept the previous night, and upon her dress and the thin shawl that was wrapped around her, were several stains of mud, as if she had either fallen or been knocked down in the street. By the first faint gleams of daylight she was examining the face of the sleeping boy, and a sigh of relief arose from her full heart as she murmured—

"He yet lives! Thank God he yet lives! If he had died in the darkness, with no warmth, no light around him, I think I should have cursed that man—aye, cursed him, madly as I once loved him."

Another bed occupied the opposite side of the room, and as the sound of her voice was imperfectly heard, a question was asked from it in suppressed, awe-stricken tones.

"Is the lad dead, Mrs. Gordon? Oh, I hope he lives yet! I trust that God will spare him to you."

The mother sadly shook her head as she replied—

"My child will not be spared to me, Margaret, for I brought misery and desolation into the home of my own parents, and God himself has said, 'I will repay.' But my little Grief is not yet gone; he lingers and suffers still, for which I am selfish enough to rejoice."

"Do not speak so despondently, Mrs. Gordon; Grief may recover yet, to be a comfort and support to you in your old age."

The speaker, a girl of about twenty-one years of age,



arose from her own couch and came to the bedside of the child. She was not handsome, but there was something truly gentle and sweet in the expression of her features, and an air of submissive docility gave an inexpressible softness and charm to her pallid face: this was so unnaturally white as to lead a stranger to marvel at its wanness. If the sun had never shone upon her, she could not have been more colorless, and this pallor was the more striking from its contrast with her intensely black hair and eyes. Yet her health appeared to be good, for her form was well rounded, and there was no sallow tinge of sickness in her bloodless complexion.

She examined the face of the boy, felt his pulse, and then cheerfully said:

"Grief is better, Mrs. Gordon. I thought you were unnecessarily alarmed about him last night; and after your weary walk in the freezing cold, you did not get a doctor to come to see him."

"I did not try," said the mother faintly.

"Why, how was that? You would go out in spite of my assurances that the freezing night might seriously injure you, if not kill you outright. What was your object if it was not to get help for your child?"

"When I left this place, that was the only thought in my mind; but when I got out, a kind of madness seized me. I thought it would be useless for a pauper, with no money, to ask a physician to leave his house on such a night as the last one was. For the first time my sense of utter destitution overcame my pride, and I thought I would beg. I passed swiftly to Broadway, but it was late, and the few stragglers I met, passed me by without heeding the despairing cry that asked for life for my child. I wandered on until I came to one of the stately avenues of palaces in which the rich revel, while children of the same humanity crouch in dens even more loathsome than this, to starve. I

hoped in that locality, to meet people returning from some fashionable party, to whom I might appeal in my desperate need. It was a mad hope, for the sons and daughters of mammon are too prodigal of self-indulgence to have much to bestow in charity."

"And how did you fare, poor mother?" softly asked the girl. The woman went bitterly on:

"My first attempt came very near proving fatal to me, for as I threw up my arms to attract the notice of the driver of a splendid carriage, he struck me violently with his whip, and dashed on, leaving me prostrate and half senseless in the street."

"Good heavens! can hearts be so cruel? And that is how your dress came to be stained with mud. What happened to you then?"

"A thing so strange that I wonder, now, if it was not all a dream. Margaret, my quest is ended, and its solution is despair. The hope that sustained me is gone. My child will die, and I shall speedily follow him to the grave, or live to be classed among the miserable creatures who wear out their lives in the insane asylum at Blackwell's Island. My mind cannot bear this tension much longer."

Margaret sat down beside her, and took her hand; but it was so icy cold that she dropped it with a shiver, and drew a coarse shawl she had thrown over her shoulders more closely around her. She softly said:

"Tell me what has happened to you—it may lighten the burden on your poor heart to confide in one who loves you well."

Mrs. Gordon covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly; she at length said:

"No—it matters not now, Margaret. Things have changed with me since yesterday. I cannot speak of what oppresses me with horror. Dark as my fate seemed but yesterday, a deeper shade of gloom has been thrown on it



by the occurrences of last night. Oh! would that I could blot it from my memory, for then delusive hope might come back to cast a gleam upon my broken heart. I am afraid my mind was not perfectly clear when I came to this great hive of human misery to seek for one on whom I have claims that I imagined could not be set aside. I hoped to find him, and surrender to him the charge I felt myself becoming unfitted to retain. I *have* seen him, Margaret; but I found him not among those who labor for their daily bread, as I expected; he evidently belongs to those who revel in wealth, while *we* who should be cherished by him, are left to want and misery."

"Did you speak to him? Did he refuse to assist you?" asked Margaret, eagerly.

"He offered me money; but, bitter as my destitution is, I *could not* take it. I threw it at his feet, and fled. Enough, enough. Ask me no more, for I cannot bear it. I scarcely know how I got back here, but I did come, and I have been sitting in the darkness for hours, afraid to touch my child with my freezing hands, and yet dreading that the light of another day would show him to me even colder than I myself am. Oh, Margaret, are there not creatures on this earth so wretched that they have nothing left to them but 'to curse God and die,' as Job was told to do?"

"No, no; the All Father has himself said, 'Am I not always with you?' and would you blaspheme your only help and refuge? What have the poor but faith in God? Without that we should indeed be lost. Do not speak so dreadfully, I entreat. *Do not* look so wild. You are weary and exhausted. I will make a fire, and have some hot coffee ready by the time mother wakes."

"I cannot share your morning meal, for my last penny is gone, and I will not rob you and your blind mother of the little you can earn to keep yourselves from starving," was the despondent reply.

Margaret only replied by pressing her hand, and commencing active preparations for the slender repast she had the means of setting forth. In doing so, she evidently took great care of her hands, which were of singular delicacy and fairness. She drew on a pair of well worn gloves before touching the scanty supply of wood which was to fill the small stove that stood in one corner of the apartment.

This aroused Mrs. Gordon from her stupor of weariness and grief, and she arose and took the wood from her, as she said:

"My sorrow makes me selfish, and heedless of others. If you do this rough work, your hands will be unfit for lace-making to-day. Let me prepare our food as usual, and I will not refuse to partake of it this morning, at least."

Margaret earnestly asked:

"Are you sure you will take your portion? You know that as long as I have anything to share with you, neither you nor Grief shall want."

"I know it, Margaret, and I thank you more deeply than words may express; but after this morning I will not trespass upon your kindness. I must find other work that pays better than the needle. An idea occurred to me as I sat here in the darkness last night. You remember the poems and sketches with which I have sometimes amused Grief by reading aloud? They were written in happier days, and I will select from them such as I think best, and offer them to the editors of some of the numerous literary papers in this city. Some of them pay very high, and I may chance to get enough to keep us from starving till my boy recovers, or enough to pay for his coffin and a decent grave in the country, for I could not bear to have him buried where there is no sunshine, no waving trees to make music above his last resting-place."

"Do not speak of the child's death, Mrs. Gordon. I

have hopes of him still. There is life, much life, in the darling little fellow yet."

The mother glanced hopelessly toward her sick son, and an expression of passionate anguish swept over her face, as she said:

"Yes, there is life enough to be fanned back into a vital flame, if I had a moiety of the wealth that should be freely poured out for him. In this miserable place—with no comforts, no aid—my little lad will go down to darkness and the grave! *Then* will I seek *him*, and hurl my wretchedness upon him!"

The expression of Mrs. Gordon's passionate sorrow was interrupted by the awakening of Margaret's mother, who was blind, and nearly helpless. She could not walk, but she had perfect use of her hands, and darkened as her sight was, she added a trifle to the common stock by knitting fancy articles in Berlin wool; she excelled in the variety and beauty of her patterns, and such was the delicacy of her touch that she selected her colors with unerring skill. At times she was peevish, and particularly apt to be so when just aroused from sleep:

She sharply asked—

"What is the matter, Margaret? What is all this going on about? Has anything happened? Is Grief dead?"

"No, mother; Grief is still sleeping; Mrs. Gordon is grieving over his condition—that is all."

"And well she may, poor thing—well she may, though the lad is going from her to a better father than she'll ever find for him on earth. But it's nature for the mother's heart to grieve when death comes to grasp her darling. Ah me! I know what it is, for I've felt it more than once. God took from me all my strong healthy boys, and left me only one delicate girl who had no choice but to become a lace weaver as her mother was before her; to wear out her

eyesight as I have done, and live in darkness the last half of her existence. Yet the Good Father knows best—I will not repine—no—no—'If he slay me yet will I trust in him!'"

Mrs. Gordon turned from the fire which was just beginning to burn, and gazed wistfully at the worn and wrinkled face of the speaker. She went toward her, tenderly lifted her in her arms and placed a pillow at her back, while her daughter arranged the bed clothes around her in such a manner as to protect her body from the biting coldness of the atmosphere. She said in broken tones—

"Mother Seyton, I wish that I had only a portion of your faith. But toward you, God remembered mercy in the midst of chastisement. He did not take from you all your children. Grief is my only one, and he lies before me, stricken—stricken—even unto death."

"Is it so bad with the lad as that? Must the tender bud perish, while the withered and sapless branch remains? How is it with the lad, Margaret? His mother is easily alarmed for him, but you can judge calmly."

"He sleeps quietly, mother, and I trust that he will awake stronger than he was last evening," replied the girl, with cautious regard to her mother's feelings.

"You hear, Margaret herself dares not give hope. My pretty lad—my bright promising child, must perish because I have not the means of saving him from the grave that want and misery are digging for him. Oh Mother Seyton, in this hour my heart rebels against the resignation you have endeavored to implant there. As the moment approaches in which I must give him up, I can see nothing but the dark, cold grave: the heavy clods that must press upon him with their suffocating weight. The angel form that rises to the bosom of his Creator is dim—is nought. I have not faith to behold it. That human temple is my child; that body which I have clasped—those lips that I

have pressed, that tender flesh which I have so often caressed, must moulder into dust, and be as if it had never existed. Where then shall I find faith to see that impalpable image which we are told escapes from the forsaken clay to mingle its subtle essence with the redeemed of Heaven?"

"Here, my daughter," replied the blind woman, putting forth her hand, and taking an old well worn Bible from the head of her bed, "in this, you find the story of that son of a mortal woman, who went down into the grave, and after resting with the dead three days, came forth to the eyes of men to reveal to them the certainty that death is not eternal oblivion; of that son of God, who gave himself a stainless sacrifice for the sins of others, thus giving the hope of salvation to those who humbly trust in him. Has He not said, 'suffer little children to come unto me,' and would you rebel against the tender hand which is gathering your pretty lad to his breast, to save him from temptation, sin, and want? Could you, with the wealth of the world at your command, do for him a tithe of what Christ promised? Oh! blind of heart, pray for faith; pray earnestly, and God will not refuse to send his comforter to you."

"I cannot pray; my soul is dark—my perceptions dim. I see my child dying; beyond that, there is nothing to hope for, nothing to live for."

"Then I will pray for you," and the withered hands were joined, the sightless eyes uplifted, and a prayer so tender, so womanly arose from her heart, that the two listeners involuntarily knelt, and bowed their heads in reverence. When she finished Mrs. Gordon arose, bent over her, and whispered—

"True and noble woman, I will endeavor to seek such consolation as you bid me. All these things have been faithfully taught me by those who have gone to their rest, but in the darkness of my sorrow they have been doubted; at times, scoffed at as the dreams of superstition; but I will

seek to recall the childish faith my mother gave me, that when the bitter parting comes, I may feel the awful significance of the words—'Be still, and know that I am God!'"

"Do so, my daughter, and the friend you trust in will never forsake or desert you in your need."

At that moment there was a feeble motion in the bed of the child, and a faint voice asked for water. His mother sprang to his side, and Margaret held a cup to his lips. As the boy's head was lifted from the pillow it revealed a noble and intellectual outline, and the attenuated features were of a rare order of beauty. His hair lay in matted rings above his broad brow, and the eyes which lifted their weary lids were of the deep azure of the midnight sky—they were like the eyes into whose passionate depths Madeline had looked in the days of love and hope, and she almost shrank from the tender look which brought back that vivid dream of happiness which made the solitary thread of gold in her blighted life.

"My love, my precious darling, are you better this morning?" she tenderly inquired.

"I am nearer to God, mother, and that is better," and a bright smile flashed over the sunken features. The mother involuntarily clasped him closer to her heart.

"Do not talk thus, my child; I cannot bear it. It takes away the little courage I have left, to hear you speak in this manner."

"Poor mamma, I know you will cry for your little Grief until the shining angel makes you know that he has become your little Joy. In my dream last night I went away with him, and he bore me in his arms over what he told me was the silent river; its waters were deep and clear, but so still they did not seem to move, though a soft air was blowing all the while."

"Yes my child, those waters were motionless because they are formed by the tears wrung from the bereaved

hearts of earth-born mortals; the air that breathes above them, of their sighs."

"But oh, mother, if those who weep could look beyond that dark river, and see what was shewn me in my dream, they would no longer mourn. I saw little children sporting among beautiful groves, and they were crowned with the flowers that grew in every nook. They sang in chorus, and as their voices died away, a grand and noble figure, which seemed to radiate light from his floating garments, came into their midst. He spoke sweetly to them, and I thought I heard him repeat what mother Seyton has so often read to me since I have been sick, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

"And are you ready to go to him, my darling? To leave me here desolate—desolate?"

"Dear mother, to leave this cold, dismal room for that beautiful place would be best. You would then no longer have me to work for, for I know that I am a great burden to you."

Thus spoke this child, mature beyond his years, to the breaking heart to which he was held. His mother had called him her Grief in the first dark days of her sorrow, but he had wound himself into her affections until he had become the hope of her life. The rare gifts, the uncommon beauty of her child attracted all who looked on him; and the sad heart of the forsaken mother admitted bright hopes for him in the future. She vaguely dreamed that the day would come in which he would be proudly claimed by the father who had tacitly cast him off and rejected him.

Gifted herself with imagination, fancy, and poetic talent of a fair order, Madeline assiduously cultivated the precocious intellect which brightened daily beneath her fond care. Born herself in an obscure New England village, she had enjoyed only such opportunities of education as are there afforded to the million, but a natural taste for litera-

ture prompted her to devote her hours of leisure to the cultivation of her mental powers. Time proved her to be one of those unfortunate children of genius before whom no future suited to their capacities ever opens. The anguish of a great and overwhelming sorrow had first unsealed this portion of her being, and the mountain girl knew that she was a poet. She poured forth strains that would have touched the universal heart, for they came fresh from her own, crushed and bleeding—but not debased—but none of them saw the light. Those which most vividly portrayed her own state of feeling, were destroyed lest the eye of another should read and comprehend that bitterness "with which the stranger intermeddleth not."

Her portfolio was filled with prose sketches, and snatches of song on familiar themes, in which sentiment or sorrow had no part, and it was to these she had referred in her conversation with Margaret as a means of obtaining money to sustain herself and her child.

Mrs. Seyton was an Englishwoman of humble birth, and her family for several generations had been lace weavers. After the death of her husband and four sons, the temptation of higher wages induced her to remove with her young daughter to New York. Here her expenses were so much greater than in her native land, that little was gained by the exchange, except that Margaret obtained a fair education in the public schools of the city. Mrs. Seyton's sight had long been failing, and the successive losses she wept over with passionate grief, caused its complete loss. She became totally blind, and this affliction was speedily followed by paralysis of the lower limbs. Thus Margaret was compelled to relinquish her studies, and apply herself to her mother's trade as a means of living.

At first, the life of Mrs. Seyton was an inexpressible bitterness and weariness to her, and she rebelled against the fate which had laid her aside a darkened, helpless crip-

ple; but soon the abiding faith of her soul arose triumphant even above this affliction, and she turned her active mind toward the possibility of assisting in supporting herself.

With fingers skilled in the delicacy of touch so necessary to a lace weaver, she was speedily able to distinguish colors by passing her hand over them, and she commenced knitting articles in Berlin wool. The exquisite combinations she had once imitated with her bobbins, she now reproduced from memory, and wrought articles which were readily purchased by dealers in fancy goods. Four years had passed since this calamity fell on her, and the blind widow and her daughter had managed to live without appealing to the aid of charity.

When Madeline Gordon came on her wild quest to New York, she wandered from lodging to lodging, each one poorer than the last, as the money she had brought with her melted away. Accident made her known to Margaret Seyton, and she became a joint tenant of the little room occupied by herself and her mother. Her stay was to be temporary, but soon the four forlorn creatures became so strongly attached to each other, that all thought of parting was abandoned.

While Margaret worked at her bobbins, and Madeline made coarse shirts, by which a pittance was gained that barely enabled her to keep her son and herself above want, the little Grief would sit upon the bed of the blind woman and read aloud to her from the Bible, or from the Pilgrim's Progress, and Doddridge's Rise and Progress, three books which the widow prized above their weight in gold.

This tranquil though poverty-stricken life was broken by the restlessness of the boy, and his determination to do something toward taking care of himself. There was no opening for a friendless lad like himself, save one—with a trifling capital he could start as a newsboy. With many

tears and misgivings, his mother saw him start on his new career, but his success in the first week gave her confidence in his ability to win his way slowly but surely to a better position in life.

All her hopes were dashed by his illness. Exposure, to which he was unaccustomed, brought on an attack of pneumonia, which ended in a permanent affection of the lungs, and the bright, promising boy was stricken with hopeless disease.

Then all the misery of her position came home to the agonized mother's heart. Her resources were exhausted, and she was in the midst of that most heartless—soulless place—the centre of a great city, without a home, without friends who could aid her in her need.

While her money lasted she had advertised and inquired in every direction for Ernest Gordon, Artist. She wrote again and again to the same address, imploring aid for her child, for the noble and gifted creature who might be rescued from death to become an ornament and a pride to that family to which he rightfully belonged.

These appeals, written with all the pathos of a breaking heart, could not of course reach the person for whom they were intended. Like thousands of others penned with the same failing hopes, the same faltering despair, they were sent to the dead letter office to be tossed over by some careless official, and thrown amid the blazing pile of perished hopes and wasted effort.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### MADELINE AND HER HUMBLE FRIENDS.

THE breakfast, which consisted of a few potatoes, and a cup of hot coffee, without milk, and with very little sugar,

was soon prepared. Margaret brought forth a small loaf of bread, from which she cut a slice for her mother, and another for the sick child; but when it was offered to him with a portion of the coffee, he turned from them with an expression of disgust. All his mother's entreaties could only induce him to swallow a few morsels, which were evidently unpalatable to him.

"My darling, what could you eat? Tell me; perhaps—perhaps I may be able to get something better for you. Speak, my own, and let me know what you would like."

"I wish I had an orange, mother; and something to hold me up—I mean something to keep away this feeling of sick faintness, that makes me think sometimes that I am dying."

"You need wine; you shall have it, and the orange too, my precious boy."

The large, eager eyes of the lad sparkled with momentary brightness, and then the joyful expression faded. He glanced around the miserable room, and said:

"I believe I can do without them, mother. I know you cannot get them for me without pinching yourself, and you give me too much from your earnings now."

Madeline tried to smile on him, as she replied:

"Never mind now about that. I have discovered a new means of making money. I have something here I have only just thought of, which, I hope, will be worth much to me." And she held out the portfolio.

Grief half smiled: he asked:

"Are you going to sell my pretty poems, mother? Take those you wrote for me, and maybe some one else may think them as beautiful as I do. Oh! how much I should like to see them printed for everybody to read."

"That's where you'll soon see them, Grief; for it's my opinion that the editors will be only too glad to get them," said Margaret.

Madeline opened the leaves of the portfolio, and looked over its contents. She selected two prose sketches, and four short poems, which she considered among the best, and then, with a beating heart, prepared to go out on her errand. Margaret brushed the mud from her black dress, and wrapped her own shawl around her—a worn but heavy woolen one, which had more warmth in it than that belonging to her friend. Promising to take every care of the sick boy, the mother and daughter sent her forth, with many fervent wishes for her success.

Nerving herself to the task before her, by the thought of her suffering child, Madeline walked rapidly until she came to a street in which there were several printing offices, from which she knew popular literary papers were issued. Should she offer her productions there, or would they be more suitable for a magazine? was the question debated in her mind. Feeling as if the walk of a few squares would re-animate her waning courage, she decided in favor of the magazine, and cautiously picked her way over the icy pavements, through wretched streets leading to an extensive establishment.

We will not follow her efforts in detail, nor will we catalogue her disappointments and humiliations. Suffice it to say, that she at last found in the editor of the "Carrier Pigeon," an appreciative purchaser of her productions, and received a not illiberal compensation, together with cheering words of encouragement. As the editor handed her the money for her pieces, he said:

"These contributions will fill three columns of our paper, and I have given you the price we pay to our best contributors. It is not usual to give so much to an unknown writer, but your pieces have uncommon merit, and you may probably soon command the highest remuneration."

A flash of joy gleamed a brief moment upon her expressive face, but it immediately faded into hopelessness as she said—



"I have no such hope—no such aspiration now. To smooth the way to a child's grave, and find means to lay myself beside him, is the utmost limit of my wishes. I thank you, sir, for your kindness; it has lightened my heart of a heavy load."

She passed quickly out, and with hurried steps proceeded toward the dreary place she called home. Going a little out of her way for that purpose, she came to the stall of an old woman who sold fruits; from her Grief had often been in the habit of buying apples and oranges so long as his health lasted, and his mother's means could compass such indulgences. Cold as the day was, the stand was there, and bundled in many garments, Mrs. Boggs sat behind the angle of a wall, which in some measure screened her from the nipping blast.

"Is it oranges you want?" she asked, in a doubtful tone. "They be scarce and high—very high at this season."

"I know it, but they are for a sick person, and I must have one at any cost."

The old woman peered into her face, and remembered her. She quickly said:

"I hope it's not the pretty lad that used to buy from me, that is down with sickness?"

"Yes—it is my little son for whom I want the fruit."

"Oh, then, dear, you shall have it as cheap as I can possibly afford it, for he was a bright spoken boy as ever I saw. Not much the matter with him, I hope?"

"Not much," replied the mother, vaguely. "Only an easy summons to Heaven. God wants him among his angels, and I shall not keep him much longer."

Mrs. Boggs gazed at her with an expression of compassionate surprise. She dived into a basket which was kept carefully covered, and drew forth two oranges wrapped in paper.

"There," she said, "take one to the sick lad, and tell him who sent it to him. The other you can have for a shilling, and much good may they do the poor fellow."

"But I have money to pay for both, and when you expose yourself on such a day as this, you should be well rewarded in your profits. Here are two shillings."

"No—by your leave. I am well enough to do. I needn't come out such weather as this, only I'm used to it, and don't like staying all day in the house. Take the orange, and tell the lad I only want him to come himself, and I'll freely give him a dozen more to see him in health again."

The mother sighed heavily.

"That will never be. I know now that when he comes forth upon the street again, his hands will be folded upon all earthly work, and the cold will no longer have power to chill him; the pitiless cold that is sapping his young life away."

Madeline was now speaking more to herself than to the fruit seller, and she mechanically walked away to a wine store where she purchased a bottle of port, and hurried on. She had been absent three hours, and in that time her child might be worse. She had no thought for the effect of the stinging cold upon herself—her mind was solely occupied with him, and what she could do to alleviate his suffering, and cheer the brief remnant of life yet left to him.

But yesterday she had prayed for his restoration—to-day, no such prayer came to her lips; for now she felt that he would probably be regarded as an unwelcome intruder in the home of that father to whom she had desired to give him, before she herself became unfitted to take care of him. What refuge then could there be for Grief, save that grave which opened its sheltering arms to snatch him from penury and temptation, ere the tension on her own heart and brain caused a cord to snap which would class her among those she shuddered to think of as her future companions.



Madeline knew that she had once already suffered from a species of melancholy madness, and with sad prescience she foresaw the doom that awaited her, unless her heart should break over the fate of her perishing child. But a broken heart does not always destroy the frame that enshrines it, though it may shatter the life which tunes the spirit to harmonious action, and send the stricken soul a sad wanderer amid the unreal phantoms of the maniac's unrest.

When she again entered the dim room, she found Grief lying in a half slumber, while Margaret crooned a low song to him, keeping time with the motions of her fingers over a small pillow covered with green silk on which a delicate lace collar was nearly completed. Her mother was placed in a large chair near the scanty fire, knitting and assorting her colors with a rapidity and accuracy that was surprising.

As Madeline entered, Margaret looked up with a joyful smile, and softly said:

"I see by your face that you have been successful; and Grief has been so patient; you can't think how much credit he deserves."

At the sound of her voice, the child aroused himself and looked eagerly toward his mother; she held up an orange from which she tore away the paper, and he uttered a cry of joy. She had never expected to hear such a sound from his lips again, and it made her heart leap, but she said:

"You must not touch it yet, my darling; it is frozen hard. I will put it near the stove to get the frost out, while you take some of this nice wine. This will warm and strengthen you."

In a few moments the bottle was opened, and a small portion of its contents offered to the pale lips of the patient sufferer. He swallowed the whole of it without effort and declared himself better in a few moments. By this time the orange had begun to thaw, and, rolling it gently in her hands till it was quite soft, Madeline prepared a portion of

it for the eager child, who watched her motions with an interest he had not shown for days before.

After having partaken of it with real enjoyment, with a sigh of thankfulness he again sunk back on his pillow, and said:

"You do much for your little Grief, mother, and I almost wish God would let me grow to be a man, that I might help you in my turn; but the shining angel will not have it so, for sometimes I almost feel his hand touching me. The wine you gave me made him draw it away a little, but just as you came in it was quite near me."

"Grief, dear," said Margaret, softly, "you distress your mother when you talk so. Don't do it, my child."

"Is it wrong, Margaret? Well, I promise not to do so any more—only the shining presence is there. I can see it now—there—there," and he pointed towards the foot of the bed; "but if you don't like me to speak of it, I will not do it."

"What does it matter?" asked Madeline, with forced calmness. "Do you not think that I know what must come, as well as if we spoke of it every hour of the day? But you are right, Margaret; let us put evil away from us as long as we may. Let the little gleam of brightness this morning brought with it, shed its faint glimmer on my weary path, without looking forward to the inevitable."

"You were successful, then! Ah! I thought so. Men of cultivated taste must have at once appreciated your beautiful pieces. No doubt they have paid you well, and engaged contributions from your pen for the future."

Madeline smiled mournfully.

"Dear Margaret, when you have heard what actually befell me, how will your sanguine hopes fall. Mr. Lyra, to whom I first went, took one of my poems from compassion for the miserable-looking being who offered them. The second trial was an utter failure; and when I entered the of-

fice of the Carrier Pigeon, I was so worn out with disappointment, that my full heart gushed forth in a confession of my destitution to the editor, even before he had an opportunity of looking over my pieces. He took them, paid me liberally, and promised to find a place for an occasional contribution from me. I am certain that I owe this to his compassion, more than to his desire to possess the writings, though he assured me they have merit."

"And so they have. Why should you doubt it, when you have received money as an equivalent for them?" replied Margaret, with exultation. "I knew that you would succeed, and this will only be an opening for a brilliant future. What signature did you put to your productions?"

"Only my own initials. Why do you ask?"

"Because in these days the signature seems as important as the writings themselves. It is imperative that the two names shall begin with the same letter, since Fanny Fern has made her name so popular. You are from the country, and you must be rural, too. What do you say to Dora Daisy? or Hatty Harebell? or Kitty Kingcup? they are all natural and pretty."

Madeline shook her head with a half smile.

"It will be useless to find a name for me, for I shall never make it famous."

"Pooh! nonsense! Now you have secured a hearing, you have as good a chance as any. I insist that you shall have a signature of your own."

"Let it be Faith, then," broke in Mrs. Seyton; for the help which has come to you when you most needed it, verifies the words of the Holy Book—'Never yet have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor their seed begging bread!'"

"You are right, mother Seyton," said Madeline, emphatically; "and if I claim a *nom de plume* at all, it shall be Faith."

"It will not be half as effective as either of those I sug-

gested," persevered Margaret, "for the world will never guess why it was assumed, and readers will probably give but one glance at a poem with that puritan name tacked to it. However, mother has spoken, and the question is decided. See my work, too, is it not beautiful?" and she held up a web of lace of the finest texture, on which a most delicate pattern was imitated with an accuracy that could not be excelled.

"You rival Arachne herself," said Madeline; "but you have labored diligently to finish that piece of vanity."

"Yes," replied Margaret, with a half sigh. "I wonder if the daughters of fashion ever turn their thoughts for a moment from the beauty of such things as these to their weary makers? If this filmy web could only reveal all it has witnessed here in the course of its fabrication, it would be a strange, weird tale to be spoken in the brilliant gatherings to which it will be worn."

"Yes," replied Madeline, as she sadly contemplated the costly trifle. "It may fall into the possession of one who would not pause to listen to its teachings, or it may chance to adorn one who would only need the faintest whisper of its early history to seek out its maker, and find some remunerative employment for her before the inevitable doom arrives. Margaret, are your eyes as strong as they were?"

With a hasty glance toward her mother, and a warning gesture, the lace-weaver quickly replied—

"Why should you doubt it? Look into my eyes—are they not clear and strong as those of the eagle? Oh, I have years of profitable labor yet before me, in which I may be able to lay up something for the days in which my sight may grow less clear than now. I love my beautiful art, and should be sorry to give it up as long as I am able to work at it."

"Margaret, are you *sure* you are speaking the whole truth?" tremulously asked Mrs. Seyton. "Have you seen

any indications of failing vision, Mrs. Gordon? Oh Lord! in mercy avert this calamity from my child!"

She dropped her knitting, and clasped her wrinkled hands in supplication. Her daughter, with a reproachful glance at Madeline, sprang to her side, and tenderly caressing her, eagerly spoke:

"Mother—dear mother, do not distress yourself about a mere random remark. I promise you that at the first indication of failing vision, I will seek other employment; I will not risk blindness. For your sake, I will be careful."

"Promise me truly, my daughter. Nay, swear it to me, that you may fear to break your oath! Oh! you don't know what this darkened life is. Always night—no light—no sunshine! It is horrible! If God in his infinite mercy did not sustain me—did not give me courage, I could not live."

"Poor Mother," murmured Margaret, with tears, "I knew it was bad, but I did not think you felt it in this way. Yes, I swear to you that I will not risk becoming blind like you. I will begin at once to seek other employment—to learn a new trade."

"Then all is not so well with you as you would have me believe," and in spite of her assurances to the contrary, the old woman retained this fixed belief, which was in truth not far from the fact.

Though scarcely conscious of it herself, Margaret had been observed by her companion bending lower and lower over her bobbins, and fixing her eyes so intently upon the pattern that she was often compelled to raise her hand and press it on the quivering eyeballs to restore the steadiness of vision, so important to the accurate finish of her work. She would not regard this as a premonition of the calamity that might follow, but persevered, in the hope that it was a transitory affection proceeding from the extreme intricacy of the pattern she had been required to imitate.

When Mrs. Seyton's calmness was again restored, her daughter went to a closet, and taking from it a box lined with tissue paper, drew forth a pair of sleeves, wrought in a pattern similar to the collar she had just completed. She compared them together, and then asked of Madeline:

"Is not the match perfect? The collar is to go with them."

"One would think that the same hand wove them all. I wonder who they are for? Some one that must have a great deal of money, for Madame Leontine will ask a very high price for them."

"Yes," replied Margaret, with a sigh, "she profits largely by my labor. If I only had the means to open a little shop for myself, I could soon see my way to independence. I happen to know who ordered the collar to match these sleeves, for I saw the young lady at Madame's, and heard her name. She is a great heiress, and one of the loveliest girls in New York. Miss Euston looks as good as she is pretty, too."

"Then I trust the collar will whisper its story in her ear," replied Madeline, "and bring her to your assistance, Margaret, before it is too late."

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DIAMOND CROSS AND ITS COUNTERFEIT.

WHEN Lumley left the house of Mrs. Euston, he walked with hurried steps toward Union Park, and turned from there into a wide, quiet street, in which were several fashionable boarding-houses. At the door of the most imposing of these he rang and inquired for Mrs. Pierre.

He was ushered into a private parlor elegantly furnished,

and the numerous costly trifles which ornamented the room revealed the luxurious habits of its fair occupant. Heated air kept the atmosphere at a tropical temperature, and superb flowering plants which claimed their origin from those glowing regions, bloomed in the pale gleams of northern sunshine that struggled through the rose-colored curtains.

The walls were nearly lined with mirrors, in which the only work of art Mrs. Pierre cared to see, her own charming self, could meet multiplied reflections wherever she turned.

The visitor waited but a few moments, when the door which communicated with an inner temple of luxury, even more elegant than the reception room, softly unclosed, and the fair widow floated into the room with an airy grace that would have been extremely captivating to any other beholder; but Lumley was just then too deeply absorbed in his own thoughts to note the fascinating appearance of the lovely Circe.

She wore a morning dress of scarlet cashmere confined to the waist with a cord and tassel, beneath which was seen an exquisitely embroidered robe. A net of crimson chenille, with gold fringes pendent on either side, covered her black hair, and by contrast brightened the soft olive of her complexion.

Lumley sat drumming his fingers upon a table, quite unconscious of her presence, until she placed her fair hand on his shoulder, and inquired—

"Well, how did the *coup de main* succeed?"

"Just as you predicted, devilishly bad," he moodily answered. "It was a false move in the game which, I am afraid, it will be difficult to retrieve. I wish I had taken your advice, Lonore."

"I must say that is just like your self-sufficient sex," replied Mrs. Pierre, in a tone of annoyance. "You refuse to

profit by a woman's superior finesse, and then get brutally angry because you had not the foresight to take the advice your pride rejected. I knew that your blunt sailor way of acting would offend Mrs. Euston, and disgust her daughter; but you would persist in spite of my warning."

Lumley placed his hands over his ears, as he exclaimed—

"There—there—that will do. There is no use in pouring forth a Niagara of words. I've no patience to listen to them. The trick failed, and that is all—so another dodge must be tried. The girl shall be mine, by fair means or foul, and I never yet swore to do a thing that I did not find a way to accomplish it."

"With ordinary prudence success was in your own hands, but you have thrown your best chances away," retorted the widow, contemptuously. "If you had approached Miss Euston in a regular manner, you might have succeeded in making her feel that it will be better to secure her inheritance by accepting you, than to surrender it, together with the prestige of her present position. But you would not listen to me; tell me all that occurred in the interview, that I may know how to advise you, for I see you have come to me for that, after all."

"Good Heavens, what a tongue! Will it never cease taunting me?" exclaimed Lumley, with passion. "Yes, I have come to you for advice; but you give me no chance to tell you why I wish it."

"Have I not asked you already? There—there—begin; I am mute."

She sat down on the sofa, rested her chin upon her hand, and assumed a listening air. As Lumley described the scene which had so lately occurred between Mrs. Euston and himself, an expression of bitter disdain gradually settled over her lovely face.

When he finished, she coldly asked:

"And you were really so impolitic as to threaten a woman

so self-possessed and well-bred as Mrs. Euston? What must she think of you? Are you not aware that she has a clear head and reasoning mind? And now neither her pride nor the interests of her step-daughter will permit her to yield the field without a struggle. Bah! you have ruined all."

He listened anxiously, and then asked:

"Do you really think so, Lonore? You forgot my proofs; they are convincing."

"To you and to me they seem so; but perhaps they will not be so to the rest of the world. Besides, the other party has possession, which is greatly in their favor. If the legality of your claim is contested, a lawsuit may drag slowly along for years, keeping you out of the enjoyment of the estate, with the chance that at its close you may be stripped of all."

"But I defy them to set the proofs aside. I have in my possession the letters that passed between Thomas Lumley and his wife before their marriage, Mrs. Lumley's wedding ring, the certificate of Albert Lumley's birth and baptism, and the seal ring of the family, bearing the heron's crest. How should I have come by these, unless I am the heir?"

"That question an astute lawyer will ask *you*, and you must be prepared to prove that they were honestly obtained," she significantly replied. "After so many years of absence, it will be very difficult to establish your identity. Miss Euston's friends are fully aware of the advantage this gives her, and it is only by appealing to her sense of justice—to her generous impulses—that you have much chance of success. But you saw the lawyers—what was the result of the interview?"

"Exactly what you predicted. I could manage old Euston, I think, but Mr. Spring is too much for me. The occurrences of this morning have only brought matters to a crisis. The fortune, or a large slice of it, I must secure

pretty soon, for I am greatly in need of it, as no one knows better than yourself. Let your fertile wit devise some means of getting me out of this scrape, Lonore, and your own interests shall not suffer thereby."

Mrs. Pierre smiled significantly.

"I find that my interests are always thought of when your own are in jeopardy; at other times they sink into complete insignificance. However, I have undertaken to aid you in this, and I will not shrink back now. You must write a note of apology to Mrs. Euston, and entreat that she will forget the scene that passed this morning. Appeal to the memory of your father, and ask that his son shall not be repudiated as an acquaintance by those who are known to have been his nearest friends."

"But I was mad enough to utter threats to Mrs. Euston," he moodily replied. "The d——I must have been at my elbow, instigating me to act as I did this morning."

"It is safe to believe so, when he is never long absent from you," was the sarcastic rejoinder. "Some people find his satanic majesty a convenient ally, on whom they can lay the burden of all their evil doings. When they go to him at last, I hope he pays them well for such treatment."

"I believe in my soul, Lonore, that you are one of his most provoking emissaries," was the angry response; "for you taunt and worry me sometimes until I could almost destroy you."

"Ah, truly, that would be acting like the verdant owner of the goose that produced the golden eggs; without me you would be a poor, miserable failure, for when you act against my advice you are sure to be going wrong, as was proved this morning."

"Diablement! will you never be done talking of that? I've said I was wrong, and what more do you expect?"

"I expect nothing but wilfulness and stupidity from you to the end of the chapter; but such as you are, our fortunes

are embarked in the same boat, and I must do the best I can to sustain your cause. There, write the note to Mrs. Euston, and I will deliver it myself. She admits me without ceremony, and I will try and smooth over this unlucky bravado on your part."

She pushed note paper toward him. Lumley dipped the pen in the ink, and sat in a kind of bewildered silence, as if his ideas had all deserted him.

"Why don't you begin?" impatiently asked Mrs. Pierre.

"Because I don't know what to say," he sulkily replied. "I am no woman's lackey, and what would be likely to please such a stilted one as Mrs. Euston, I am sure I shall never express."

"Ha, ha! the dignified, elegant Ellinor described as stilted! Why, she is called the graceful and charming widow. I am sometimes half jealous of her myself."

"She may be all that to those she likes. To me she was only the offended woman, who commanded me to leave her house as quietly as if she was saying the most agreeable thing in the world."

"But if I ask her to receive you again, she will do so, provided you apologize as I shall dictate. I knew you would be forced to use my brains at last, so put down what I tell you, and dismiss the affair as settled, for I shall bring you back permission to call with me this very evening."

"Go on then; I will write."

In spite of this promise, Lumley paused several times, and demurred at the abject tone of the apology; but Mrs. Pierre was despotic, and he was finally compelled to put down the exact words with which she furnished him.

"Now direct and seal that with the Lumley crest, while I get ready to call on Mrs. Euston and her daughter."

She retired to the inner room a few moments, and then appeared clad in a dark, merino walking dress, and wrapped in furs. A thick veil concealed her piquant features, and she laughingly said:

"My fashionable friends would be surprised that so dashing a person as I am, would ride in an omnibus, but I intend to do so now. It is too far to walk this cold morning, and I do not care to have my carriage seen before Mrs. Euston's door to-day."

"Why not to-day, as well as any other?" he naturally asked.

"Oh, *that* is my affair, not yours;" and she laughed with an affectation of mystery that annoyed him.

"To hear you speak thus, one would think your movements are as important as those of a crowned queen."

"To some people in *my* world, they are certainly of more consequence than those of any royalty I am aware of. A queen of fashion is more noticed and commented on than the Queen of England. Will you go out with me, or would you prefer to remain here till my return? There is the morning paper, and on the *étagère* you will find the last new novel."

"I will stop and look over the paper, but you need not expect to find me here on your return."

"You will not wait to learn the result of my mission?"

"You have already assured me that it shall be propitious, and I trust implicitly to your word."

"Ah! if you only had as much faith in what is good!" she laughingly exclaimed as she closed the door upon her bewitching face.

Lumley waited until he saw Mrs. Pierre trip past the windows. Then he slowly arose, and locked the door opening into the hall. Having again seated himself, he called in an authoritative tone on the name of "Toinette."

An elderly negress came from the inner room in answer to the summons. She was very black, and wore immense gold earrings in her ears, a brilliant turban made of a gay plaid handkerchief upon her head, and a calico robe of most gorgeous colors. With a low courtesy she spoke in Spanish, and inquired—



"What is your will with me, Senor Alfred?"

"Albert—remember Albert is my name, you old stupid," he angrily exclaimed.

"Ah! den sho' 'nuff I done forget you change him," was the response in imperfect English. "But I no do so no mo'—I try to tink 'bout you' fancy for de oder name."

"Very well—see that you do remember, or I shall not be likely to think of your pleasure again. Your mistress has gone out to pay a brief call; I shall remain here, and if you wish to go out for half an hour, I will take care of her apartment till you return."

"Oh, t'ank you, Senor Al—Albert; dat is what I very much wish alway, for Miss Lonore keeps me 'bout her room so much in fear dat some one take her jewels, dat I don't hardly get out at all."

"Go along with you, then, and I will keep watch over the jewels. Half an hour you may stay, but mind that you come back to the minute."

"Si, Senor, I be sure to remembair; I go out de bedroom door, and take de key wi' me."

"Very well," and he took up the newspaper and appeared to become deeply absorbed in its contents, while he eagerly listened for the woman's departure. After the door closed, he sat still several moments to be quite sure that she would not return, then, with light steps, he entered the chamber beyond.

The fitting up of this room was in exquisite taste, but the intruder did not pause to note the hangings of lace and brocade, the velvet carpet, which looked as if the pressure of the foot might crush the flowers that glowed upon its surface; or the many articles with which a woman of elegant taste and lavish expenditure surrounds herself.

With reckless tread he advanced at once to the wardrobe in which he knew the jewel case of Mrs. Pierre was kept. Taking a key from his pocket, he nervously unlocked the

door, and found the casket standing half open, as Toinette had left it when he called to her, for she had evidently been engaged in removing some of them from the dress her mistress had worn on the previous evening. Lumley eagerly turned over the shining baubles, and extricated from them a cross of great beauty; beside the glittering splendor of this, the others looked mean and valueless, and his eyes sparkled as he drew the heavy curtain aside, and suffered the light of day to flash upon the gems.

He took from his pocket a case containing an exact counterpart of it, and compared them together. The setting was precisely the same, and no eye save that of an experienced lapidary could have distinguished the true from the counterfeit. A triumphant expression came upon the face of the gazer, as he muttered—

"She will never find out the cheat, any more than she did with the others. By Jupiter! Jacobs has excelled himself, and these California sparklers will answer Lonore's turn as well as the others. She will never discover the exchange, and this beauty will bring me in a cool five thousand. The stones are immensely valuable, but it's the last throw on the dice till I get the heiress and her fortune, or the money without the girl—it's all the same to me. What folly! to keep so much money locked up in bits of glittering finery that can so easily be counterfeited. Lonore thinks her diamonds worth twenty thousand dollars, and so they were, once. The sham sparklers I have given her in exchange for the true, are quite as ornamental, while I have lived a jolly life on the precious little bijoux. I really am sorry this is the last haul from the dear, unsuspecting creature."

He removed the cross from the chain that held it, and substituted the one he had brought with him. Then, replacing the casket exactly as he had found it, Lumley calmly locked the door of the wardrobe, and returned to the



outer apartment. There the reading of the newspaper was resumed, and he quietly awaited the return of the negress. She came back at the end of the stipulated time, and with the assurance that all was safe, the robber bade her a friendly good morning, and walked away with his prize.

In the meantime, the person whom Lumley had thus despoiled was using all her tact, all the arts with which nature had lavishly gifted her, in endeavors to serve him. Mrs. Pierre was at once admitted to the snuggery, for she had cast the glamour of her fascinations over Clara, until she had been successful in establishing an intimacy with her step-daughter, which Mrs. Euston scarcely approved. But there was nothing that could be alleged against the attractive widow. She was cordially received in a most exclusive circle, into which she had been introduced by letters from several of the most influential families in Havana, and her own conduct since her residence in New York had been unimpeachable. Still, there was a vague fear in the mind of Mrs. Euston, that her influence over the darling of her heart might not be for the benefit of her future happiness; but Clara loved and trusted Mrs. Pierre, and her mother could not bear to sever a friendship which afforded her so much happiness.

It seemed singular that a worldly wise and sarcastic woman of society should become the chosen friend of so young and inexperienced a girl as Clara Euston, but their very dissimilarity rendered them more attractive to each other. The true secret of Mrs. Pierre's advances to Clara, was found in the fact that the success of her own schemes rendered it necessary that the young heiress should fall under her influence, and she spared no flattery that was likely to accomplish her ends. Clara was but human, and the incense adroitly offered had its natural effect. She gave her confidence, and a great deal of her heart, to her insinuating friend, and she excused her sarcasms in the belief that Mrs.

Pierre was too honest to repress her opinions, however severe they might seem to a person so new to society as herself.

When her card was sent in, Mrs. Euston hurriedly whispered a caution to Clara not to mention the visit they had that morning received; to which she assented, as she had no desire to hear the comments of her friend on the ridiculous incident of the day.

The widow came in brilliant and smiling; she exclaimed—"See how anxious I am to visit you, when I venture out with the thermometer nearly at zero; but it is worth while to traverse the Arctic zone to get into such an atmosphere as this. I declare this room is the perfection of comfort: when I am once seated in it, I never know when to tear myself away."

"I am glad you find it so attractive," said Clara with an affectionate smile. "I am sure we would often detain you in it much longer than you are willing to stay."

"Thank you, *ma belle*. If I consulted my own inclination, I should never leave the side of so charming a person as I find you to be. Ah me! I must veil my diminished head since you have made your *débüt* in society. The dashing widow is no longer the Cynthia of the minute, but the fair young girl, who is new to life and its follies. Ah Clara, do you know that I almost envy you your freshness—the zest with which you enjoy everything; while I am almost sated with pleasure? It is a miserable condition of existence, that satiety so soon comes to take the fine edge off our most highly prized delights. While young, we should be like the immortals—impervious to disease or sorrow."

"If I were asked who among all my friends enjoys such immunity, I should have named Mrs. Pierre, for you seem to me always bright—always happy."

Mrs. Pierre half sighed, and then smiled:

"How can I always be happy, when I am plagued to death with the worries of my friends? as well as my own? You will be surprised to hear that I came hither as ambassador for a despairing swain, who has had the misfortune to offend you."

Without the slightest embarrassment, Clara replied:

"I am sure I do not know to whom you allude. I am on the best terms with all my acquaintances."

"The person to whom I refer, can as yet scarcely be classed among those. You have seen him but once, I believe, and then he had the misfortune to offend both you and your mother. Did you not receive a singular call this morning?"

Mrs. Euston and her daughter exchanged surprised glances; the former asked:

"Is Mr. Lumley a friend of yours, Mrs. Pierre?"

"By a singular chance, he is; he once stood my friend in a fatal crisis of my destiny, and I am anxious to return the service he then rendered me, by endeavoring to explain and excuse his mad conduct here this morning. You must have seen that Mr. Lumley is only a *brusque* sailor, to whom the conventionalities of life are in a great measure unknown. You must not judge him by the usual standard, but try and be lenient towards a man placed in a very trying and peculiar position. I am the bearer of a note from him, which I beg that you will read in a conciliating spirit: when you have done so, I will explain the connection between Albert Lumley and myself, which induced me to undertake this commission."

With an expression of reserve which Mrs. Pierre scarcely considered favorable to the success of her mission, Mrs. Euston took the note, and slowly perused it. She smiled faintly as she looked up, and said:

"The tone of this, is quite different from that assumed by its writer this morning. I am afraid you can say

nothing to me that will induce me to forget Mr. Lumley's impertinence towards Clara, or the blustering tone he assumed in speaking to me. It seems inconceivable that any man should have dared to attempt either."

"Ah, dear Mrs. Euston, this man is a creature of impulse; he has a heart open to every good impression, but with a violent and impulsive temper that misleads him forever. He really is deeply enamored of my sweet Clara whom he had seen on the street, and followed more than once before he was aware of her identity. When he ascertained that the Miss Euston whose fortune he is about to claim is the same lady he had so passionately admired, he rushed hither in the delirium of his feelings, and was guilty of the most *mal apropos* thing he could have attempted. In his simplicity, he absurdly believed that his proposal would be gladly listened to, as a means of uniting conflicting interest of a very painful nature. If you will only consider the motive that prompted him, you will be able to find an excuse for him in your true woman's heart."

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

"My dear Mrs. Pierre, I am sorry you have undertaken the defence of this person's conduct; for much as I regret to say it, he is not a gentleman. If the pressure of circumstances compels me to receive him at all, it must be in the most formal and distant manner."

"Thanks for even that concession," replied Mrs. Pierre with animation. "He can make his own way when once known to you under more favorable auspices. Albert Lumley is not a man of forms, but he is one who has the stamp of nature's nobility upon him, therefore I venture to press his claims. Listen, dear Mrs. Euston, to the history of my acquaintance with him, and then see what your heart says in his favor. I went to Europe on a bridal trip with a husband who adored me. We spent a year of happiness in travelling, and then embarked for our home. On

the third day out, my Carlos sickened with a malignant fever. The people on board the vessel were afraid to approach him, with one exception—this was the young American who was employed as supercargo. He came to me and offered his services; he watched with me beside the dying bed of my husband, held him in his arms in his paroxysms of frenzy, and finally received his last directions for restoring me to my native land."

By this time the voice of the speaker had become tremulous with emotion, and her face was bathed in tears. Clara tenderly clasped her hand, and Mrs. Euston marvelled that such apparently genuine feeling should be displayed by this gay and brilliant butterfly of fashion.

After an impressive pause, Mrs. Pierre went on—

When death had set its seal upon my beloved, and I was left in stupid dumb despair, Albert Lumley acted for me. His was the hand that smoothed the tangled hair—straightened the lifeless limbs, and wound around them the canvas shroud that formed the only coffin of him who had been so tenderly nurtured. His voice read the burial service over the dead, and his arm supported me back to my state-room when they had launched my husband amid the wild waste of waters."

Again she wept so bitterly, as proved the incidents she related to have at least some foundation in truth. She presently added in broken tones:

"His was the only voice that offered me consolation, and protection, and is it wonderful that I love as a brother the man who did all this for me? That I make an effort to aid him now."

"Oh no," murmured Clara, "he must be true—must be noble, in spite of his strange conduct toward us."

"He is true, my dear Clara; true as steel. But that is not all; he went with me to my home, where I found my husband's family arrayed against me, resolute to deprive me

of the wealth he had willed to me, because I had no child to inherit. I was an orphan, without friends to serve me, save those my money could purchase. Albert Lumley remained beside me; he took my cause in hand, battled with my opponents with a courage that would not be daunted, and finally brought me off victorious in the struggle. To his efforts I am indebted for all I possess. I remained three years in Havana, but my home was dreary and oppressive to me. Every spot about it was filled with haunting memories, and I finally settled my affairs in such a manner that I could travel whither I pleased. Last fall I came to this city, where I have sought in the bustle of society to bury the memories of that which can never—never return."

After a brief pause, Mrs. Euston inquired—

"And your friend, Mr. Lumley? What became of him in the interval? I believe he only made his appearance in New York within the past few weeks."

"He was wedded to the sea, and after my suit was decided, he again went out to China, from which country he returned only a few weeks since. And now, my friends, comes the most serious part of my confession. I must tell you the whole truth, and I dare hope for your pardon after doing so. I learned the terms on which Clara holds her fortune—I knew the true heir lived—that he was worthy of her—and I thought that fate itself had pointed out the path these two noble hearts should walk in. I wrote to Lumley informing him of the belief in his death, and the possession of his estate by one who was eminently worthy to become his wife. I urged him to return and woo the beautiful girl who had so deeply charmed my own heart. My letter reached him at Liverpool on his return from the East, and after some delay he came hither; but it was only to refuse to act in the matter at all. He declared that his wandering life suited him better than any other; that so

long a time had passed, he should have much difficulty in proving himself his father's son, and he would not bear the odium of bringing forward a claim that might be regarded as spurious."

"What changed his purpose?" asked Mrs. Euston.

"He accidentally saw Clara on the street. He did not know her, but by one of those strange chances which influence our fate without any will of our own, Albert became desperately enamored of her. When he found the lady who so strongly attracted him to be Miss Euston, he considered it best to take steps toward claiming his inheritance. He notified yourself and her guardian of his intention, and then, in a moment of impulsive feeling, he came hither to set your mind at rest by making an offer of his heart and hand to Clara; believing, in his sailor-like simplicity, that you would be willing to listen favorably to so easy a method of settling the rival claims to the estate. I have done; I leave him to your mercy, with the certainty that you will be lenient in your decision."

She threw herself back in her chair, as if wearied with talking, and Mrs. Euston turned to her daughter.

"You have related a touching story, Mrs. Pierre, which proves the son of our old friend to be worthy of his parentage; but before I consent to overlook his strange conduct to me, I must ask Clara one question—could you, my love, under any circumstances, be induced to accept Mr. Lumley as your future husband?"

"Certainly not," was the prompt reply, "I respect his good qualities in spite of his rough exterior; I can relinquish my fortune to him, if he establishes his right to it, but I can never marry him."

"You hear, Mrs. Pierre. It will be more just to your friend to decline any further acquaintance with him, as it can only lead to annoyance to Clara, and a hopeless pursuit to himself."

"But really, Mrs. Euston, this seems to me a precipitate decision. Young ladies often change their minds, and, as yet, Clara can form no idea of the impression Mr. Lumley may make upon her on a further acquaintance. I only ask a fair trial for him, and that you owe him on the score of his father's long friendship for your late husband."

Wearied by her importunity, Mrs. Euston replied—

"While the suit progresses, if like the silly moth, Mr. Lumley is resolute to flutter around the flame that may destroy him, I will not say him nay. He may visit Clara, with the positive assurance, however, that he is not to consider this concession on my part as encouragement to his suit. I yield this much from respect to the memory of his father."

"You recognize him then as the person he claims to be?" asked Mrs. Pierre, eagerly. "Where then is the necessity for a suit at all? Would not a compromise be more just to all the parties concerned?"

Mrs. Euston coldly answered—

"Courtesy requires that I shall speak of your friend as what he represents himself to be. As to the rest, it is now beyond my control. I have given Mr. Spring authority to act on the defensive, as he has from the first strenuously advised."

This was a great blow to Mrs. Pierre, but she carefully concealed its effect. She felt that Mrs. Euston had yielded as much as she could be induced to do, and she was compelled to rest contented with the permission she had wrung from her to admit Lumley as an occasional guest.

Mrs. Euston was summoned from the room, just as Mrs. Pierre was preparing to leave, and the widow was thus left a few moments alone with Clara.

"My angel," she caressingly said, "do not close your heart to this new adorer, think, my darling, of the alternative offered you; the heart of a noble, true man, and undis-

puted possession of your fine fortune, or obscurity and dependence on your mother. Weigh the two well, Clara, and do not decide too hastily. Let *my* friend have a fair chance; you can mould him to your will. He has known only hardship and indifference; but a beloved wife, a home of his own, would soften him, and make him all you could wish. Think kindly of him my sweet one, will you not?"

Clara blushed and smiled, as she replied:

"It is our duty to think kindly of all, and I will not refuse to do so of your friend. Let him come to us occasionally; I loved his father dearly, and I cannot refuse consideration and kindness to his son."

"That is right, it is like your noble self, my Clara. And now adieu; I go to carry a gleam of hope to poor Albert's disconsolate heart."

Clara, when left alone, sat down to reflect on all that had that morning occurred. She tried to arrange her thoughts and take a dispassionate view of her true position with reference to this new claimant on her fortune and her sympathies. The revelations of Mrs. Pierre, the assurance she gave of the validity of his claims, materially changed the position of affairs. An unknown pretender to her estate, and the accredited son of her old friend, were very different persons. What right had she to withhold his fortune from his possession, if he were really the son of Mr. Lumley?

She felt, at moments, as if she almost owed him her hand, for she stood in the way of his accession to wealth, and loving her as she had been assured he did, he generously hesitated to strip her of the property she had been accustomed to consider her own. Then the memory of his *outré* conduct that morning, arose before her, and she was bewildered by the contrast in the man as he appeared, and as he was represented by his late advocate.

Mrs. Euston indited the following note to Mr. Spring:

MR. SPRING.—*Dear Sir:* Mrs. Pierre endorses the claims of Mr. Lumley, and professes to have known him several years ago. I leave this clue in your hands to be followed up with your usual shrewdness.

E. EUSTON.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SHOOTING FOLLY AS IT FLIES.

AFTER their brilliant party, the calls upon the Misses Stuckup were numerous of course; and of all the persons present on that evening, Ernest Linden and his foreign wife furnished the most attractive subject of gossip.

The family of Commodore Stuckup had been in Europe at the time of Linden's sudden marriage, and numerous inquiries were made of them as to *who* the Miss Waltham was who had succeeded in entrapping so fastidious a man into a marriage so evidently unsuited to him.

To these queries Miss Stuckup replied with dignity:

"That Miss Waltham's father was said to be an eccentric Englishman, who lived entirely upon the continent, but not in Paris. She knew nothing of the family beyond the fact that they were reported to be rich. The friends of Linden were extremely surprised at his sudden marriage, as his intention to turn Benedict had not been suspected even by his most intimate associates. The affair was a mystery she could not pretend to solve; but it was very certain that after his marriage, Linden took extreme pains to avoid his own countrymen. Therefore they had not seen his wife till she made her *débüt* at their party."

"A very mysterious affair, truly," lisped a pale young man, with a scanty supply of soft, silky hair, elaborately



curled, and a dust colored moustache curved above his effeminate lip; at the first glance he looked like a badly grown boy; a second one revealed lines beneath his eyes and around his mouth, which proved that his juvenile days had long passed away.

"'Twas rather a take in, I fancy; but these handsome men who think so highly of their own good looks, are always the fellows to do a silly thing of this sort. Linden had better have stuck to his own country, and married that fascinating Mrs. Euston, whom people used to say he was desperately in love with. It is deuced strange, any way, for that stately Miss Graham threw herself away too by marrying a man old enough to be her father when he was at his last gasp. By Jupiter! what is the world coming to."

"Very good reasons can be given for Ellinor Graham's marriage to Gen. Euston I fancy," sneered Miss Stuckup. "She was not rich, and he *was*; by a mere form, she gained a handsome dower in addition to her own estate. For my part, I always believed her excessive fondness for that child was half pretense. The result proved that a deeper plan was laid than any woman with less tact would have been capable of forming."

"But it is said she never intends to marry again—that she allows no suitor to approach her. That looks as if there was some feeling deeper than interest, Miss Stuckup, with all due deference to your opinion."

"No—not while Mrs. Ernest Linden lives," replied the lady in a confidential tone. "Her heart, everybody knows, was given to Linden years ago, and no one can tell why he did not marry her. Miss Graham consoled herself for his desertion, by securing the name and position of Gen. Euston's widow. It was by no means a bad speculation."

"From which she is not likely to gain much, if all reports prove true," broke in a gentleman who turned from a book he was pretending to examine, while in reality he was

giving his exclusive attention to the two who were so congenially engaged.

"Why, la! Mr. Simpson how is that?"

"Have you not then heard the last *on dit*? Euston's estate has long been known to be insolvent, and now a person claiming to be the son of old Tom Lumley has appeared and set up a title to Clara's inheritance. It seems very curious that after an absence of so many years, Albert Lumley should re-appear."

"Is it really so?" inquired Miss Stuckup, with delighted eagerness. "I declare it will be so romantic that I almost hope that it may prove true."

"For its romance *alone*, Miss Stuckup?" inquired her informant with sarcastic emphasis. "Lumley has made known his claims, and they are now undergoing legal investigation. The best talent at the bar has been engaged on either side, and it is the current belief that he will sweep the whole estate. The pretty Clara is likely, after all, to be no heiress."

"Zounds!" exclaimed he of the moustache. "That interferes materially with my future prospects. I had cast a favorable eye on that fair little Clara, myself, and I had a vague idea that I could not do better than bestow myself on the heiress; but the idol without the trappings would be more than I could stand."

"Upon my word, Miss Euston will be in despair when she learns that with her money she loses the chance of buying a slave;" replied Mr. Simpson, curtly. "You had better not speak so freely, as the claimant may not be able to establish his identity, after all."

"What! will they refuse to relinquish the money to the son of Mr. Lumley?" asked Miss Stuckup, with an air of affected surprise. "I thought so disinterested a person as the pattern Mrs. Euston, would do what she considers right at any sacrifice of interest."

"So she will in this instance, as in every other in which she is concerned. It is surely right for Mrs. Euston to protect the interests of her daughter until she is convinced that this Lumley is really the person he assumes to be. At first she was inclined to give up without a contest; but her lawyer, who is a very shrewd man, and a warm friend of Clara's, advised a different course. There will now be a suit."

"Have you seen Mr. Lumley?" inquired the lady.

"Yes—I met him yesterday with the charming widow, Mrs. Pierre. They had just been calling on his fair adversaries, and seemed in the best of spirits. I understand that the suit is to be carried on in the most amicable spirit."

"Oh, yes, I comprehend what that means," replied Miss Stuckup, with her most malicious expression. "The poor man, if the true heir, will be cajoled into making Clara the partner of his fortunes; if defeated, he can be thrown over for some more eligible match. Commend me to such disinterested manoeuvrers as Mrs. Euston."

Mr. Simpson shrugged his shoulders.

"You are incorrigible, Miss Stuckup. I had no idea that such is your opinion of Mrs. Euston, for I have remarked that when you are thrown with her in society you are uncommonly gracious in your advances to her. I think she was one of your guests the evening of your last party."

The lady had not even the grace to blush; she carelessly replied—

"Oh, that was a matter of course. To Mrs. Euston's position in a certain set I must yield my individual antipathies. All who are in society recognize this necessity."

"Defend me, then, from what you call society!" exclaimed the satirist. "If false hearts, false tongues, and false faces compose its constituents, it is really a most delectable compound."

"Upon my word, Mr. Simpson, you have no right to find

fault with any of its members, for you say more hard things than any one I know."

"Yes—but I have the saving grace of always speaking the truth. It is not often palatable, I know, but it amuses me to make people throw aside the artificial varnish that is used to conceal the little that is real in them," and with a low bow Mr. Simpson departed, carrying with him the agreeable conviction that he had aroused all that was evil in the temper of the lady he had called to see. A bachelor, and a man of large fortune, he commented with severity on the hollowness his shrewdness detected, which from a person differently situated would not have been tolerated.

Mr. Simpson sauntered away, and his place was filled by a large red-faced woman, dressed in the extreme of fashion, who had just entered; she exclaimed:

"My dear Miss Stuckup, I have just returned from a musical *mattinney*, where I saw Ernest Linden's wife with the most horrid bonnet on that ever was seen. I can't think what makes the woman make such a figure of herself."

"What kind of a bonnet was it, Mrs. Smoot?" asked several eager voices.

"Oh, a horrid English poke made of fur, and it actually covered the top of her head! You can't think how ridiculous it looked among the elegant Parisian things worn by the other ladies."

"I only wish she could introduce so sensible a fashion during the cold weather, at least," said a young girl who was recently from the country; "for my ears nearly freeze, and I am really afraid I shall get some dreadful disease in my head from such constant exposure."

With a contemptuous glance at the speaker, Mrs. Smoot went on—

"Everybody was at the *mattinney*, except you and your visitors, Miss Stuckup, and we had such heavenly music with refreshments."



"Both together?" asked the advocate of the fur bonnet, with a sly smile. Mrs. Smoot did not deign to reply, but went on—

"The Italian preemer donna did sing most delicious, and so did the other woman, too, but I wondered what that man played on the pianner so much for. I wished he would let 'em sing all the time. That Dangree, as they call her, had on a new style of robe, the most exquisite thing I have seen this season; and I am sure she looks as pleasant as if she never was angry in her life, in spite of her name."

"Do you really not know who that man was, of whose playing you speak so contemptuously?" asked the country girl, with an expression of comical amazement.

"Really, how should I know who he is. Some person hired to fill in the time between the songs, I suppose; but he played on as if we had gone there only to hear him."

"Ha! ha! so the rest of us had, madam. I was there, and I went to hear Thalberg, the most renowned pianist of the day. Really, you do not say that you attended his *matinée*, and did not know he was the attraction? It is a new version of Hamlet with the character of Hamlet left out."

Mrs. Smoot turned redder than ever as she replied—

"I saw his name in big letters on the bill, but I didn't read it, and I took it for granted he was the stage-manager or some such person. What should I know of Thalberg, or any other pianner player? I'm no musician myself, and I only went to the mattinney because my nieces told me they were all the fashion. Good morning, Miss Stuckup; I thought yours was an *exclusive* circle, but I see several here that I scarcely expected to meet."

With an impertinent stare at her late antagonist, Mrs. Smoot loftily made her exit. She was the owner of a "palatial mansion" on a fashionable avenue, purchased by the proceeds of her own industry. Having been a milliner in

the Bowery, afterwards a fashionable modiste in Broadway, lastly a millionaire by some lucky speculations in property, Mrs. Smoot had assumed her hard-earned right to make her way into our "best society," and was quite as aristocratic as any plebeian of them all.

Her departure was immediately followed by the entrance of Mrs. Pierre and Miss Euston, in elegant walking dresses, for they, too, had attended the concert, and with them came the new claimant on the fortune of Clara, Mr. Albert Lumley.

Miss Stuckup advanced to greet them, with the most engaging air:

"My dear Mrs. Pierre, what an age it is since I have seen you! and my fair Clara, looking like the enchanting Hebe herself. Really, so many bright young girls have made their *début* this season, that I begin to feel almost *passée*. Mr. Lumley, I am happy to welcome you to my father's house, for I remember yours as an old friend."

Any one who did not know Miss Stuckup well, would have believed that the bright smiles, the gracious manner, were true indications of cordial feeling. The rural young lady who *had* some ideas of sincerity and hospitable feeling, looked on in silent surprise. The pale young gentleman, with the dust-colored moustache, caught the expression of her face, and burst into as hearty a fit of laughter as good breeding and his delicate organization would permit. He composed himself sufficiently to say:

"My dear Miss Green, you have not been long enough in the city to lose a tinge of verdancy. That dashing widow, and her pretty companion, know as well as I do, that Miss Stuckup has a positive aversion to them, because they are charming, and she is not. But they belong to the same set; they must occasionally meet, and the conventionalities of life supply the rest. It is useless to look shocked."

"Did I betray so much? I must guard my face better.

Am I to understand, then, that the 'friends we grapple to our souls with hooks of steel,' are only to be sought and found far from city life?"

"If you had said *hoops* of steel, now, it would have been 'more german to the matter' in hand; but we'll leave that pass. I beg to decline replying to your query, for candor is sometimes invidious. I have surveyed yon 'whiskered pard' through my glass, and I find nothing attractive in his ursine aspect. I trust my rosebud Clara will retain her fortune, and refuse the pretender to it too. I believe I will pay my devoirs: it will be time enough to desert the shrine when the golden offerings are removed. What! shocked at me too? I can only reply, live in this atmosphere one year ourself, and see what *you* will come to."

The young girl laughed:

"I do not think I can conscientiously pray not to be led into temptation every morning, and then deliberately walk into it. I believe I shall return to my own quiet home, more enamored of its simplicity and sincerity than when I came hither."

"Pooh! is there any nook on earth free from malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness? If there is, we should not be required to pray to be preserved from them at least one day out of the seven."

"And as you only avail yourself of it on the Sabbath occasion, I presume that is the reason why the prayer is so seldom granted," was the retort; and Miss Green made her parting salutations and left.

And Mr. Grey also departed.

"What an entertaining creature Mr. Grey is!" said Miss Alicia, with a half sigh; "only I cannot always tell whether he is in earnest, and sometimes I do not quite understand what he means."

During this conversation, Miss Stuckup had been playing the agreeable to Lumley in a very animated manner.

"I thank you very sincerely, Mrs. Pierre, for bringing your friend to call on me. I have heard something of your romantic history, Mr. Lumley, and I am dying to have some of the incidents confirmed by yourself. Is it true that you have been a prisoner in Turkey, and one of the Sultan's wives fell in love with you, and eloped with you?"

This was a pure invention on the part of the lady, suggested by a sudden reminiscence of the history of the most extraordinary John Smith who has figured in the annals of that extensive family.

Lumley stroked his moustache in a self-complacent manner, as he replied:

"If such an incident occurred, I have no recollection of it, ma'am. I do not wish the impression to get out that *any* lady had claims on me before I returned to this garden of beauty, this land of the free and the home of the brave, which should read the land of the fair, for no women can compare with my own countrywomen in beauty."

"What, not even the enchanting Circassians, from whom Powers has modeled his Greek Slave?"

"With all due deference to Mr. Powers' genius, and his marble woman, too, I have seen handsomer creatures in the parlors of this city than she ever was."

"Marble woman! ha, ha! I perceive, Mr. Lumley, that you are an original. We really feel flattered that so great a traveller as you have been, should give the palm to the ladies of America."

"I will not only give the palm, but my whole hand, to one of the fair enchantresses, if she will only consent to take it," replied Lumley, with a glance toward Clara which filled Miss Stuckup with rage; but she sweetly said:

"What wit, yet what impulsiveness of nature you must possess, Mr. Lumley. I declare it is quite refreshing to meet a person unsophisticated amid the heartless routine of our life of conventions."

"What is that about conventions? I understood that you women in this free country have taken to holding them. I hope you are not one of the strong-minded, Miss Stuckup."

The lady was quite aghast. She exclaimed—

"Dear me, Mr. Lumley, you have lived on the sea until you strangely confound terms. I meant nothing of that sort."

"Oh, if I am allowed to confound things in such a highfalutin set as yours, I'll do it without stint. All this making believe to be one thing when you're quite another, is a confounded bore, I must say. Here am I, plain Albert Lumley, sailor and freeman, who can't be received in the set to which my father belonged unless I put on fine airs and graces that are not natural or becoming to me. I say again, confound the whole thing, since I'm free to say so to so fair a lady as yourself."

Mrs. Pierre repressed an amused smile, and gravely said:

"Really, Mr. Lumley, you shock Miss Stuckup. I had no idea that you ignore forms to such an extent, and if I am to act the part of your patroness in society, you must consent to pay a little more regard to them."

"Beg pardon, ladies, if I've said anything beyond rules. Can't lay aside the natural man and become a fine gentleman all at once. Don't forget that for more than twenty years I have lived on the sea, and consorted with sailors. They are very good sort of people in their way, but not up to fine fixings and genteel doings. With a little training I'll answer the bit finely, but just now I can't help running restive a little when the liberty is granted me. I'm glad to find one woman above nonsense, Miss Stuckup, and you're that trump."

And with great appearance of cordiality, Lumley offered his large hand to the lady, who touched it with the tips of her delicate fingers, as she said:

"Your originality is charming, Mr. Lumley. I have no doubt that we shall understand each other better when we are longer acquainted, and I assure you, as a friend of Mrs. Pierre, that you will always find a welcome among us."

"Oh, hang it, Miss Stuckup, if a fellow can't be received on his own account, his welcome ain't worth much, I'm thinking."

"Upon my word, Mr. Lumley, you are a most extraordinary person," faltered the deeply shocked young lady, struggling between her desire to claim this new lion as an acquaintance, and her deep disgust at his want of cultivation. "Pray do not misunderstand me wilfully, for I meant to give you a cordial invitation to visit our family."

"Now that is something like! always speak out what you mean, and then there will be no danger of a misunderstanding. Don't make one thing stand for another, as my cousin did with her father-in-law's tombstone."

Though Mrs. Pierre affected to be engaged in conversation with Miss Seraphina, she was really listening to this strange conversation with extreme amusement, and she now asked:

"How was that, Mr. Lumley? Pray explain your allusion."

"It's a queer story, but it's true. My cousin was a great housekeeper, and for a long time she tormented her husband to get her a marble slab to make biscuit on; but he was a stingy old hunk, and wouldn't get one himself, nor let her do so. One evening she was walking past the family burying-ground, and she observed that the slab over the grave of her husband's father had fallen in. A bright thought came to her, which she acted on without asking anybody's leave. She had the marble thing taken to her kitchen, thoroughly cleaned, and laid upon a table with the smooth side up. It answered the purpose of a biscuit board admirably until one unlucky day, when she had quite a large company."

"What happened then? I hope her husband found out the desecration she had been guilty of, and punished her as she deserved."

"You shall hear. Some connections of the family were dining at my cousin's. One of them was an old lady, who was very rich and extremely particular. She had been a warm, personal friend of the deceased Dr. Plummer, and held his memory in great respect. This same old lady was very fond of a certain kind of thin biscuit, rolled out to a considerable size, and baked crisp. Particular orders about these biscuit were given, but the cook got muddled with liquor, and turned over the tombstone so that the lettered side came up. When dinner was served, the old dame had a plate of her favorite bread placed near her. She saw some singular protuberances on the surface, and put on her specs to examine them. Imagine her horror when she read 'Uriah Plummer—died—.' Then there was a hiatus; but on lifting this, she found on the under one, '1836—*Requiescat.*' There was another break, but that was enough! The reader fainted.

"I leave you to imagine what followed. None of *that* dinner was eaten by the old dame, and what was worse, none of her fortune came to my cousin's husband, though he poor man, was not to blame, and did all he could to restore himself to her good graces. So the moral of this story is, that his stinginess to his wife cost him a fortune."

"I hope he had the tablet restored, and repudiated the heartless woman who had been guilty of such disrespect to the ashes of his ancestor."

"No—he was too sensible to do either. The mischief was done, and it was useless to make himself uncomfortable about it. His wife wouldn't leave him, neither would she give up her biscuit board, unless he would get her another. He refused to go to that expense, and they compromised, by having the name chiselled off the thing, and kept it in use as long as they lived."

To express in words the horror of the three ultra-refined daughters of the house of Stuckup, at this relation, would be impossible. Mrs. Pierre could stand no more; she arose, and hastily bidding them adieu, the three departed.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MISMATCHED PAIR, AND A MYSTERIOUS INTERVIEW.

WHEN Mrs. Pierre had set Clara down at her own door, and the carriage rolled away, she gave free vent to her mirth. At length she said:

"*Amigo*, that scene among those horrid girls was too good! But really now, are you not afraid they will represent you as a bear to all their friends?"

"I can't help it, Lonore; I *am* a rough fellow, and I can't be anything else, try as much as I will. I've concluded to play my own part naturally; for half the people I meet will call rudeness originality, as Miss Stuckup did, simply because I am known to be the claimant of a large fortune, and have a history attached to my name."

Mrs. Pierre looked grave.

"Nature made you rough, it is true, but unless you put some curb upon yourself, you will have no chance of success with Clara Euston. I could see this morning, that she was amused with your conversation with that absurd woman, but repelled by your want of refinement."

"Miss Euston will never accept me with her own consent, but that does not signify much. With the power your intimacy with her places in our hands, she can be decoyed from her home, carried off, and married in spite of any opposition she could offer. I can arrange matters so as to spend our honeymoon in Cuba, where she could appeal to

no one against me, and her mother might take her own time to become reconciled to the match. I can see plainly enough, that this will be my only chance."

"But really, I have hardly made up my mind to aid you to that extent," she nervously replied.

"It matters not, Lonore; you will do it, for you dare not refuse to aid me when I demand it, in the way most likely to win the stake for which we play."

Mrs Pierre became deadly pale. She firmly said:

"Oh! that must be your last resource. Do you understand me, *amigo*, *must* is the word I use?"

He shrugged his shoulders—

"It sounds very pretty and imperious from your whitening lips, and means as much as such words usually do with your sex. Bah! Lonore, don't be a fool, and spoil everything by affecting compassion for the bird you have limed for the fowler's snare."

"But this is far more than I expected. I trusted to the chances of the suit in your favor, and the natural unwillingness of the heiress to relinquish her fortune, when she can so easily retain it by becoming your wife."

"And a charming fate would that be for one so daintily reared as she has been," he bitterly retorted. "I cannot see that it will make any difference, if she marries me either with or without her own consent."

"Then why seek to marry her at all? The award may be in your favor. Then you can act magnanimously, by waiving your claim to repayment of what has been spent out of the income, and leave Clara still independent."

"This advice is very different from that you have hitherto given me; and now, just as it becomes necessary to act with vigor, you show the white feather."

"Has anything happened to defeat us," she apprehensively inquired.

"Only this—that the true man has disappeared from the

room in which I kept him, and I cannot trace him anywhere."

The listener fell back nearly fainting—she gasped:

"Tell me—tell me—do not keep me in suspense."

"You know the clairvoyant I called on at your suggestion? who gave me the clue to the hiding-place of the papers? Well, it seems that she has called to see the puling idiot more than once since, and gained access to his room by means of the chambermaid's key. Last evening she came in a carriage and took him away with her. I felt confident it could be no other person, and this morning I went to her cottage. It was closed, and an old woman came out from the house next door, and told me the family had gone into the country."

"And what have you done?"

"I set a policeman to find out what has become of her; that is all I can do for the present."

"Is there no chance for a compromise yet?" she asked, in a tremulous tone.

"None—I have seen old Spring again, but he is too keen for me. I can't cope with him."

"Get some one that can, then," she impatiently rejoined. "Employ a man skilled in all the subtleties of the law, who can meet your antagonist on his own ground. Frighten him with a show of your proofs, and make your own terms."

"The last is sooner said than done, Lonore; though I shall do as you advise. I will save your fair friend from the stupidity of her counsel, if I can. I really have no desire to do what I hinted, if it can be avoided, for a wife would be a dead bore to me."

"Oh, means can be found, *must* be found to release me from the necessity of throwing Clara Euston into your power."

"If they are not, look to the fulfilment of your part of the contract—fail me, and the brilliant belle falls from her position to—*her true level*."



With this parting threat, he left her.

From the night of the party at the Stuckups, Mrs. Linden seemed to have made up her mind to annoy her husband and his family in every possible manner. Her caprice, her irritable temper kept the house in constant commotion, and the health of Mr. Linden visibly failed under this new and trying phase of existence to one of his taste and habits. Mrs. Gaston was one of those quiet, self-sustained women who manage everything under their control without trouble or confusion, and the elegant repose which had grown to be the habit of her father's life was necessary to his happiness. This the turbulent and uncontrollable daughter-in-law was resolute to destroy, because in so doing she rendered the whole family miserable.

Day by day Mrs. Linden watched the shadows deepening upon the brow of her husband with a feeling of vindictive triumph; she exulted in the thought that she possessed the power to render him so wretched: since she could not make him happy, she would fulfil her threat and become the torment of his weary existence. If she could have read the remorseful struggles of his heart, she would have known that his sufferings were great enough without the daily annoyances she inflicted upon him.

Cherishing a passionate fondness for children, Linden never saw an attractive child that he did not yearn with feminine tenderness to take it in his arms and caress it, and the agonizing thought ceaselessly haunted him that his own—his son—that should have been the joy of his life, actually lay perishing in some den in that vast city—perishing of *want*, while he revelled in luxury! He could not find a clue to the retreat of the hapless Madeline—day after day he visited the office of Drew & Co., but no application had been made there in answer to his advertisement—and he turned with loathing from the costly viands daily spread before him, with the agonizing thought that the

deadly pangs of hunger were probably endured by those he would have given his heart's blood to be able to succor.

Ernest Linden was not a bad man; he was only a weak and self-indulgent one, and he could not thrust away the hideous phantoms that came to him both waking and sleeping. That pale wasted face with its wild eyes, and imploring manner, haunted him without a moment's repose. He would start from his fitful broken slumbers bathed in perspiration, with arms stretched forth to grasp the flitting form of a worn woman who held toward him the emaciated form of a dying boy—and then with a mocking cry, would chide his frantic efforts to pursue her.

Linden broke through the deep reserve of his nature, and entreated his sister to make every effort to discover the abode of Madeline. Mrs. Gaston also enlisted the sympathies of Mrs. Euston, but both had hitherto signally failed in their efforts to gain a clue to her whereabouts.

His family saw with sorrow that from day to day his health became more feeble, and they had almost given up the hope that his native air would prove efficacious in restoring to him any portion of his early vigor.

It was morning, and a singular scene was passing in his apartment. Linden lay upon a sofa drawn near the fire, in a fitful half slumber, and his wife stood beside him looking down upon him with a rapidly varying expression upon her face. At moments she looked almost like the picture in the library, for a soft and loving expression lighted up her commonplace features; some bitterly painful recollection would sweep this away, and in its place came rage, jealousy and despair, to efface the flitting charm with which softened feeling had invested her.

She suddenly put forth her hand, and grasped a dagger that lay upon a table close at hand. "I could kill him as he sleeps," was the savage thought that came as a temptation to her—"I could stab him with his own weapon as he

lies so utterly at my mercy! Yet I dare not—neither do I really wish it, even if I could escape the consequences of the act. Sweeter will it be to destroy him by slow torture. Like the cat which suffers her prey to fancy it may escape her deadly clutches, only to spring upon and secure it again. I will stealthily sap the springs of life in that heart which cherishes the image of another, while I am only a wife in name. Oh bitter doom! to cling to that which loathes and would spurn me if it dared! The hand though won by stratagem, is at least mine, and it shall never be claimed by another. Who was that woman who stood upon our path the other night? What's the tie between them? Oh! I would—I would that I could fathom it!”

She bent forward, and the sleeper stirred uneasily as if conscious of the baleful glance that rested upon him. Presently he unclosed his eyes and seemed startled by the near approach of her face to his own. She still held the dagger clasped in her hand, and suddenly raising himself up, he asked with scornful bitterness—

“Are you meditating the crime of murder, Mrs. Linden, or only that of suicide?”

“Perhaps I thought of committing both,” she coolly replied. “I could not of course outlive a model husband like yourself; our domestic happiness is so perfect, that life must be worthless to me except in your companionship either in life or death.”

Linden regarded her with grave sadness.

“Amelia, it seems to me that you could lead a peaceful life here if it were in your nature to do so. I have given you all that you could have expected from our ill-omened union. Position, fortune, a home that was at least the abode of contentment till you entered it. What more do you require of me?”

She passionately replied:

“Don't taunt me with the poor worldly advantages you

have bestowed upon me, when that is withheld that can alone give them any value—your heart recoils from me. Every glance of your eye betrays the repulsion which you dare not otherwise express.”

He sadly asked—

“Did you expect any other result from our most unsuitable union? The marriage bond made me your husband, but a mere legal form cannot blend two antagonistic souls into one. Priestcraft can never accomplish a miracle like that.”

“Yet the minister said, ‘whom *God* hath joined together.’ A union sanctioned by heaven should have some truth for its foundation. Tell me Ernest Linden, were you free to make the pledge that gave your loveless hand to me? Before you ever saw me, was there not another who in the sight of God was your wife?”

A fearful convulsion passed over his face, and he covered it with his hands to shut out the burning gaze that seemed to penetrate his shrinking soul, but no reply to this demand came.

She frigidly said:

“I am answered. That woman we so strangely met a few nights ago is the true wife. Who was she? Where does she conceal herself from my vengeance? Were you ever legally wedded to her, and is the tie that unites us but a rope of sand that can be severed at any moment?”

Linden arose in a paroxysm of intense passion.

“Woman! who gave *you* the right to question me thus? to impute such infamy to me as this? That wretched woman was a friend of my early days—her parents were kind to me, and the claims of herself and her child are sacred to me. Let this suffice, and do not seek to invade every corner of my miserable heart with your prying spirit of curiosity. I warn you that I will not bear it.”

“I only seek to learn that which is of vital importance



to me," she defiantly replied. "Am I the legal possessor of your name, or am I not?"

Linden regained his self-control, and sinking back, he feebly asked:

"Is this a new device to torture me, Amelia? Your ingenuity must be at fault when you seek so absurd a ground of quarrel as this. I shall reply to no such query."

"Because you dare not," she triumphantly said. "I hold the clue in my hand, and I shall surely follow it up until I find the secret of your renunciation of Ellinor Graham. I suspect it now, and if I gain its confirmation, but one thing will withhold me from disgracing you before the world. I would be glad to abuse the pride of those who look down on me as an inferior, by showing them, and those whose respect they prize, how low the idol of their pride has fallen."

He sternly said:

"I doubt not your will to do so, Amelia, if you possessed the power—but you have it not. Besides, self-interest is all powerful with you, and you would lose everything by such an *exposé*."

"That is true," was the cool rejoinder. "I suppose that I must bear with you and your indifference, to insure the magnificent reward I have in view. Your father cannot live much longer, and it will be grateful to me to be queen in this house where I have been looked on as an upstart and a nobody. You are his heir, and when you claim your own, I know one woman who will have to seek another shelter."

"Why should you speak of me as my father's sole heir? he has another child."

"Oh, Mrs. Gaston is only a daughter, and therefore is not entitled to more than a few thousand pounds. You, as the eldest and only son, will of course take the paternal mansion and the family estate. I will reign in state then, and your

sister may seek another home; there will be no room for her in mine."

Linden regarded her with a mingled expression of disgust and surprise, as he asked:

"Are you really so ignorant of our institutions as to imagine that I shall inherit my father's estate to the exclusion of my sister? The laws here give me only an equal portion with Cornelia, and if the family mansion ever becomes mine it will be by an arrangement to that effect between my sister and myself. I shall probably permit her to remain its mistress, for she loves every stone in its walls, while I have been a wanderer until I care very little about claiming it as my own."

"Are you really telling me the truth?" asked Mrs. Linden with an expression of dismay. "Can I never turn that hateful woman out?"

"It is so very true that my father can disinherit me, if he chooses to do so, and leave the whole of his property to Mrs. Gaston. If he should survive me, you could legally claim nothing more than he might choose to give you."

"And am I to be defrauded of fortune as well as love?" she passionately asked.

"No intentional fraud was practised on *you*, Mrs. Linden," was the pointed reply. "A question of fortune was the last I supposed in your mind when—when——"

Linden paused as if struggling with some bitterly painful feeling, and his wife sarcastically completed his unfinished sentence:

"When you conferred the high honor on me of giving me your imperial hand, which it seems after all, only weds me to poverty if the old man should beat you in the race you are both running toward the grave."

Bold and reckless as she was, there was something in the expression of her husband's eyes that made her recoil. He slowly said:

"I trust that the old man of whom you speak so irreverently, will long survive his hapless son to enjoy what belongs to him. For me, all joy in life is gone—self-respect is buried in the grave of my past misdeeds; ambition has flitted before me as an unstable shadow; remorse darkens my life, and I am ready to lie down in my grave, a wretched failure. Upon my tomb shall be inscribed, 'Unstable as water,' for my own weakness has made me what I am. You, madam, will be sufficiently provided for; you have borne the name of his only son, and my father will be liberal to you for my sake."

She proudly tossed her head as she said:

"I shall seek and find other means to loosen his purse-strings. I do not choose to remain dependent on the caprices of an old man almost in his dotage, who would be entirely under the influence of a woman that hates me."

"I am at a loss to conjecture what those means can be, and I am very sure that Cornelia has no such hostile feeling towards you. She forbears towards you every way."

"Yes—I dare say—I hate her for that insolent superiority she habitually assumes. If she would lose her temper and retort on me, I should like her better; but to be treated like a petulant child is enough to make me angry every hour of my life."

"Oh, well, I am weary of this discussion, and there comes an opportune knock upon the door to end it."

Mrs. Gaston came in carrying a glass of jelly in her hand. She said to her brother:

"You took no breakfast, Ernest, and I have made this for you myself. I beg that you will try and eat a portion of it."

"I wish other people wouldn't take the trouble to wait on my husband," rudely said Mrs. Linden. "I regard that as my right; but in *this* house I'm not considered as having any rights."

Mrs. Gaston flushed deeply, but she regarded her sister-in-law calmly as she replied:

"I should be sorry to invade your privileges, Amelia, but a sister also has strong claims upon an only brother. I hope that, on my part, nothing has been said or done which would lead you to imagine me willing to infringe the sacred duties of a wife toward her husband. Can we not come to a better understanding, Amelia, than has lately existed between us, and become sisters in something more than the name?"

"Oh, as to an *understanding*, that is not wanted on my part, dull as you may think me. I comprehend very well that I am nobody and nothing among such superfine people as my unlucky fate has thrown me with. My husband hates me, and both you and your father despise me."

Mrs. Gaston, thus rudely attacked, sat down, trembling violently. She made a strong effort to control herself, and then said:

"I trust, Amelia, that your assertion regarding the feelings of your husband towards you, has no more foundation than that which followed it, for I assure you that neither my father nor myself would permit ourselves to cherish hostile feelings toward Ernest's wife, let her act as she will."

"Your brother's *wife*! Aye, there it is! Only as a precious piece of property belonging to *him* have I any consideration. I wish I could go back to what I was before I ever saw him. Better freedom even with——"

Linden arose with sudden strength, and regarded her with an expression that made her pause. He spoke in the concentrated tone of a person wrought up to the highest point of endurance.

"Amelia, these contentions are destroying me, and I am fully aware that you are following out a purpose in acting as you do. I cannot bear them any longer. Go, if you wish it. If your life is intolerable here, you can have ample

means to seek a more congenial home elsewhere. My father will be prodigal of his wealth to rescue the few days left to me from these intolerable jarrings. I cannot—I will not endure them.”

“It must be a high bid that will induce me to leave you, and a still higher one that will prevent my ‘unruly member’ from prating of *you know what*,” was the scornful reply.

Linden sank back, evidently cowering before this threat, and alarmed at his increasing pallor, Mrs. Gaston took up a bottle of cologne and attempted to bathe his temples. Mrs. Linden snatched it from her hand, and said:

“No one shall come between me and my husband, not even a sister. He is mine, body and soul; *mine*, I tell you, bought with a price, held in a bond that death alone may break. I assert my power and defend my right, and *he* dare not repudiate it.”

Mrs. Gaston drew back and looked upon the two with an expression of bewildered fright. She asked her brother:

“What does she mean, Ernest?”

“Nothing, nothing, Cornelia; my wife was only intended by nature for an actress, and her destiny was marred by marrying me. This ranting might tell on the boards of a provincial theater, but in everyday life it is too melo-dramatic to be agreeable. The poor girl loves me, I believe, though at times she does torment me sadly. Leave us, now, if you please, Cornelia, and when I feel stronger, I will come down to the library to sit an hour or two with my father. Thanks for your jelly; I will eat a portion of it by and by.”

Thus dismissed, Mrs. Gaston left the room with her heart oppressed with undefinable fears and suspicions, to which she dared not give a tangible shape in her own mind.

As the door closed upon her retiring form, Linden dashed away the hand of his wife, which was bathing his brow, and sat up, pale, rigid, and stern as Brutus himself, as he sat in judgment on his sons.

“Amelia, I warn you it is the last time I will bear an allusion to the dire secret that bound our miserable fates together. As well avow the truth at once, as have vague insinuations of something terrible constantly thrown out. To save my family from the disgrace I would have brought upon them, from the anguish the knowledge of my act would have caused them, I sacrificed myself to you. I swear to you that if another such scene occurs—if you utter another threat to me, I will reveal the whole, cost what it may. Then I will send you adrift in the world with enough to keep you above want—nothing more. The wealth of my family shall never go to pamper the luxury of one who has tortured me as you have.”

“No—it will take it all to purchase immunity for yourself. You seem to ignore personal consequences.”

“I shall never live to suffer the penalty of my crime,” he gloomily replied. “Besides, nothing can now be proved against me: your evidence against your husband would not be received, even if you could carry your malignity so far as to give it.”

“Is that really the law in this country?”

“Of course; and in every other in which justice is regarded.”

Mrs. Linden sat down and rested her head upon her hands, apparently absorbed in deep thought. He closed his eyes, with an expression of weariness, as if exhausted by the disagreeable excitement of the last hour. Suddenly she arose, and went toward him, with an expression of contrition; she knelt beside the couch, with tears streaming over her face, as she humbly took his hand, and pressed it to her lips and heart.

“Ernest—my Ernest—adored of my heart! you know that I would die sooner than injure a hair of your beloved head! My nature is wayward, and I cannot be to you what I could wish. I taunt you, I torment you, and then my

heart weeps tears of blood over the suffering I have inflicted. Oh! I will try—I will try to be more rational, more thoughtful for the future, for I know I am a sad trial to you.”

Linden wearily lifted his heavy eye-lids, and spoke scarcely above a whisper:

“It is only the same old story, Amelia: a blaze of passion extinguished in a flood of tears. Your promises are only made to be broken. Your avowals of affection I can have no faith in, for we do not torture what we love. No—an avenging fate has sent you to punish me for acts committed in the selfishness of youth and passion, and I accept the atonement, fearful as it is.”

Again that flitting expression of wistful tenderness swept over her face, and she humbly said:

“Oh! if you would only love me a *little*—a very little, I might be encouraged to make an effort to do better; but you have always shown me such bitter contempt—such a scornful endurance of the creature you cannot shake off—that my whole nature is embittered by it. Think, Ernest, how wildly I must have loved you, to grasp your reluctant hand, and make myself a burden to you, in the forlorn hope that in time you might learn to endure me near you.”

“That lesson has been learned—is daily practised, Amelia; and if it were your will, we could at least live tranquilly together. I will not act a part that is odious to me, but I am willing to treat you with the consideration that is due to the position you hold as my wife. You will not accept those terms—you render my life a constant irritation, and then, in a moment of aroused feeling avow affection, which, if genuine, would lead you to consider at least my daily comfort a little. You have come into my father’s house to be not only my evil genius, but that of every one in it.”

“Oh, you are cruel, cruel—inflexible toward me!” she moaned. Linden did not look at her—he seemed scarcely

to have heard her, and the hard mockery of her real nature again gleamed upon her features. She sat watching him in silence, revolving schemes in her busy brain that would most effectually have aroused him if he could only have fathomed them.

A servant came to the door, and handed in a letter, addressed to herself. She examined the superscription, for there was no postmark: the writing was not new to her, and a cold shiver ran through her frame, as she muttered:

“If the dead can come back, I should think this *his* writing. Pshaw! why am I so nervous.”

With trembling fingers she broke the seal, and scanned the few lines scrawled within with pale lips, and dilating eyes. She went out, and inquired who had brought the letter. A boy had left it at the door; there was no message, no clue to the bearer.

Again Mrs. Linden sat down, and carefully scanned the few words the note contained:

“AMELIA:—I am still alive. I have come hither on business that will need assistance. *Mrs. Linden* is in a position to afford it, and *it must be granted*. Call at No.—, in Eighth Avenue, at two o’clock to-day, and a person will meet you who will conduct you to your old friend.

A. G.”

She glanced at her husband, and a bitter smile curled her lips, as she muttered:

“It will soon be war to the knife between us now. When he knows all, he will never submit to keep me near him; but I will die before I will consent to give him up. That fatal hold is slipping away from me, and a new one must be forged or found. Well, at the worst, money—money will be mine. *That* I must and will have. Oh, subtle brain, and scheming mind, help me now, at my utmost need!”

She glanced at the time-piece on the mantel: it was nearly one. An expression of irresolution crossed her face; but she finally commenced preparing to go out. As she stood before the fire, in her bonnet and furs, Linden unclosed his eyes, and regarded her with surprise. It was something so unusual for her to go out alone, that he asked:

"Where are you going, Amelia? and just at lunch time too."

"That is my own affair," she coolly said. "I do not want any lunch. I have business that may detain me several hours. Good morning."

Too indifferent to her movements to inquire further, and feeling her absence a release, Linden heard the door close with pleasure. He arose at once to employ the interval of quiet her absence afforded him in writing letters, for she hovered so constantly near him that he could do nothing without her surveillance.

From the first day of their union this watchfulness had annoyed him, but of late it had become almost unendurable.

Mrs. Linden did not ask for the carriage; she went out without speaking to any one, and after walking a few squares, she found a hackney coach which she engaged to take her to the place designated in the letter. Telling the driver to wait her re-appearance, she entered a small fancy store, in which a young girl stood behind the counter.

"A person is waiting here to see me," she said to the shop-woman. "I have but a few moments to spare, and shall be glad to have the interview immediately."

"Walk up stairs, madam. A lady is there expecting you."

The girl opened a small door which disclosed a flight of narrow steps leading to the upper story. At the top of these another door opened and admitted her into a room the size of the one below.

A woman in deep mourning came forward to meet her; the dim light afforded an imperfect view of a face entirely destitute of color, with a serene but very sad expression. She said:

"You received the note, madam. I thank you for your prompt attention to the wish of the writer."

"When the summons came from one I have long thought numbered among the dead, I could not do otherwise than obey it at once. If the writer of that note lives, where shall I find him? How can I aid him in any way?"

"He will answer that question himself, madam. To place your friend beyond the reach of his most unscrupulous enemy, I have removed him from the city. We must go out on the railroad to —, and visit a cottage I have hired for a season; but you must pledge yourself, Mrs. Linden, not to reveal his place of concealment to any one."

"How long will we be in getting there?" asked Mrs. Linden, with a look of extreme annoyance.

"At three the train leaves; in half an hour we will reach our destination."

"And how am I to get back again?"

"A down train passes at five. You can return on that." She shook her head.

"That will not do at all. I could not remain away from home so long a time without remarks and inquiries being made which I could not evade. Besides, the train might be delayed, and then I could never give a satisfactory account of my detention."

"You are the best judge of what you can do, Mrs. Linden; and you must be aware of the importance of the interests at stake. The person who desires to see you is in a very feeble condition; he is impatient to meet you, and obtain your aid in a matter of vital importance to himself."

"My aid? How can I possibly help him, when I am

entirely dependent on others myself? Can you tell me the nature of the assistance your friend expects from me?"

"That, as I before told you, he will reveal to you himself."

The speaker turned slightly, and a ray of light fell upon her features. Mrs. Linden said:

"I cannot be mistaken in your face, madam. I have seen you before at your own house. You are Madam Latude, the clairvoyant."

"You are right, madam. I also perfectly remember you, and the errand on which you came to me."

Mrs. Linden seemed annoyed. She took from her pocket the letter which had brought her there, and carefully examined the writing. She suspiciously asked:

"Is this writing genuine, and was it fairly obtained?"

A faint smile flitted over the calm face into which she looked.

"It was written by the hand of Albert Gayoso himself. His name will assure you of the genuineness of my mission. You will soon learn from his own lips that it is an assumed one. Your assistance guaranteed to him, he will speedily resume his true one, and claim a large inheritance now withheld from him by another."

"And the price of my aid?" she eagerly asked.

"Will be whatever you may consider it worth. But we lose time, madam. Will you accompany me to my cottage?"

"I believe I must risk something to see Gayoso. Let us go at once."

The carriage still stood at the door, and the two were rapidly whirled toward the railroad depot. They were just in time for the train, and after engaging the hackman to be in waiting for her on her return, Mrs. Linden went on her mysterious errand.

They stopped at the first station, and a pony phaeton,

driven by a young lad, awaited them. After a short drive they drew up in front of a brick cottage densely embowered in trees, which now stood as tall, bare sentinels around it.

The door opened noiselessly to receive them, and without further delay the visitor was ushered into a comfortably furnished room, in which a cheerful fire burned. In front of this a large arm-chair was placed, in which was propped up a tall, gaunt figure, who seemed wasted away to a mere skeleton. His hair and beard were nearly white, and his thin features wore an eager, half frightened expression as his eyes fell upon his visitor. He nodded his head, and grimly said:

"So, you came at my bidding. That was well."

Mrs. Linden had grown very pale as her eyes fell upon him, and she evidently recognized him, changed as he must have been since they last met. She sunk into the chair that was placed for her, and faintly said:

"How is it, Alberto, that I find you living, and *here*? For years I have believed you dead."

"And rejoiced in the thought that I was safe under the sod, no doubt; but I am not so easily got rid of. Do not fear that I came hither to disturb the *happiness* you doubtless enjoy with your prosperous husband! All I demand is, that you do not turn the cold shoulder to one who has some claims upon your gratitude, at least."

"Speak—tell me what you expect, what you demand—for I know that it amounts to that. I am impatient to learn what has brought you hither."

"The lever that moves the world brought me here—money! money! With the aid of a powerful friend, I can claim wealth that should have been mine long since. I know of old that you have an insatiate passion for gold. Help me to recover my own fortune, and I will make you rich. You shall become independent of those people among whom you must live as an inferior."



The listener's eyes flashed, and she drew nearer to him.

"Tell me how I can aid you, and I will not fail you."

"Ah, you're a girl after my own heart; you're a trump, and no mistake. There's no nonsense about you, Amelia, and never was. Now listen with all your acuteness, and follow me carefully while I explain my position."

He went on to reveal to her his story, to which she hearkened with the keenest interest. When he spoke of Mrs. Euston and her daughter, she repressed an exclamation of surprise, and listened even more intently than before. When he had finished, she said:

"You have placed in my hands a power which I have eagerly coveted: the power to circumvent and injure a woman I hate. I will exert myself to serve you for that reason, if for no other; but I must do so with extreme caution, for my husband is a near connection of the girl who has your estate in her possession. Clara Euston is his cousin."

He uttered a fierce oath.

"And what are your feelings towards her?"

"I hate her, as I do all of her blood. But what will you do with reference to your own cousin, and his claim to be the true heir?"

"I shall remain quietly here until Alfred has gained the suit. Then I will force him to disgorge his prize, for I have means of proving my identity of which he is not aware."

"What, then, am I to do? I can see no means of serving you, if such is the policy you intend to pursue."

"Your part is to watch the progress of the suit, and report every particular that can be of importance to me."

"And what is to be the result of your re-appearance to myself? A meeting between you and Linden would be fatal to me."

"We need never meet. My claims once established I

shall return to France, and spend the remainder of my life there. I am so changed in appearance that my nearest friend would scarcely recognize me, and if your husband should meet me face to face I scarcely think he would find a trace of the reckless Don Alberto, in the broken-down man before you."

"Perhaps not, but you had better keep out of his way altogether. Consider me your fast friend in this crisis of your affairs, and be assured that I shall give you due notice when an important movement is made by your antagonists."

He expressed his thanks, and with a thousand conflicting thoughts in her busy brain, Mrs. Linden bade him adieu. She reached the train in time, and folding her thick veil closely over her features, she sat absorbed in deep thought.

That which had threatened to ruin her might be made the means of advancing her interests. She had heard enough of the claim brought forward by Lumley to comprehend the importance of the revelations just made to herself.

Whose interests should she espouse? those of the true, or the false heir? Either one could impoverish Clara Euston; which could most materially advance her own fortune, for that, after all, was the question that most deeply concerned her. Gayoso, as she called him, was an object of terror and aversion to her; he had her in his power; he could ruin her with her husband, and free him from the mysterious hold she held over him by the utterance of a single word, and she had not confidence to believe that the word would be withheld should the two ever meet. On the other hand, she could use her information in such a manner as to force the pseudo heir to pay her more liberally for her silence than the true one would be willing to do.

"Besides, and the meditated treachery blanched her

cheek, was not the life of this worn and feeble man completely at her mercy? Let his antagonists know where he was to be found, and would not the story of his wasted, miserable life soon be ended? Thus could she rid herself of him forever, and her fatal secret be buried in his unknown grave. Would not this be safer? She would think of it, and the ruthless heart scarcely beat faster as the dire thought intruded.

It was quite dark when she entered her home. The servant looked surprised when he saw who it was that rang, and she hurried up stairs to get ready for dinner.

"Linden was not in their apartment, and after a few trifling alterations in her dress, she descended to the library, where the family usually assembled. Mrs. Euston and Clara were with them. The former sat on a sofa conversing with Linden, and a baleful glance was darted from the flashing eyes that fell upon them. Mrs. Gaston arose and offered her sister-in-law a large fauteuil which she knew to be her favorite seat. Mrs. Linden declined it with a smile and a courteous gesture, and placed herself beside Clara. Her husband nodded toward her, and said—

"Your visit detained you longer than I expected, Amelia."

"Yes," she replied, with composure, "I am so little accustomed to going out alone, that I got lost, and was compelled to hire a carriage to bring me home again."

"At that moment dinner was announced, and nothing further was said upon the subject. It was impossible to be more charming than Mrs. Linden rendered herself at this meal. It was the first time she had attempted to play the agreeable to Mrs. Euston and her daughter, and she was certainly eminently successful. They began to comprehend the fascination which must have attracted Linden, and to think his wife less plain than she had hitherto appeared.

The old gentleman seemed delighted with her vivacity, and

on their return to the library, she sat upon a cushion at his feet, and prattled to him so gracefully that he half forgot the vulgar rudeness of which she was so often guilty.

At length Mrs. Linden started up and proposed a tableau, in which she and Clara could appear together. With a quick eye for effect, a few folds of drapery were arranged by her nimble fingers, and they were ready for the personification of Beauty and the Beast.

Clara would have remonstrated against the subject chosen, but Mrs. Linden would not listen to her. She would act in this tableau and no other. She sent for her furs, and that "horrid English poke," of which Mrs. Smoot had so disrespectfully spoken, and by some art known to herself, she wore them in such a manner as so perfectly to look the character she assumed, that the fair young girl, who acted with her, felt half afraid to permit her hand to rest upon her shoulder.

On this evening Mrs. Linden seemed inspired. The tableau ended, she threw aside her ursine garb, and gave imitations of the most celebrated actresses of the day. Mrs. Keene's mellifluous accents in *Ion* came like sweet music to the ears of the listeners—Miss Heron as *Medea* succeeded her, and then Rachel in her passionate power stood before them, the incarnation of tragic despair.

The audience was appreciative, for they were charmed by this versatility of talent hitherto unsuspected by all save her husband. Linden was aware of his wife's abilities, but their exhibition did not seem to afford him much satisfaction. He looked on silently and dreamily, wondering why so consummate an actress did not choose to play a part every day that would at least insure her the respect of those among whom her lot seemed to be cast for life.

When Mrs. Euston finally arose to depart, she cordially insisted that Mrs. Linden should visit her without ceremony, and the warm-hearted Clara kissed her and thanked her for the pleasure she had afforded them.

When they were gone Mrs. Linden again threw herself upon the cushion at her father-in law's feet, and seemed absorbed in thought.

He at length asked :

"What are you thinking of, my child?"

She started—smiled with a peculiar expression, and asked :

"What is the punishment for bigamy in this country, *mon père*?"

"Imprisonment in the penitentiary," replied Mr. Linden with surprise. "But why do you ask, my dear?"

"Oh, nothing in particular; I only wished to know. Are you ill, Ernest? Heavens! have I said anything that could affect him? What is it? What ails you, Ernest love?"

"Nothing, madam," replied Linden in a loud tone. "I am only worn out with the excitement of the evening. Come—let us retire."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

CHARLIE ASHTON GOES IN QUEST OF PROOFS. MRS. EUSTON FINDS A CLUE TO MADELINE.

WHEN Mrs. Euston reached her own house, the servant who opened the door informed her that there was company in the parlor awaiting her return. On entering, she found Mr. Spring seated under the gas light examining papers, while his more youthful coadjutor paced up and down the room, too deeply excited to remain still.

The elder gentleman arose, and with stately courtesy greeted the lady of the mansion and her daughter; he said :

"It is rather an unusual hour for a consultation on busi-

ness with ladies, but as my young friend Ashton is on the eve of a long journey, and was anxious to see our fair client before leaving, I concluded to come up with him. My time is really so occupied, that I can only snatch an odd hour occasionally to call on my friends."

Mrs. Euston cordially assured him that he was always welcome in her house, and after greeting Ashton with a nod and smile, she sat down beside the lawyer to become immersed in the legal possibilities and disabilities he came to lay before her.

Clara received a warm pressure of the hand from her old friend, as he whispered :

"Charley has something particular to say to you, Miss Slyboots. He is wearing himself out in your service, trying to prove this pretender to your fortune a man of straw. I can only say that if you do keep the inheritance, he richly deserves to share it with you."

She blushed, extricated her hand, and saucily said :

"Why do you not put in your own claim to be made its joint possessor, Mr. Spring? I am sure you will do more toward enabling me to retain my godfather's gift than Mr. Ashton can."

"Don't tempt me too far, Rosebud, or I may play traitor to common sense, and become the latest illustration of an old dunce chasing a brilliant meteor which would be sure to lead me neck deep into a quagmire, and possibly leave me there too."

"Do not be too severe, dear sir. If *I* were the meteor, I should take care to steady down into a quiet household light after I had pulled you out of the bog my folly had led you into."

"Perhaps so—I am not disposed to trust you, at all events; so Miss Clara Euston you may consider the offer of your heart and hand as refused, or rather transferred to one more willing to accept the boon."

"As if the affections of the heart are transferable. Oh dear, I must look for some one to console me for your cruelty."

"Do, my dear; and you'll not have far to seek either, I think."

Again the crimson flashed over the lovely cheek, and Clara turned away, and joined Ashton. He was pale and evidently deeply excited, and after a struggle to conquer his feelings, he said:

"I remained till this late hour, Miss Clara, because it is the last opportunity I shall have of seeing you for some time. I leave the city at dawn to-morrow."

"To go whither?" she asked.

He regarded her with searching eyes, but he saw no expression of regret in her face, and he impetuously said:

"I do not suppose you care whither I go, Miss Euston, though it is for you and your interests that I have consented to make this journey."

"I do not quite understand you, Mr. Ashton. Why should you speak thus to me? I am sure we have too long been friends, for you to get up a scene now on the score of my indifference."

He proudly replied:

"Excuse me, Miss Euston; I have no right to reproach you; I am fully aware of the wide gulf between a man battling for position and wealth, and the flattered heiress of a great fortune."

"Especially as that fortune is tottering in the balance, and but for *your* efforts to save it, will probably be lost to me. Really, Mr. Ashton, you do well to taunt me on the subject of this disputed inheritance, which, in all probability, I shall never enjoy. I really thought you more generous."

"Clara, you may think me mean, ungenerous, or what you will, but I shall not drop a tear if every cent of this money

is lost to you, though I intend to do all I can to save it for you."

She looked reproachfully at him, and began a sentence which died away beneath the glance he bent upon her:

"Do you think that I——"

She looked up at him, their eyes met, and as she paused, he exclaimed:

"Oh Clara! I think, I feel but one thing; and that is that I love you with all my heart; and fortune has lifted you so far above me, that it is madness in me to dream of offering my poor future to your acceptance. Let me say to you now, that if your cause fails, if you lose the wealth so long considered yours, and you would come to my heart only in your own sweetness and beauty, I should consider myself the happiest, and most fortunate of men."

Clara was touched by this manly avowal, but a spice of coquetry that lay deep in her nature prompted her to reply:

"Let us not speak of this now, Mr. Ashton. We have played at lovers in our infancy, but I think it rather early in our real life to begin to re-enact the mimic scenes of childhood. Of late, I have had so much incense of this kind offered me, that it begins to pall."

"I trust that *my* tribute is not classed with that of the multitude," said Ashton, in a tone of deep mortification.

"Certainly not," she carelessly replied. "Now I think of it, yours is the first declaration I have received since the chance of my loss of fortune has become known. I give you due credit for disinterestedness, Mr. Ashton, but I believe I had rather remain a free agent yet awhile. I am afraid you would prove the most exacting of adorers, and I have only begun to taste the pleasures of society."

He looked in her face, and gravely said:

"Clara, this is mere trifling. I offer you the love of a true man: has it any value to you, or has it not?"

"Value—of course it has: it is a loyal, sterling heart I know of old, and I would not wound it for the world."

"Then do not belie your own nature by speaking as you did just now. Retain your freedom if it is so precious to you. I can trust to your own native excellence not to make an ill use of it. I ask no pledge from you, for I would not hold you bound by a promise that might become irksome to you. In this, our hour of parting, I have ventured to utter what you have long known, and tacitly encouraged. Now that the chances are that you may lose your fortune, I have ventured to speak of my love for you—had you remained its undisputed mistress, I should not have been willing to array myself among the suitors of the heiress, deep as is my devotion to you."

"And you would really have permitted your pride to stand in the way of your affection? Do you call this true love, Charlie Ashton? If you do it is not my ideal of love, I assure you."

"What is your ideal of true love?" asked Ashton, with a faint smile.

"Something very different from yours, I dare say, but I do not care to define it at present," she petulantly replied.

Ashton regarded her reproachfully, and slowly repeated Wordsworth's beautiful lines:

"There is a comfort in the strength of love,  
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else  
Would overset the brain, or break the heart."

"That is *my* ideal of love, Clara, and the time may come when you will clasp this comfort to your heart as your only hope. Triply guarded as you are by love, care and fortune, I cannot imagine you in need of assistance from me; but should such a crisis in your fate arise, no knight-errant ever rushed more promptly to the rescue of his lady-love, than would plain Charlie Ashton hasten to your assistance."

"Your pen, your dagger, and your bundle of parchment, your revolver, eh?" said Clara, laughing. Thanks for your promise, and I shall be sure to remember it. I can recall

some very tangible dangers from which you have rescued me in my childish days, and I am sure that I could rely on no more valorous arm than yours. But I have no fancy for claiming it as my especial property just yet, and I am sure that Ma Nelly would not approve of any definite promise on my part, much as she likes you."

"I must be satisfied with what you are willing to grant, Clara, but I half fear the influence of the world upon your confiding nature. You are passing fair, and keen of wit, and it is this last quality, so necessary to perfect success in society, which makes me fear for you. I could not bear to see you become a mere woman of the world, your finer nature buried under the brilliant varnish which is made to supply all deficiencies of heart and nature."

"See how necessary is your probation," replied Clara, with an air of pique. "Already you are anticipating a time when I shall be less charming to you than now. The ordeal is one I must pass through, and I thank Heaven that I have wit enough to play my part with credit to myself. I assure you I have no fancy for being a little nobody, put by in a corner, even to be worshipped by the grand Mogul, himself. I respect my own individuality, and I intend to assert it, too. If you think I shall ever become what Miss Bremer calls a 'good sheep' you make a great mistake, and you had better look for your ideal woman in some other quarter."

"I always knew that you have a sufficient spice of temper, Clara, but I did not expect you to fly off in a passion with me just as I am bidding you farewell to go on a journey from which I may never return."

"Passion! you are mistaken. I am not angry at all. I am only tired of the quantity of stuff talked and written about my sex. I verily believe that the ideal woman of every man is a good Joan that has no will of her own, is contented with the dreariest view of life, leaving all its brighter

portions to be enjoyed by her master, while she sits in the corner at home, her heart, intellect and soul fully satisfied with the little humdrum details of her family and house-keeping. And then, forsooth, your lordly sex complain that women are narrow-minded!"

Ashton raised his hands in affected horror.

"I perceive that you are not at all excited, Clara, *mio*, but I begin really to fear that you have been listening to the heresies of Lucy Stone and other feminalities of that stamp, who seem anxious to ignore all feminine qualities. Can you not see a *juste milieu* between your fancy sketch and the extreme ground occupied by the fair reformers? That is *my* platform, as the politicians say, and if I get *one* affirmative voice, it shall stand firm in spite of all the lures of worldliness and ambition."

"You may consider *that* vote as not yet cast, if you please, Mr. Ashton, for on second thoughts, I believe I will look for some one who will adore me with all my faults, and not expect me to change my nature to suit his fantastic ideas of what a woman should be."

"I shall hope to reverse that decision, Miss Euston. You cannot deprive me of that cheering drop in the bitter draught you commend to my lips with a smile upon your own. I understand your heart better than you do yourself, and trust my fate to its nobler impulses."

"Vanity, I perceive, is not confined to my sex. If you wish to cherish a delusion, do so; I shall not gainsay you, but when it proves itself a *mirage*, do not cast the blame on me."

"I should not then have the heart to blame any one. A desert with no oasis to brighten it, would my life become. You carelessly play with edge tools, Miss Euston; I trust that you will escape the evil results that sometimes ensue from such trifling."

"I have no fears for myself. But about this journey; Is it really to be a long one, and what is its object?"

"It will be a long journey, and its sole object is to serve a young lady who is determined to prove herself perversely ungrateful."

"Meaning me, of course. Well, consider yourself thanked, praised, &c., as much as you can desire, and then tell me whither you are going, and what particular service you expect to render me?"

"These are precisely the things I am bound to keep concealed from you."

"What an affectation of mystery! You are very absurd this evening. Why am I not to know something about my own affairs?"

"You know that young ladies are imprudent, and sometimes talk too much; therefore my old Mentor yonder has impressed me with the necessity of profound secresy."

"You tiresome creature! I will appeal to Mr. Spring himself."

"If you do, he will only confirm what I have told you. Better let him alone, for he is explaining some abstruse law point to your mother, who looks as much perplexed as if he were speaking Greek to her. I wonder if the fair sex intend to adopt the practice of the law, too, when their millenium is established? Eh, Miss Clara, what is your opinion?"

"In the course of my reading, I have found the biography of a beautiful woman who once lectured on law with a veil over her face, that her pupils might not become enamored of their teacher, and forget her instructions."

"That was in an earlier day, when law was a far less complicated study than it now is, and you see, even then, how inconvenient to the lady was the position she assumed. How would you like to turn Minerva, and cover not only your head, but your whole face with her helmet?"

"Nonsense! you donned the cap of absurdity to-night, when you came hither."



"Do you think so, Clara? It may be absurd in me to aspire to such happiness as I have dared to hint to-night, but I know that I am a truer man, and better gentleman than the latest, and report says, the most favored pretender to your favor."

"Mr. Lumley is the person you refer to, I presume," she coolly replied; "I should be sorry to compare you together, for it would scarcely be fair to either. He is an original, for whom many allowances must be made, and you are—"

She paused, half smiled, and he eagerly enquired:

"What am I to you?"

"My earliest friend, sternest judge, and—the defender of my claims to a disputed inheritance."

With a low courtesy, and a smile half bewitching, half mocking, she turned from him, and approached Mr. Spring, leaving Ashton bewildered, charmed, half angry, yet more in love than ever with this tantalizing gipsy who knew her power and used it.

"Is it absolutely forbidden me to know the destination of my *preux chevalier*, Mr. Spring? Since he goes on *my* affairs, I surely have a right to know in what direction my fortunes lead him. Mr. Ashton is so provokingly mysterious that I can gain no clue to guide me in a lucky guess."

"Very right, my dear, obedient to orders, as all successful men must be as long as they are subordinate to others. I refused to let you know his destination, because the oily widow, who has become so intimate with you of late, would be sure to get the secret from you, and as she is interested on the other side, she might do your cause some harm."

"Do you mean, Mrs. Pierre? You are mistaken, sir, for she is one of my best friends."

"I will wager that she is a better friend to your adversary; and if she cannot persuade you to marry him, she will array herself on the other side."

"You misjudge Mrs. Pierre, indeed you do. She has

never attempted to influence me in favor of Mr. Lumley. She leaves him to make his own way, I assure you."

"And I trust he does not progress very rapidly in your favor, Miss Clara; the fair prospects of Mr. Lumley may darken a little. Thanks to a certain young friend of ours, we are in a fair way to find out a thing or two which will materially affect his claim."

"After what Mrs. Pierre has told me, it is impossible to believe Mr. Lumley an impostor; and, in fact, I have scarcely considered it fair to contest his claim at all."

"We do not intend to contest it, my dear. We only require him to *prove* his right to the estate; but if he is the real Simon Pure, I intend at least to frighten him into leaving you your own little property untouched. In the meantime, Clara, do not give too much of your heart to the fascinating widow, lest the wench prove too severe when you are forced to give her up."

"What can you mean? I trust that I shall never be called on to give up my friend."

"Oh, I am only giving you a caution that may or may not be of use to you. Good night, ladies—come Ashton, let us go."

"And you are really going without telling me the place of Mr. Ashton's destination?" asked Clara, in a tone of vexation.

"Really and positively, Miss Clara Euston; and now go and pout because you are not considered to have discretion enough to keep your own secrets. You need not blame Ashton, for I can see in his face that he would betray it now if he had half a chance. I shall not afford him one, so come Charlie, I am in a hurry."

Clara involuntarily looked towards her lover; there must have been something magnetic in the will that compelled her to do so, for there was a single flash from his eyes which her own responded to without any power on her side

to prevent it, and she felt that Ashton was the victor in the playful contest they had waged; and he carried with him the assurance that he held the highest place in her regard, in spite of her assumed indifference. He took the fair hand extended to him, and pressing it to his lips, murmured something to which she replied by a saucy smile, and a few words of playful defiance, but they could not destroy the effect of her tell-tale glance, and he went on his way with a lighter heart.

Clara turned to Mrs. Euston.

"Do *you* know where that tiresome Charlie Ashton is going, Ma Nelly? What is the use of making such a mystery of such an every day affair as a journey."

"It is sometimes necessary, my love; and in this case, I approve of Mr. Spring's caution."

"And you, too, think me unfit to be trusted with a knowledge of my own affairs!"

"My child, do not fancy that any slight is intended towards you. In an unguarded moment Mrs. Pierre might learn from you what would render Ashton's journey comparatively useless."

"What can Mrs. Pierre have to do with my law-suit?"

"Nothing herself, perhaps; but a great deal as the friend of Mr. Lumley. By the way, your uncle seems completely infatuated by her; if his wife had been dead a little longer, I really believe he would ask her to become Mrs. George Euston."

"I wish he would; I like her much better than I ever did Aunt Emily."

Mrs. Euston looked gravely upon her.

"It is only since Mr. Lumley's claim to your fortune has been brought forward that Mrs. Pierre has attempted to fascinate your uncle. The aim of the two is doubtless to secure your hand to Mr. Lumley, and thus ensure the final possession of the estate to him as your husband."

"An aim they will never succeed in, for I do not choose to be bartered like a bale of merchandize. Can any one seriously imagine that I could be induced to marry a man so destitute of cultivation as Mr. Lumley?"

"A great fortune is a great temptation to most girls, Clara. Your uncle is worldly, you are well aware; and I have reason to believe that he has fallen completely under Mrs. Pierre's influence. I am afraid that she is a dangerous person, and not a suitable companion for so inexperienced and trustful a girl as you are. I deeply regret that I permitted her to gain an intimate footing in my house."

"What has Mr. Spring been telling you against her?" asked Clara, impetuously. "I am sure she has been slandered, Ma Nelly. I will not believe anything against her."

"Softly—softly, my child. Mr. Spring knows nothing positive against her; but vague doubts of the truth of the touching stories she related to us, have arisen in his mind, and he is quietly taking measures to find out the actual position held by her toward Mr. Lumley. His antecedents must be strictly inquired into, and revelations *may* come to light which will render a further acquaintance with Mrs. Pierre undesirable; a connection with her impossible; yet I scarcely know how to warn your uncle."

"I detest lawyers!" said Clara, with flushed cheeks. "They are always imagining sinister motives, dragging forward things that should be kept in the dark, and exposing the meaner side of life, until many of them scarcely believe that there is a good impulse in either man or woman. If Mr. Spring thinks I will give up a friend I love because he has vague doubts about her entire trustworthiness, he is mistaken. A miserable renegade to friendship should I prove myself, if I were capable of doing so."

"We do not ask you to give Mrs. Pierre up at once, Clara; that would be too pointed an insult; and I should be sorry to do anything that can injure her while a doubt

in her favor remains. I only advise more caution in your intercourse with her; a gradual withdrawal from intimate association, till the cloud that begins to gather around her is cleared away. Clara, darling, if you love me, listen to me now. In this most important crisis of your life, do not let me have the bitterness of finding that the friend of a few months has more power over you than my long-tried affection has given me."

Thus seriously appealed to, Clara's tender heart melted, and she threw herself upon her mother's breast.

"No love can be like yours, Ma Nelly, as you know very well. What can I do to prove to you how much I respect your wishes?"

"Only be on your guard against any new advances from Mrs. Pierre. I do not wish you to be seen in public with her until we have ascertained whether we are to cherish her as a friend for life, or to give her up entirely."

"But I love her dearly, Ma Nelly. She is so charming—so indulgent to me."

"She understands flattering you, Clara."

"As to that, everybody flatters me but you and Charlie Ashton. Why shall I think Mrs. Pierre more insincere than the rest of the world?"

"She may not be so, Clara, but that is not now the question. I have your promise, my darling, and I insist that you shall withdraw as much as possible from the close intimacy she is endeavoring to establish between you. Let us change the subject, Clara. Tell me the meaning of the significant glance which passed between you and Ashton as you gave him your hand at parting."

"Oh, nothing! That is, not much. He had been talking nonsense, and I believe I annoyed him a little. It was only a flash of mutual forgiveness, for he said things I did not like either."

"Hum! a love quarrel, I suppose."

"Not quite a *love* quarrel, Ma Nelly; it has not come to that yet."

"Not with you, perhaps; because in your heedless ignorance you play with a flame that should only light up the sacred temple dedicated to one true and pure affection. With poor Charlie it is a more vital affair, for he loves you with the strong affection of a manly heart. He would not approach you as a lover while fortune smiled on you, but now that the chances are that you will lose your inheritance, he claims the right to labor in your service, to save you from utter ruin, and asks as his reward the dowerless hand of the dethroned heiress. Clara, he has a noble and true nature, and I do not weigh such against wealth; that he will win for himself."

"He as good as told me all this himself," said the perverse listener with an affected yawn. "I dare say he is a very good young man, but I do not care about having a match made for me even by you, Ma Nelly, much as I love you."

"A match, my dear! How can you hint such a thing? I would not attempt such a thing for any consideration; a bond that is said to be made in Heaven, should never be tampered with on earth."

"If matches are really made in Heaven, I must be irreverent enough to say that the superior spirits who arrange them do not always exercise the best judgment. From the result, I should sooner think that names are thrown into two vast reservoirs, and as one falls from each, they are paired whether matched or not."

"Really, child, you run on very glibly on this subject. You must have given it much more attention than I imagined."

"How can I help it, when my numerous admirers discuss no other theme? After all, I believe it is a bore to be an heiress. Since the appearance of Mr. Lumley I am sensi-

ble of quite a falling off in that class of adorers. Good-night, Ma Nelly; I am too tired to talk any longer."

She flitted away, and Mrs. Euston remained alone to think over the evening at Linden House, and recall the expression of deep suffering that swept over the face of Ernest, when in reply to a tremulous inquiry from him, she informed him that her efforts to discover Madeline Gordon had entirely failed.

Like Mrs. Linden, she was puzzled to discover why, after so many years of indifference, he was suddenly so deeply interested in this woman and her child. What was the origin of this interest? and when did it commence? were queries she vainly asked herself. That worn face, with its eager questioning glance, its expression of keen anguish when assured that no clue was yet found, had opened to Mrs. Euston's mind a host of conjectures as to what this unhappy mother had been to Linden, and a cold shiver crept through her frame as the possibility of wrong that could never be atoned for, of treachery that was unpardonable, came to her heart.

For years that early love had been buried deep—deep amid the wreck of past hopes. It was dead, crushed out of life by Linden's falsehood; yet it was hard to believe that she had not been his *first* love. Had another claimed that shrine before her? and could she who had once been endowed with the royal gift of his affections, be really a wanderer amid the wilderness of a great city, without friends or money? Love was dead; jealousy could not survive it, and she would seek and find this outcast, and minister to her wants: it was a sacred duty, which must be diligently prosecuted until the search proved successful.

Thus meditating, Mrs. Euston slowly walked toward her own room. As she passed Clara's door, she opened it, and said:

"Do come in, and see what a beautiful match for my point lace undersleeves has been made here in the city."

She held up the collar made by Margaret Seyton.

"It is very beautiful indeed; but what weary work it must have been to the maker. To whom was the order given, Clara?"

"To Madame Leontine, who, with my permission, kept the set in her store to exhibit to her customers. It was only sent home this evening."

"Who does Leontine employ?"

"I have forgotten her name, though I saw the young lace-maker the day I ordered the collar. I intended to speak to her myself; for her face interested me; but some one claimed my attention, and when I looked around for her she was gone."

"I am sorry you did not employ the girl herself, for the greater part of the money paid for the work will only go to swell the rapid fortune Leontine is making; and the one who performed the labor is probably in urgent need of it."

"I am afraid she is, for her dress was very poor, and she was so white and fragile looking that my heart ached for her. In fact, I asked Leontine for her address, which she reluctantly gave me. But you will think me very frivolous when I tell you that I forgot all about the poor girl until I found these things lying on my table just now."

"You are young and thoughtless, my dear, and therefore excusable. I dare say the girl was not in immediate want either. Give me her address. I think I will seek her out and give her a double commission; one to make me a lace set, the other to find out a person in whom I am interested, who has fallen into indigent circumstances. She may be able to find a clue I have long been anxious to obtain."

After searching a few moments, Clara succeeded in finding the address, and Mrs. Euston took the card with her to her own apartment.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE RIVALS STAND FACE TO FACE.

OTHER affairs interfered, and occupied Mrs. Euston so exclusively, that for more than a week she had no time to think of the young lace-maker, and the visit she purposed making to her humble abode. It was recalled to her mind by a note from one of the directresses of a charitable institution to which she belonged. It ran thus:

"DEAR MADAM:—Our inquiries for a woman known to be in distress, calling herself Madeline Gordon, have at last met with something like a response. A young girl called at my house this morning, and requested aid for a poor woman whose child is dying. On being desired to give the name of the person who needed assistance, she stated that she had called on her own responsibility, as the sufferer would not consent that charity should be asked for herself. She has known better days, it seems, and her pride shrinks from asking aid even for her perishing child.

"I enclose the address furnished me, as she may possibly prove to be the person in whom you are so deeply interested."

On glancing at the card which was enclosed, Mrs. Euston started, for it bore the same street and number given to Clara by Madame Leontine as the abode of the young lace weaver. She put off an engagement she had made for that morning, and ordered her carriage to be driven to a corner near the street named. She would get out there, and walk to the miserable shelter of poverty and want.

On the previous evening, a few hurried lines from Linden had been sent to her, and she again read them over as she proceeded on her errand of mercy. She was at a loss

to comprehend them, for they were more like a wild rhapsody than the utterance of a sane man:

"Not found yet! not found yet! Nelly, God forgive me, but my heart is breaking, and my head is wild with anguish and fear! Cornelia is lukewarm in this quest, and so are you, for you neither of you know the vital interests at stake. It is something more than even the life of the unhappy Madeline, or that of her son, anxious as I am to save them.

"Help me, Ellinor! for you are my only hope. Help me, angel of my life, and you will save me from more than you can dream. Oh! I have taken to my life a double curse: that of remorse is enough to weigh me to the earth, but the other is a taunting demon, who crushes the very manhood out of me by her jeers and threats. Aid me quickly, Ellinor, or a worse fate may befall me than that of death."

The allusion to his wife was too plain to be misunderstood, and the reader felt a vague fear creeping over her, that this woman held over her husband a fatal power gained by a knowledge of crime committed by him, which he feared to have revealed. She was touched by his earnest entreaties for assistance, and trusted that her present errand would result in bringing relief to his deeply tried mind, so far as the discovery of Madeline and her son could have that effect.

A brilliant sun was shining over the throng that crowded Broadway, offering a scene of life, animation and excitement, more resembling a carnival than the every day appearance of a great thoroughfare. The carriage, once in the crowd of vehicles that filled the street, must perforce proceed at their usual slow pace, and Mrs. Euston had ample leisure to observe the well-dressed people that filled that fashionable side of the street; for, while one side of Broadway looks like a moving tulip garden, the other is

given up to men evidently intent upon business, working women, and people of that class who cannot afford the time to be jostled at every step, and detained at every crossing.

Among these an occasional promenader may be seen, who looks as if properly belonging to the gayly dressed crowd on the opposite pave; and a casual glance at one of these caused Mrs. Euston to fix her eyes intently upon the person who had thus attracted her attention.

It was a woman wrapped in heavy furs, with a close hood tied carefully, as if to conceal her features, and a thick brown veil folded over that. The heavily set figure, the careless walk, were surely those of Mrs. Ernest Linden; yet whither could she be going, alone and on foot?

The pedestrian could easily keep up with the pace the horses were compelled to assume, and Mrs. Euston watched the figure with painful interest, until she was convinced that it could be no other than Mrs. Linden.

The press of vehicles thickened as they approached the Park, and gradually came to a stand opposite to a stately pile, dedicated to fashion and finery. A lady alighted from a carriage just in advance of her own, and a gentleman stepped down from the platform in front of the door to offer her his hand. Mrs. Euston gazed with astonishment upon her brother-in-law, so metamorphosed that at first she scarcely knew him. Mr. Euston had laid aside his sober suit of mourning, worn for the wife who had been dead scarcely a year, for one of the latest fashion; and his gray hair and whiskers had suddenly become of a bright glossy brown!

Entranced by the vision of the beautiful widow, who smiled bewitchingly upon him, and permitted him to hold her hand clasped in his own longer than was necessary, Mr. Euston was oblivious of the observant eyes bent upon him from his sister-in-law's carriage.

Lumley sprang out after her, and Mrs. Pierre said to her rejuvenated lover:

"How elegant you are looking to-day, dear sir. Really, you have become quite a youthful Adonis, ready to take hearts by storm."

Her irreverent companion muttered, quite audibly:

"Grown young again, by Jove! I wonder if there is a patent renovator in town, that can furbish up *humans* to look as good as new. I say, old fellow, do you use some Patent Renovator? for it seems to me that you only resolve to become young again, and you are so; and I believe that these *mixters* are warranted to do everything but bring back the dead to life."

"I wonder if their use would improve your manners, Mr. Lumley?" replied Mr. Euston, with chilling dignity.

"I at least recommend a trial of that, or something else warranted to produce a change," interposed Mrs. Pierre, placing her hand warningly upon the arm of Lumley. "This is the best creature in the world, Mr. Euston, but I am afraid he will be one of the rough diamonds to the end of the chapter. Let us go in—the air is too cold here."

"Thank you, Lonore, but I have an engagement which compels me to leave you under the care of our rejuvenated friend, there," and Lumley sauntered away in the direction of the Park.

An opening in the press of vehicles was at this moment made; the carriage passed on, and Mrs. Euston saw the fur-clad lady walking slowly toward the City Hall. Lumley followed close upon her steps, and to her intense surprise he joined her, offered his arm, which was accepted, and the two walked slowly toward the opposite side of the Park.

Mrs. Euston felt assured that she could not be mistaken; the woman was certainly Mrs. Linden; yet how she came to be acquainted with Lumley, to have a clandestine meeting with him, was a mystery she could not fathom.

Bewildered and alarmed by this singular discovery, she took out the incoherent letter of the unfortunate husband,



and again read it attentively. What could all this mean? What complication of misfortune had his unhappy marriage plunged Linden into?

Mrs. Euston's painful reverie was broken by the sudden stopping of the carriage, and she mechanically stepped out and turned into the dreary-looking thoroughfare before her. What a contrast did it offer to the brilliant panorama of Broadway, with its dingy, uneven pavements, and the piles of garbage thrown from the tenement houses that filled it. These were crowded from cellar to garret with squalid inmates; and bloated, unhealthy-looking children gathered in the sunshine upon the steps to watch the well-dressed lady, who was evidently seeking for some particular number.

At length Mrs. Euston found the house she sought; she stood upon its threshold and surveyed a narrow, dirty passage, in which was a flight of stairs which looked as if a broom had never been used upon them since the building was first erected.

Mrs. Euston was familiar with the homes of the poor, for the benevolence that actuated her was not of that kind which could be satisfied with giving a few dollars from her abundance to keep the gaunt-eyed fiend from the door; she gave sympathy, aid and advice, as well as money; and many a grateful heart blessed the day which first brought that sweet compassionate face in the home where hope had almost ceased to dwell. Its soft accents were once more breathed from her lips into the fainting heart, and she felt that it is indeed "more blessed to give than to receive."

Uncertain which way to go, she addressed a small girl who stood staring at her as if fascinated.

"Little one, can you tell me in what part of this house a young girl lives who makes lace?"

"Lace? I dunno what 'tis you mean."

Mrs. Euston pointed to the edging with which her collar was trimmed, and explained.

"She makes pretty edging like this, and her name is Margaret Seyton."

"The blind 'oman's gal? Yes—I seen her through the winder a makin' somethin' like that; *they* don't live in the house wi' the raff, but in the back buildin'. They think theirselves better 'n we, though I guess they's poorer 'n us is."

"Will you show me her room for this?" asked the lady, showing a shilling. It was painful to see the greed that lighted up the eyes of so young a child as they fell upon the money. She eagerly held out her hands, as she said:

"Come on—and I guess you're come when you're most wanted, for there's ill to do in that room now."

Mrs. Euston followed her young guide into a narrow yard, in the centre of which stood a bare, stunted-looking tree, which the dust of summer and the cold of winter had as effectually blighted as had hard and evil fortune the destiny of those who tried to cherish its poor life as a memento of the bright days, when the rustle of leaves and the song of birds made music to which the young heart beat time.

A window shaded by a calico curtain opened upon the yard; and the visitor noticed that the glass was clear, and the door less dingy than those she had before passed through. Dismissing her guide, she knocked softly, but no answer came, and the child paused in her retreat to say:

"I guess they'll not hear that tap wi' all the noise in the street, and the lad in a bad way, too."

A faint, wailing cry came from the room, which sounded so dreary, so heart-stricken, that she could not repress a shudder. Softly turning the bolt, she unclosed the door and stood within the room.

It presented nearly the same scene we have before described; with the difference, that the boy was now dying—and his mother, more wan and wild than ever, knelt beside the bed with her arm thrown across his body, and her

pale face bent down to catch the last faint breathings from the lips of her idolized child. The chair of Mrs. Seyton had been removed to the side of the bed, and she sat with one of the lad's chilling hands clasped in her own, while Margaret endeavored to restore warmth to the other by gently rubbing it.

Mrs. Euston took in the scene at a glance, and softly closing the door, she advanced lightly to the foot of the bed, and stood with pitying face, looking down upon the convulsed face of the child.

Death came to that young frame as a conqueror; formed for long life, with vital force yet left, which care and comfort might yet have revived, had they been afforded a few weeks earlier, Grief struggled at intervals convulsively, and then lay exhausted and white, as if already dead.

Mrs. Seyton heard the closing of the door, and asked:

"Who entered, Margaret?"

"A friend who comes to offer sympathy and assistance," said Mrs. Euston, softly. "I trust the last is not too late."

The hollow eyes of the mother were lifted reluctantly from the face of her son, and as they wandered vaguely over the person of the stranger, she repeated the last words in a tone of bitter hardness.

"Too late! yes—look at him; he is perishing for want of nourishment that I could not afford him. In this vast city, overflowing with plenty, gorged with wealth, a human creature on whom God has lavished his noblest gifts, is permitted to perish of want! The writing upon the wall warned Babylon of its fall, then why is not a crying sin like this blazoned upon every wall in this vast hive of hard hearted and full coffers? Too late! too late! You may well say that, for life is nearly gone."

Her head dropped upon the bed, and the failing voice of the boy whispered:

"The hand is put out, mother; it rests upon my head—

it slowly passes down, down; when it reaches my heart I must go with the shining angel. He is beautiful; he smiles; the sweet lady yonder looks something like him, though I see her through a mist. She will care for you, the angel says. Oh, mother, I *must* go; do not try to hold me back."

With a sudden exertion of strength, he threw his arms forward, half arose, and fell back—dead. There was a breathless pause, and then the voice of the blind woman arose:

"The Lord hath given, and he hath taken away, blessed be his holy name. In all our time of trouble, in all our time of tribulation, let us call upon him, and he will never forsake us."

Madeline arose with a stony expression upon her wasted face. She said:

"I have no resignation, mother Seyton. It may come, but now my soul is a chaos of rebellion against God, for taking from me my one hope and blessing, against man, for suffering him to perish in want and misery, and above all, against one man, on whom may the blighting hand of——"

"Forbear! dare not to invoke the curse of Heaven upon a sinful, erring mortal, who may even now be suffering the tortures of remorse."

Mrs. Euston spoke earnestly, almost passionately, for in the calm sweetness which settled upon the dead boy's face she recognized the features so long stamped upon her own heart as the ideal of manly beauty, and no doubt remained in her mind that the son of Ernest Linden lay before her.

Madeleine fiercely asked:

"Who are you, who would arrogate the right to come between me and my righteous wrath against the deceiver and the man of wrong? You, who wear soft raiment, and dwell among the children of luxury, presume to arrest the curse that is so richly merited."

"I am a woman, and a sister, who has come hither to afford the assistance which would have been earlier offered if you could have been found. I have sought you long without success."

"Why, then, did you not find me? Are all the angels of mercy dead, that God could not find one to send to you with a message, warning you of my whereabouts? He did it with the old Hebrews, and why should they alone have been favored in such a manner?"

"Poor creature, her mind wanders," said Mrs. Seyton. "I pray, madam, that you will not lay too much stress upon her words, for she has had a weary, weary time watching the life fade away from her boy, and for some time I have not thought her mind quite clear."

"Nothing is clear," muttered Madeline. "Nothing—not even the purposes of Heaven. Why am I bereft of my joy, my life, my darling, darling boy, while others live and prosper? There is nothing left for me now, but to die and forget my misery, yet I will not curse the author of my wretchedness, for God hath said, 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay.'"

Mrs. Euston bent down and whispered:

"He is repaid. He suffers deeply, and he will feel bitter anguish when he learns that his son cannot be benefited by the aid he entreated me to bestow."

"*His son*—whose son?" vaguely asked Madeline. "Who are you, madam, and why do you come to me when I have no longer need of your services? It is too late; do you not see that the spirit has flown to a brighter home than I could have given him here, if millions had been at my command? How should *you* know whose son he is? I do not know the true name of my child's father myself, for he bore a fictitious one to me; but it matters not now—the link that bound me to him is severed, and the empty words that made him mine have melted into vacancy long

ago, never to be confirmed or recalled. Oh, this is a dreary world, so full of wrong and misery that it stifles my breathing to think of it. Why don't you speak, madam, and tell me how *you* should know the father of yonder chilling form, which will so soon return to dust?"

Mrs. Euston pointed toward the still features.

"They bear the impress of a face I know. He is not heartless, though he has sinned deeply. Let such amends as can now be made, be yours."

"Are you—are you anything to him?" gasped Madeline. "You are not his wife?"

Mrs. Euston lifted her head proudly.

"No—thank Heaven! not his wife. You may trust me, for I came not alone from him. An errand of my own brought me hither, and fortunately I found you of whom I have long been in search."

Madeline did not seem to have heard the latter part of her explanation. She repeated:

"Wife—I trow not; but one can be that, and he knows—but it matters not—it matters not now."

Her head fell beside that of the lifeless child, whose hand she had held clasped in her own while her speech wandered vaguely on. Mrs. Euston turned to Margaret, and in a low tone conferred with her on what was necessary to be done for the mother and her dead son. She was agreeably impressed with the sweet face, and gentle manner of the young lace maker, and after other preliminaries had been settled, she said to her:

"I came hither, Miss Seyton, to give you a commission. I have seen some of your work, and I wish you to make a lace set for me, for which I will pay you the sum Madame Leontine would charge me; and if I like you as well on further acquaintance as now, I will recommend you to friends of mine who will furnish you with remunerative employment."

"Oh Madam, how shall I find words to thank you!" exclaimed the poor girl with emotion. "Had this help come only a little sooner, I could have saved that poor child—I know I could!"

"And you, with your blind mother to support, still find means to give!" said Mrs. Euston, grasping her hand warmly. "Noble humanity asserts itself everywhere, and under every difficulty. I honor you, Miss Seyton, and I will find means to remove you from this wretched life, and place you where industry shall meet its fair reward."

Low as were the tones in which they spoke Mrs. Seyton's quick ears caught their meaning, and she said in trembling tones:

"Ah madam, Heaven surely sent you hither to-day. My daughter labors for me; she is sacrificing her sight as I did mine to gain a few more dollars than a common workwoman can earn. Save her from this, and you will indeed be our good angel."

Mrs. Euston took the hand of the blind woman in her own, as she said:

"She shall find other means of living, I pledge you my word. This sad scene is scarcely a fitting place in which to order a mere article of personal adornment, but its necessity only proves how strangely the darker and brighter sides of life often blend. I will pay you in advance, Miss Seyton, and you can work upon the laces at your leisure."

"I thank you, madam, and I will not refuse what I so greatly need; but my diligence shall prove me worthy of your good opinion."

Mrs. Euston took from her purse a note which she offered to her, but on glancing at it, Margaret shrank back.

"I do not need charity, madam; and this is six times the amount I have received from Madame Leontine for my work."

"Is it possible that such extortion is practised toward

one who gives time and eyesight to such a trade as yours? I assure you that I only offer the price paid by my daughter for the set you completed for her."

A faint flush came to the girl's cheek.

"I knew there was a great difference in the prices paid to Madame and myself, but I had no idea it was so much as this. Ah, dear madam, if you had only found us a little sooner!" and her eyes filled with tears as they fell upon the dead boy.

"I reproach myself that I did not seek you earlier, for your address has been in my possession several days. It was only this morning that I ascertained that the same roof sheltered yourself and Mrs. Gordon. Money will be supplied for her use, and measures will be taken to bury her son respectably."

Though she spoke almost in a whisper, Madeline understood her last words. She paused in her occupation of straightening the limbs of her child, and smoothing down his hair, which services she performed with the tender touch with which she might have fondled a young infant, and sharply said:

"Why do you talk of burying my Grief? He only sleeps; see how sweetly he smiles; he will soon awake to speak to me again. Where would you lay him? In that dreadful Golgotha called Potter's Field, among thieves and paupers? No—his blood is gentle—I do not ask you to place him in the vault of his father's race. Let him lie in God's sunshine, where grass and flowers may spring upon his last resting-place. Then I can lay me down upon his grave, and weep my life away. But he is not dead yet—he only sleeps."

"Yes, he sleeps," said her visitor, compassionately, "and it shall be my care to prepare a more suitable bed for him than the one he now lies on."

Again the hard and bitter expression came to the face of Madeline, and she said:

"Yes—the last bed on which he may rest can be supplied, when you let him perish of want. A little from your abundance, given at the right time, might have saved him to become a blessing and a pride to the whole human race. Go away; I do not want your alms. I might have stooped to accept them to keep life in my little lad, but he is better without them now. He has gone to tell his tale of neglect and wrong to Him whose ears are always open to the cry of the poor. All that is necessary to be done for him, I can now do myself, and the poor's ward can furnish a coffin when it is called for."

Mrs. Euston knew that this was no time to reason with the broken-hearted mother whose mental faculties had evidently received so severe a shock as to become unsettled. She examined the wild face to discover the charms which had attracted the fastidious Linden, and she acknowledged that in the brightness of early youth Madeline must have been very lovely. She would have given much to learn the history of the past; to comprehend the nature of the tie which linked those two fates together. Madeline's expressions seemed to assert the strongest claim upon him, yet Linden had sought and won her heart since he had been known to this unhappy woman; and he had consummated the last wrong against Madeline by giving his hand to another while she yet lived.

She recalled his early avoidance of herself, as if he shunned the temptation that offered itself; his fitful intervals of wretchedness after he yielded to it and became her declared lover; his efforts to evade an early union; and she drew her own conclusions therefrom. Grief for his fall, indignation at his want of principle, and deep pity for the sufferings he must have borne, alternately swayed her heart. Ellinor recalled the image of the noble, fascinating Ernest, who charmed all hearts, and attracted all eyes by his singular beauty of person; and compared that image with the

miserable, wasted phantom who had so lately sat beside her, and passionately entreated her to discover the abode of those whose uncertain fate had filled his heart with remorse.

She knew that he was penitent, and she forgave, though she feared she could never again respect him. He had refused to recognize the tie which bound him to the hapless being before her, yet knowing its existence he had given his hand to another! What was the mystery that clouded his fate, and how fearfully would it be developed? Rousing herself from these thoughts, she took leave of the sorrowful group around the bed of death, and with a promise to send immediate assistance, departed.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### ERNEST LINDEN'S REMORSE.

ON reaching her own house, Mrs. Euston despatched a note to Linden, briefly informing him of the events of the morning. He speedily answered it in person; and he looked so broken down, so crushed, that she had not the heart to utter a reproach. He appeared exhausted, both mentally and physically, as he threw himself into a large chair, and faintly said:

"You found them at last, Nelly; and the boy—my boy—is dead! Oh, if I had earlier known of his existence, all might have been well; for my heart would have yearned toward my child, though it was alienated from the mother. For his sake I would have borne with her, and he is dead—dead."

There was inexpressible pathos in the tone with which this last word was repeated, and Mrs. Euston gently said:

"The child has gone to a better Father than you could

have been to him, Ernest. You have never known what he might have been to you, therefore the pang of giving him up is lighter."

"Oh, Nelly, if he had died in my arms, clinging to my breast to the last moment, my heart would not be riven with half the anguish that it now feels. To think that *my* son—flesh of my flesh, life of my life—should perish in penury; should need the very means of life, while I had wealth, luxury at my command! My God! why did not that woman let me know that a child called me father? Yet she could not, she could not—poor, unhappy creature—for my true name was never known to her."

Mrs. Euston uttered an exclamation; she earnestly asked:

"What is the dire secret of your life, Ernest Linden? The time has come when it is necessary that you shall clear yourself from doubts and suspicions which have too long hung around you. If any excuse for your double dealing can be offered, it is now time to give it."

"Ellinor, my conduct has been base enough, God knows, but it is not so bad as you think it. Listen with your usual forbearance, and I will explain my connection with the unfortunate woman you saw to-day."

After a brief pause, during which he seemed to be nerv-  
ing himself for a great effort, for he became even paler than before, Linden went on:

"Before we ever met, I spent a summer in a pedestrian tour through Vermont, carrying with me a portfolio for the purpose of sketching scenery, of which I was then passionately fond. I do not know what caprice seized me to drop my last name, but I swear to you that I did so without any ulterior object in view. I was taken everywhere for a travelling artist, and I passed several weeks in unalloyed enjoyment."

"One day I was wandering through a romantic strip of

woodland, bounded by a deep, rapid stream, when I witnessed an accident which laid the foundation of all the evil fortune that has befallen me. An insecure bridge spanned the stream, and a farmer, with a heavily loaded team, was crossing it, when the structure suddenly gave way, and precipitated his wagon into the water below. I was a bold swimmer, and to rush to his assistance was my first impulse. His leg was broken, and by great exertions I succeeded in dragging him to the shore.

"The cottage in which he lived was in a glen about half a mile from the spot where the accident happened; I found means to get him home, and in that home I found Madeline. She possessed uncommon beauty of person and sprightliness of mind, combined with a degree of cultivation not often found among persons in her station.

"I lingered among those kind and grateful people, leading a sort of pastoral life that was suited to my taste, but I declare to you on the honor of a man, that I was not attracted by Madeline. Her desire for a higher kind of cultivation than she had been able to attain interested me, and I assisted her in acquiring a knowledge of music. I had books brought from a neighboring city, which aided in developing and improving a mind whose natural quickness often astonished me, but I had no thought of loving the mountain maiden. I could not wed one in her humble position, and I was not base enough to think of bringing degradation and misery into the house which had afforded me friendly shelter.

"But unfortunately Madeline loved me. Yes; I am no coxcomb, and it gives me bitter pain to tell you that this poor girl loved me with a passion that spurned all control. When I would have departed from her father's house, she threw aside that feminine reserve which is the greatest charm of your sex, and spoke to me of her despair if I left her. I frankly told her that I regarded her as a dear friend, a sister, but I could give her neither hand nor heart.



"I made my preparations to leave the valley, but was prevailed on by her entreaties to remain until a large apple bee came off at one of the neighboring houses. I had never been present at one of these primitive gatherings, and I had some curiosity to attend one. I consented to remain, and from that evening I date all the misery of my life.

"It was a gay assemblage of rollicking young people, and after the labor that called them together was despatched, they amused themselves with plays. At length it was proposed that mock marriages should take place; several couples stood up, and one of the young men said to me:

"Gordon, take out Madeline, and let us see what a handsome couple you would make."

"I had been drinking more freely than I was in the habit of doing, and did not hesitate to enter into the spirit of what was going on. We stood up together, and I was too much confused to observe that the man who performed the ceremony for the others, delegated his office to another when our turn came. Believing us to be in love with each other, those who were in the plot thought it would be a good frolic to marry us, without my knowledge at least. A magistrate performed the ceremony, and according to the laws of New England, I was really the husband of Madeline Waters.

"When I discovered the fraud which had been practised upon me, I was furious with passion. I threatened punishment to every one engaged in it, and declared my intention to leave the valley immediately. Madeline, pale with anguish threw herself before me, and entreated me not to forsake her. She vowed that her life was bound up in mine, and she would not survive our separation.

"She was young, fair, and wildly in love with me. I *then* had loved no other, and I weakly yielded to her entreaties; shamefully gave up the freedom of which I had

been defrauded. I do not know what I looked forward to in the future. There was a vague intention in my mind of reconciling my family to the humble bride who had been forced upon my acceptance; but like all weak people, I left myself to be guided by circumstances.

"Madeline's devotion to me; her real loveliness of nature, began to make themselves a place in my heart in spite of the ruse she had practised to gain my hand, when letters from home came to me, imperatively demanding my presence in New York.

"My letters were forwarded to me under the name of Ernest Gordon, and only as a wandering artist dependent upon his pencil for bread had Madeline known me. I resolved not to reveal my true one till I could make my arrangements to remove her from her father's house, and acknowledge her as my wife. With difficulty I convinced her of the necessity of leaving her for a season, and we parted with passionate tears on her side, and a sense of freedom and release on mine, for which I bitterly reproached myself.

"I came to my home; I found you there, Ellinor. You know what followed. I tried to resist the sudden and powerful passion with which you inspired me in spite of my strongest resolutions to the contrary. I cursed the tie that bound me, and vowed to repudiate it. I would never again see the mountain wife whose memory filled me with disgust. I was base enough to think that I would prevent others from rivalling me by winning you to love me as desperately as I loved you. I would dally on, until the lapse of years would give me back the freedom I had so recklessly thrown away; for I respected you too much to give you a hand which another might legally claim.

"I wrote to Madeline; sent her a considerable sum of money, and declared to her that I would never acknowledge the validity of the tie which bound me to her. I told her

that I loved another, was beloved in return, and it was useless for her to endeavor to reclaim her truant husband. as my precautions were such that she would never be able to trace me.

"Now you can understand why our union was evaded by me. I went to Europe to pass the years which must elapse before I could be legally released from the irksome tie that fettered me; just as I might have dared to claim your hand, a more fatal obstacle arose between us. How, or why, I can never explain. That secret is sealed to all who love me."

He leaned his head down, and seemed struggling for mastery over recollections that were more bitter than death itself. At length he resumed:

"Through all those years I heard nothing from Madeline, and I concluded that she had accepted my decision as just and final. I had almost ceased to regret my course toward her, when one night she arose before me like a weird phantom, and demanded help for her child: for *my* child. Oh, Ellinor! from that hour I have been as one accursed; there has been no rest—no rest for me. Tossed on a sea of anguish and doubt, which has ended in despair, my soul has suffered the torments of the lost. My son is dead, and I am bitterly punished for my hardness of heart toward his mother."

Linden dropped his head between his hands, and seemed so much overwhelmed that the sympathetic heart of his listener was touched. She spoke softly and soothingly to him, and with gentle tact strove to draw the barbed arrow from his heart.

"Ernest, I pity and forgive you; I can see that you were more 'sinned against than sinning,' and you have been too bitterly punished for your evil doing for me to lift up my voice in condemnation."

"Thanks, true and noble woman, who would have been the

joy and comfort of my life, but for my own culpable weakness. Oh, Ellinor, turn not away from me now, for I must speak or die. I am mated with a fiend who tortures me every hour in the day; she has by some means discovered the prior claims of Madeline upon me, and threatens me with exposure; to lay bare this wretched history to the prying gaze of the world. The disgrace would kill me, Ellinor; it would destroy my poor old father."

"But I understand you, Mrs. Linden has no legal ground of complaint against you."

"No—the years of separation which were necessary to dissolve the tie so perfidiously forced upon me had passed away before I gave my hand to Amelia. She affects to disbelieve this, and threatens to bring the sad story of my broken life into a court of justice. This blow to my pride—to my family honor, would be the crowning anguish which I could never survive."

"This is a morbid feeling, Ernest, which would vanish before the necessity of exertion. You were once a hopeful, energetic man, and the persecutions of a bad woman should never have power to crush you out of existence."

"It is not that: oh, if that were all! But there is a darker—darker record which gives this woman the fatal power she holds over me. If I dared tell you all, Ellinor, it would lift from my soul a weight which, day by day, becomes more intolerable. Yet it may not be."

Mrs. Euston became deathly pale as she listened to him, and from her white lips slowly came the searching inquiry:

"Is it *crime*, Ernest, the memory of which thrills your frame, and fills your eyes with horror?"

"Crime! aye—that would be *your* name for it; yet it was an act which had many palliations if I could reveal them. I *cannot*; but I implore—no, I *demand* of you a lenient judgment, for I feel that I deserve pity rather than punishment."

They both arose; Linden looked into her eyes—they were glittering with tears, and the mouth was tremulous with emotion. The surges of passion swept over his soul, and he snatched her to his breast in an embrace that seemed to take all power of resistance from her.

"Ellinor, wife of my soul, pulse of my heart, I must give way to this momentary madness. No other woman, save you, ever awoke one feeling of love within my soul, and between us my own reckless nature raised a barrier that we may not pass. Love me as a brother; but oh! cease not to give me, fallen and lost as I am, a place in your regard! That is all that can save me now! Withdraw it from me, and a lost soul will wail throughout all eternity beside the Heaven you will inhabit."

His emotion was terrible; Ellinor trembled, and her strong heart fainted within her as she listened to his words. All that was tender and true and womanly in her nature was aroused. She felt that a struggling and benighted soul was crying to her for help, and she dared not refuse it. Gently releasing herself from his embrace, with a smile of heavenly sweetness, she said:

"Sisterly regard—friendly service, faith in the native goodness of your heart are yours by right. *My* love is but a memory of the past, but my esteem, my sincere friendship may still be yours. Reclaim the past, Ernest. Many a man unhappily married as you are, goes forth into the world and wins a path among his fellows which almost consoles him for domestic misery. 'Let the dead past bury its dead,' and create a brighter future for yourself."

Linden gloomily shook his head.

"It is too late, Ellinor. You do not comprehend the nature of the dread weight that is crushing me, and God forbid that you ever should! But tell me what arrangements have been made for Madeline, and—and her hapless son?"

"I have already sent such assistance as is needed. She is with good friends who will watch over her, and as far as possible console her for her loss."

"And the child, Ellinor? I must see him ere the coffin lid closes over him, and forever shuts out his features from my gaze. In life I have not been permitted to behold him; in death, I would look at him, and weep to see how noble a creature he might have become had I performed my duty. Oh, I am punished—sorely punished!"

Mrs. Euston explained to Linden the measures she had already taken for the respectable burial of his son. She had given orders to have a grave prepared in her own cemetery in Greenwood, and there, at the feet of Gen. Euston, his unacknowledged nephew would lie.

Among Mrs. Euston's protégés was a widow in humble circumstances, whom she had assisted to open a cheap but respectable boarding house for mechanics and working women who had no homes of their own. Mrs. Crump fortunately had a vacant room, which was large enough to accommodate Mrs. Seyton and her daughter with Madeline, whom Mrs. Euston wished them to watch over until some satisfactory arrangement for her future support could be made. Quick in thought and rapid in action, all this had been arranged before Linden's arrival at her house, and he fervently blessed and reverently thanked her for the forethought which had spared him all these painful details.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE MEETING BESIDE THE DEAD CHILD.

A FEW hours had passed since Mrs. Euston left the scene of death. An open coffin rested upon the bed in which

reposed the body of the little Grief. The still calmness which succeeds a stunning blow had settled on Madeline, and she sat erect and composed by the side of her son.

Suddenly the door unclosed, and a stranger entered the room. She advanced to the side of the open coffin, glanced upon the marble face of the dead, and a perceptible curl arose to her lips, while her eyes gleamed with a strange light as she recognized in those clearly cut features the unmistakable stamp of his lineage. She abruptly asked:

"Are you the woman who calls herself Madeline Gordon?"

Margaret Seyton arose and came forward, for she saw that Madeline was startled by the voice and manner of the stranger. She quietly said:

"This is Mrs. Gordon, madam, but she is not in a condition to converse with you now. She is deeply afflicted by the loss of her son."

"Oh, yes, I see that the child is dead, but in her condition, I should think that was rather a blessing. I came hither to ask her a question which she must answer promptly and truly."

"Can you not defer it a few days, madam? Her mind is deeply affected by her loss."

"This is the best time, then, as it will rouse her out of her grief, and force her to think of something else."

In spite of the young girl's remonstrances, the intruder approached Madeline, and asked, in a tone of imperious command:

"Were you ever legally married? Tell me the truth, upon your soul."

Startled out of her sorrowful reverie, Madeline raised her dark eyes to the face of the speaker with an expression of wild surprise, as she repeated the word.

"Married? Who are you, and why do you ask such a question? It matters not now whether I ever claimed a husband or not."

"But I tell you it does matter. It is of vital importance to me to know the truth, and if you will reveal it, you shall never know want again."

"What use would you make of your knowledge?" asked Madeline, with suddenly awakened interest.

"What does that matter to you? Speak out, and the revelation may lead to great things for yourself."

"I ask for nothing, hope for nothing now. Look upon that lifeless form, and behold the death of hope for me. It lies buried in that narrow box. Go away, if you please; I have nothing to say to you."

"But if you will not speak to me here, I will force you to do so in a more public place. I ask you again if the father of that child was your lawful husband?"

Madeline uttered a faint cry, put her hand to her head, and exclaimed:

"Why should you doubt it? Why should you persist in asking me questions that torture me inexpressibly?"

"You hear her admission?" turning towards the mother and daughter. "Remember it, for it may be to your interest to be able to prove her words at some future day."

"What have I done? What have I said? Can one wrong right another? My poor head is not clear."

"Clear enough for my purpose, at any rate," said Mrs. Linden, coolly, as she walked out of the room, and closed the door.

Madeline sat like one stupefied. Presently she composedly said:

"Mother Seyton, at this moment I clearly see the past before me, and I wish to speak of it now, because I fear it is the last perfect impression of it I will ever have. I have been mad once in my life, and I feel that it is coming back upon me now. I have never told you my story, it is sad enough, God knows, but I have only been guilty of a wilful deception that marred my own fate, and that of one I loved

above all things on earth or in Heaven. I risked everything to gain him, and for a few blissful weeks I fondly thought him all my own. A deception which I sanctioned made me his wife, for the words were uttered which bound us together, but I knew afterwards that it was no real union which was founded on fraud, and cemented by my wild prayers that he would not leave me to die of grief at his desertion. I know now that if he had left me then, it would have been far better for us both.

"My blandishments kept him beside me until a letter from his sister summoned him suddenly to his home in this great city. He promised to make arrangements for removing me hither, and left our mountain glen never more to re-enter it. I bore the sickening suspense of absence from one in whose affection I had not perfect faith: 'the pang, the agony, the doubt,' were all to be too cruelly realized, for one day a letter came enclosing money. It was the first I had received, and its writer told me that the wretched farce of a marriage which had been enacted between us should never bind him; that he repudiated it utterly and forever.

"Then I grew wild. For days they were compelled to confine me to my room; and when it was considered safe for me again to be left to myself, I sank into a state of quiet apathy far worse than death. I struggled on in bitterness and remorse, for I now knew that I had perpetrated the first wrong, and I had little right to complain that the indulgence of my headlong passion had brought upon me such utter wretchedness.

"You have marvelled at the singular name I gave my child, but had I called him Despair it would more nearly have expressed my feelings when I looked upon his living face."

She paused, and Margaret gently asked:

"Why, then, did you come hither in pursuit of him? After the lapse of so many years, did you hope to find your

husband, and compel him to acknowledge you as his wife?"

"Oh, no—after his letter I did not expect that. I only wished to obtain protection and kindness for our child when I could no longer take care of him myself. My father's affairs fell into disorder. After my illness he seemed to lose his energy and forethought; gradually everything went to ruin; and when the old man died, I found that in place of having a home for life as I expected, the farm was so heavily mortgaged that it was seized and sold for debt.

"I was turned out upon the world with a small sum of money, which, with the utmost economy, might have supported me a year. I did not know which way to turn for assistance, but I do not think my mind could have been perfectly clear when I decided to come to this vast den of crime and suffering, in the forlorn hope of finding one who had for years repudiated my claims upon him. I did so, however, with the faint hope that I would find Ernest Gordon, and surrender to him the charge I felt myself becoming unfitted to retain.

"I *did* find him on that awful night when I went forth to beg alms for my perishing child; but not, as I expected, among those who labor for their daily bread. I found him—But, enough. You know now that if I committed a great wrong, I have reaped its bitter fruits. Lo! the end is now, and my punishment is completed. I feel that God will mercifully blunt the sensibility to suffering, by darkening the house of thought. I feel the veil descending now; the apathy of death is settling over my faculties; and with the closing of my child's grave, the light of an intellect that under better auspices might have accomplished something worth remembering, will be forever extinguished. Thanks for all your kindness to my pretty lad, for your forbearance toward myself, for I know that at times I must sorely have taxed your patience."

"Dear child," said Mrs. Seyton, "I thank the Good Father that he threw our lots together at this dark season of your life. If we have shown Christian charity toward you, see how quickly *He* has rewarded it, by opening to my daughter a better future, which you, Madeline, shall share with us."

"I have no future," sighed the broken-hearted mother.

"Yes, dear; even for you there is something in store. The sweet lady who was here this morning has already taken measures to remove us to a better portion of the city, where fresher air, and nourishing food, will do you a world of good, and give you courage to battle on in your appointed path."

Madeline only shook her head incredulously, and Mrs. Seyton went on:

"Margaret has a note from Mrs. Euston, telling her that we can remove to a respectable boarding-house to-morrow, and we are to keep you with us till your friends arrange with you about your future life."

"Friends!" repeated Madeline, bitterly; "I *have* no friends. I will never consent to become a tax on *his* family, and this Mrs. Euston is one of them I am sure. I feel that my brain is failing; I shall bury my last gleam of intellect in the grave of my child, and then the State may place me among the pauper lunatics in the asylum at Blackwell's Island. But I trust that God in his infinite mercy will speedily remove me from the earth, of which I am now only a worthless cumberer."

"God does not take life when it becomes a burden, Madeline; but he sends resignation and endurance to those who meekly bear the cross a mightier One once bore for us. Oh, child, the Comforter will come, if you will only open your heart to receive him."

Madeline pointed impressively to the form of her dead boy, as she said:

"My heart will never open again to anything sweet or consoling, for the seal of death is upon it. Your words are only empty sounds, mother Seyton, that fall upon my ear, but do not reach my deadened sensibilities. Let us talk no more. I am weary—*so* weary!"

Her head dropped upon the bed, one arm was thrown over the open coffin, and utterly worn out with watching and suffering, she seemed to fall immediately into a species of lethargy.

Trusting that the interval of repose would benefit her, Margaret sat near her, and worked in silence upon the fairy net she had already commenced for her new patroness; for with her time was too precious to be passed in idleness, even amid such a scene of distress as the room had lately presented: the very poor have not even time to grieve.

The early twilight was beginning to settle over the room, and the young girl was thinking of putting aside her work, when the door was lightly struck upon, and on unclosing it, a tall man entered the room. He wore a cloak with a wide fur collar pulled nearly up to his eyes, and his hat drawn over his brows in such a manner as to conceal his features completely. He raised his hand in an impressive manner, and the startled girl watched him in silence as he passed on to the bed on which the open coffin lay.

A ray of evening sunshine found its way through the solitary window, and fell athwart the placid face of the dreamless sleeper, revealing all its sculptured beauty, and the grand outline of the lofty brow, the ineffable repose of the serene lips. A pang of deeper remorse wrung the heart of the gazer as he beheld the noble promise blighted by cruel poverty—the young bud nipped before it had begun to expand into the perfect flower. His frame shook with emotions he could not repress, and his hands were clasped above the head of the unconscious dead as if praying for forgiveness for himself; for comfort to her who lay half



insensible before him with her arms twined round all that remained of her life's idol.

The eyes of the intruder wandered to the drooping form, and his glance seemed to possess some electric power to arouse her from the trance in which she lay. She slowly raised her head; her eyes unclosed and fixed themselves upon him, with an expression that froze his soul within him, and her tones arose on the stillness with a deep thrilling intonation which vibrated to the hearts of the listeners,

"Behold, the wronger and the wronged are brought face to face beside the corpse which should have linked them together in a bond which only death can sever. You are well come, Ernest Gordon, for a few hours later and your son would have been hidden away among the noisome earth heaps, and you could never have seen how nobly beautiful he was; how like you in those days when I loved you all too wildly for my own good. Look at him well for it is the last glimpse on earth by which you will be enabled to recognize him in the better land to which he has gone before us."

By a sudden impulse, Linden sank upon his knees beside her, and in a broken voice, said:

"Pardon—pardon, Madeline, for the cruel desertion that left you to the chances of such a future as this. If you wronged me first, mine was the deeper crime in abandoning you afterward. Hear me swear to you that if I had known of the existence of this child, I would have returned to you; I would have reconciled my father to your humble origin, and claimed you as my wife."

"Do not stain your soul with falsehood," said Madeline bitterly. "Have I not written to you again and again, and received not a line in reply? Have I not asked of you a home, a father's care for my perishing child, and no answer came to me?"

"Because they were addressed to me by my two first

names alone; my last one you never knew, and now it is too late for its knowledge to be of any use to you. Adieu, Madeline, we shall not meet again; but one I can trust will provide for your future comfort."

He moved toward the door, but she arose, grasped his hand, and with an expression of wild rapture pointed toward the dead boy:

"Here! behold: the spirit has risen from the narrow home provided for the body. I see the outline of his childish form; I see his sweet face. Oh! radiant vision of loveliness, come to my breaking heart! See! he smiles upon me! his lips syllable 'forgive as ye hope to be forgiven.' He flits away! he fades from my view. Oh my angel child, take your hapless mother with you to the abodes of the blessed!"

Overcome by the weakness and emotion, Madeline sunk down nearly insensible, and leaving her to the care of the widow and her daughter, Linden glided away. When she recovered consciousness, she continued to ramble on in an incoherent manner, and Margaret watched beside her throughout the greater portion of the night. Several of the lodgers in the house offered to share her dreary vigils, but the lace maker declined their services for she knew that those who are forced to labor for their daily bread, can ill afford the loss of a night's rest.

Overcome with fatigue, toward morning, her head drooped upon the arm of her mother's large chair, and she slept for a few brief moments. When she awoke, Madeline was missing; search was made for her, but she was gone. On the following evening a notice to this effect was found in the daily papers, under the head of police reports:

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE.—A woman about thirty years of age was taken this morning in the act of attempting to throw herself into the icy current that sweeps by our city.

She is evidently insane, and constantly raves of a lost child. She has been placed in the Asylum at Blackwell's Island, where her friends may look for, and identify her."

Warned of Madeline's disappearance, when this paragraph met the eyes of Mrs. Euston, she caused inquiries to be immediately made which resulted in finding her in a condition of mind which precluded all idea of removal. She was placed in a private ward, and every attention given to her, but the physician gave very little hope of final recovery.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE CLAIRVOYANT AND HER GRACELESS GUEST.

THE self-styled Albert Gayoso sat alone in Grove cottage. He was still too much of an invalid to be able to move about much, and his swollen, shapeless feet were placed upon a large cushion in front of the bright anthracite fire. A table was placed beside him on which books and papers were scattered; a decanter half-filled with wine, and an empty glass beside it revealed the origin of the unsteady gleam in his eyes, and the trembling of his hands. He uneasily muttered:

"I wish Annie would come back. I wonder what the woman means by leaving me so long. Pest take her! But then she is a good soul, and but for her, that wretched cousin of mine would have destroyed me long ago. Heigh ho! I wonder if the estate is worth fighting for? I shall never live to enjoy it. Look at my feet, at my bloated body; and I do believe the wine that woman sends me, makes me worse. Medicated wine! medicated devil! I believe it is drugged with poison."

He picked up the bottle, held it between himself and the light, and made a motion as if he would hurl it against the wall; but changing his mind, he poured out another bumper and quaffed it to the last drop. With an expression of intense satisfaction, he muttered:

"Ha! throw my best friend away; no indeed! not such a fool as that yet. What is that about 'putting an enemy in a man's mouth to steal away his brains?' I never had much to steal and that is the reason, I suppose, why the little I have is so wonderfully brightened by the rosy demon."

A light step came over the carpet, and a fair face looked into his flushed one, with a reproachful expression.

"Albert, is this keeping your promise? Will you persist in making the restorative offered you a new cause of suffering!—nay—a bitter curse?"

"Oh, hang it all, Annie! don't preach. This is what I was dying for in that old den you rescued me from so cleverly. Don't you see it is life to me? That miserable Alfred would not buy me such tippie as I had been accustomed to; he thought he would kill me by inches by refusing the stimulus that my system could not do without."

"And have I rescued you from his power only to have you destroy yourself by excessive indulgence in its use?" she sorrowfully asked.

"'Pon my word, my dear, I am afraid you have. I am a wretched, battered hulk, old before my time, and now all that is left for me to do on earth, is, to get possession of my own, and reward you for your goodness by giving it to you and your pretty niece. But where have you been, and what kept you away so long?"

"I have been to consult with a lawyer."

"To employ him on my behalf? Can't you see that Alfred will save me all that trouble? for when the suit is decided in favor of my father's son, all I have to do, is to prove

that I am that person, and not my rascally cousin. You can identify me, prove the theft of the papers, and enable me to claim my inheritance."

"All that may be true, but I think it is very dangerous to permit Alfred Lumley to assume the position he does. His grasp once upon your fortune and you will derive no benefit from it. I mistrust this plausible Mrs. Linden, who comes here with her favorable reports about the progress of the suit. The power I possess to read many minds seems to baffle me with hers. A misty darkness which shrouds her subtle spirit, lies as a veil between us. I feel that her atmosphere and mine are antagonistic."

"Oh, pray, don't talk your mesmeric jargon to me, for I cannot comprehend it in the least," he said, with a sneer. Madame Latude looked gravely at him, and sighing deeply, she said:

"I do not know that I have done a wise thing, Albert, but I obeyed an impulse which moved me to-day. I went to Miss Euston's lawyer, and assured him that I could give evidence myself, which would at once quash the claims of Lumley on her inheritance. At first, Mr. Spring listened incredulously, but when I unfolded to him, under the seal of secrecy, the fact of your existence, showed the fraud that had been practised on you, and recalled myself to his recollection as the Annie Lyle he had often seen at your father's house, he listened to me with more attention. In your name, I proposed a compromise to him, by dividing the estate equally with Miss Euston. The lawyer was too wary to consent at once, but finally said if you would send him a written obligation to that effect, he would consult with his client, and see what result could be accomplished."

"Well done, upon my word, Madame Latude! Divide with the girl? to be sure I will, with all my heart, for the property will cut up well. The estate is so large that there is plenty for both of us. I will write whatever is necessary

at once, for I am impatient to put Alfred *hors du combat* in this conflict of interests."

"I am glad you approve of what I have done. When Mr. Spring is satisfied that you are in earnest, he will seek a personal interview with you, and bring out with him the papers which will enable you to make a legal transfer of half your father's estate to Miss Euston. This will be safer for you than to permit so unscrupulous a person as Alfred Lumley to gain even the shadow of a claim to what is yours."

"True enough, Annie; and I don't care about stripping the old man's god-daughter of all he left her, either. It would hardly be just; and evil as my life has been, I have some good yet left in me."

"Much, much, Albert; if you would only cherish it, and lift up your head like a true man once more."

"I can't do without the wine, Annie, if that is what you mean. It is life to me; it deadens the wretched memory of what a woman's ear should never hearken to; so don't ask me about it."

Madame Latude sighed heavily, and presently asked:

"What will Mrs. Linden say to this settlement?"

A fierce oath escaped Gayoso's lips, and he said:

"It matters not what she says; I have *her* in my power, and I shall be tempted to crush her yet, venomous viper that she is! Ha! ha! how it would gall the pride of that haughty old man, to learn who and what was the wife the idolized son took to his arms. Treacherous demon! she is ready now to sell her services to me for money, and I gloat over the thought that I shall disappoint her avarice by making terms with the opposite party."

"Do you not fear the rage and vengeance of such a woman?"

"Why should I fear her, when one sentence uttered by me would hurl her from the position she holds, and make

that wretched husband of hers recoil from her with even deeper loathing than he felt when forced to clasp her hand at the altar, and take the vows which made her the evil genius of his life. He had injured me, but I am more than repaid for the blow that left its mark upon me for life."

He lifted his hair and showed a scar upon his head, beneath which the pulsation of the brain could be distinctly seen.

"You have long known Mr. Linden, then?" she inquired, with surprise.

"Yes—he knew me as Albert Gayoso. My true name to this hour he has never suspected. We quarrelled over a gaming-table; for Linden's life was, at times, very reckless after he went to Europe. He cut me across the head with his dagger. I lay for months between life and death, but finally recovered to endure a constant pain, compared with which annihilation would have been mercy. To dull this suffering I took to drink; so you see, Annie, I must have wine. I should go wild without its solace."

"And Linden?" she asked with deep interest. "What was the secret of the strange match he made?"

Gayoso shuddered, glanced hurriedly around and whispered:

"Hush! that is forbidden ground; I will never reveal that to mortal, unless that woman fiend forces me to it."

Madame Latude fixed her eyes intently upon him, and slowly said:

"Suppose I should convince you of my power to read the minds of others, by telling you what is now passing in your own? By laying bare to you the fearful secret that gives you the control over Mrs. Linden, which you possess."

"You cannot do it; I defy you. I should fear—I should hate you, if you really can dive into a blasted soul, and drag its darkest deeds to the light of day."

"No, you would not, for I am your only friend."

She took his hand in both her own, and looked steadily into the eyes which seemed forced to meet her own; to yield the memories that lay buried darkly in that fearful prison house, the heart of a reckless, sinful man whose life has been passed in the midst of riot and wassail. Her pallor grew more intense, and her lips trembled as they whispered in broken words, a tale that drove the purple flush from his face, and caused a cold dew to arise upon his brow.

At length she dropped his hand, sank down and buried her face in the sofa cushion, while Gayoso sat like one paralyzed. At length he exclaimed:

"In Heaven's name, who are you? what are you? Whence comes this power which enables you to wrench from the soul its darkest memories?"

She shuddered as she replied:

"I know not whence the power comes, and it is a fearful curse; for I look beneath the fair surface, and often find guile, treachery, evil intent, where they would have been least suspected. That night, when I was sought out by your cousin, and brought to your bedside, I saw faintly outlined before me a map of your life. I knew you for one I had loved in girlhood, and I was resolute to save you from the fate I clearly saw he designed for you, so soon as his own ends were accomplished. I saved you; I have served you, and your nature is not ungrateful. Some seeds of good yet linger in you, Albert, and I have faith to believe they will yet blossom and bear fruit. You have repented of much of the evil you have done, and that is the first step towards reformation."

For many moments Gayoso remained buried in gloomy thought. At length he abruptly asked:

"What use do you intend to make of this revelation?"

"I can make none, for it too deeply compromises you. But one favor I exact of you. Write down this history; seal it, and place it where no one will be able to find it

except myself. Your health is broken; your life cannot last many years. Enable me to perform an act of justice when the penalty can no longer reach yourself."

"Ah, well, since I am so utterly in your power, I suppose I must comply with your demand."

Madame Latude arose, came near to him, and took his hand.

"Albert, look into *my* soul, also, and see that no thought of treachery towards you is lurking there. Bring back the days when as boy and girl we sat together by the old moss spring, and *feel* that it is *impossible* for me to play you false."

He regarded her steadily, and after a pause, said:

"It is all that I can do, Annie, for if you desert me, I am helpless and friendless. But—but it is a terrible thing to have prying eyes looking into my very thoughts, and reading what I would most wish to conceal."

An expression of anguish swept over her face as she slowly said:

"Yes—it is true. This fatal power has been the bane of my life; it has alienated those with whom I most wished to form the ties of friendship; yet I cannot always exercise it, nor with all persons. There must be a certain affinity between my own mind and the one I act upon, or the oracle is dumb."

"How, then, have you so long and so successfully played the part of seeress?"

"In some cases, as with you, I can see the past and dimly foreshadow the future. To such I revealed truths that startled and convinced them of my power; thus I acquired a reputation, and when others came, with whom no sympathetic link bound me, I was careful to predict only such ordinary occurrences as happen to nearly every one in the course of life."

"Then there was some charlatanry mixed up with your pretensions, after all."

"It was unavoidable; I must make my bread, and if I had turned away those who were inscrutable to me, my trade would have been ruined."

"What drove you to such a method of making a living? It is the last fate I should have predicted for the artless country maiden I once knew."

"My husband was a physician, and an ardent student of all books that treated of the mystic side of our nature. The singular power I possessed interested him deeply, and during his life he experimented with, and strengthened it in various ways. At his death I was thrown upon the world, with no support for myself and the orphan niece he bequeathed to my care. I tried the usual paths open to female industry. My education did not fit me to teach, for it was very superficial. I embroidered, did plain sewing, painted useless little things, that helped to fill my scanty purse, but with all these resources, I was so badly paid that we were just raised above starvation. A lecturer on magnetism came to the city; he boarded in the same house with me, and soon recognized the remarkable power I possessed. He endeavored to induce me to become the companion of his wanderings, but I declined the proposal. It, however, opened a new path before me, and I became Madame Latude, the clairvoyant seeing medium. I removed to a different portion of the city, and very few suspect that the *ci-devant* Mrs. Longman is the celebrated reader of the planets and diviner of the future. I believe that no gift is bestowed by Providence which is not designed for service, and I have made the best use of mine by earning bread for myself and for the orphan charge committed to my care."

"And I do not condemn the use you have made of it, though I find its exercise upon myself very unpleasant, in spite of my old feeling of confidence in you. It is not pleasant to feel like a criminal in the presence of his judge, every time your eyes are fixed upon me."

"If you realize that the All-seeing Eye is upon you day and night, you will feel less nervous when mine rests on you," she sadly replied.

"True enough, Annie, but that is so far off that I cannot feel it as I do one of those piercing glances of yours, which seems to burn itself into my very soul. Yes, I will write the confession you ask, and when I die, you will find it among my papers addressed to yourself. So soon as my affairs are arranged, I will, so far as money can do so, repay you for your kindness to me. For the present I must continue to trespass upon your hospitality."

As Gayoso thus spoke he regarded his companion with a sort of nervous dread, and she said, in a voice expressive of weary endurance:

"It is always thus; even the child of my adoption fears my skill in reading thoughts. Is it tampering with the sacred individuality of another that the soul will not tolerate? or is it the shrinking sense of imperfection which makes this feeling universal? I am as one banned—gifted with a mystic power that severs me from all human sympathy, and forces me to walk alone, forever alone! Well—so let it be, since the vital service I have rendered you is thought only worthy of the universal guerdon—*money*."

She turned her face away, and he seemed troubled and embarrassed. He asked:

"What would you have, Annie? What can such a worn out, miserable wretch as I am offer you that is better than money? My boyish dream is dead and buried long ago. A pyramid of evil has been reared above it, until there is nothing bright or soft left in my seared heart."

"Do not misunderstand me, Albert," she sadly replied. "It is not love for which I yearned—the rosy dream that floated over our young existence has long since been exhaled in the common atmosphere of every-day life. I loved my husband tenderly, truly, and he understood and appreciated

me far better than you could ever have done. Since his death, I have lived alone in spirit; and when I found you, neglected, dying, I recalled the golden hours of childhood and youth, and thought to win the gratitude of him who then loved me, by saving him from the tender mercy of his kinsman. I have been mistaken; let that suffice. I will still serve you to the best of my abilities, but without looking to the reward to which you have referred. I am now independent; your fortune, if regained, can be nothing to me."

"Dear Annie, pardon me. I know that I am a miserable sinner, and deserve much punishment; therefore I cannot bear the glance which makes me feel all my own unworthiness. My life has been a daily sacrifice to sin, until I feel that I am unfit to live, but more unfit to die. The wretched life that unrolls itself before your piercing vision can only sadden your heart, and ruffle the serenity of your mind. We will part as soon as may be, and seek paths as widely apart as purity and guilt should tread."

"Since you wish it, I submit. Yet I see dimly that my departure heralds some calamity to you, the nature of which I cannot discover; for the feeling of repulsion which has arisen in your soul toward me has partly broken the link that enabled me to read your future."

"It matters not," he sadly replied. "The future of a broken-down wretch like myself cannot promise much. A few more weeks or months of self-indulgence, and the end must come. I now ask of Fate only the power to disappoint Alfred Lumley in his nefarious scheme for possessing himself of my fortune, and I am ready to lay down my life-burden. Let me write the obligation for Mr. Spring, and perhaps you had better take it to him without delay."

Madame Latude bent her head in assent, and left the room. Gayoso drew a sheet of paper toward him, and with unsteady hand commenced writing. A few lines sufficed,



and he dashed off his signature to them in bold characters. The effort seemed to exhaust him, for he dropped the pen, sank back in his chair, and in a few moments a fitful slumber closed his eyes, and deadened his senses.

The light from the window which opened on the front yard was suddenly obstructed, and a head was placed close to the glass. A pair of keen bright eyes surveyed the interior of the room, and then the intruder moved away. A few more minutes elapsed, and the door leading into the hall was unclosed, and Lumley entered. He carefully surveyed the sleeper, and then examined the papers on the table.

As his eyes fell on the lines so lately written, he seemed surprised, and he read them over twice before he quite understood their significance. A noise in the next room startled him, and he looked around for some place of concealment. A window with a deep recess in front of it, concealed by heavy drapery, was at the lower end of the apartment, and Lumley glided behind the heavy curtain just in time to avoid the person who was approaching. Madame Latude came in, laid her hand upon the shoulder of the sleeper, and said:

"I am ready to go, Albert. It will be time for the down train by the time I get to the station. Have you written the paper?"

"Here it is," he languidly replied. "This will serve to assure Mr. Spring that I am in earnest; arrange an early meeting between us, that I may lose no time in blowing all the plans of my miserable cousin into fragments which will cover him with infamy and ruin."

The listener clenched his hands and ground his teeth, but he remained perfectly quiet. Gayoso went on:

"To give it any value, this paper must be properly witnessed. Call in Luella."

Madam Latude's niece was summoned, and she and her

aunt wrote their names opposite his own as witnesses to the fact that the obligation was written in good faith. Madam Latude placed it carefully in the pocket of her dress, and left the room in company with the young girl, leaving the sick man to the companionship of his unsuspected visitor.

Overcome by the wine he had drank, Gayoso again sank into slumber, and as the echo of the phaeton wheels, which conveyed away his good angel, died in the distance, Lumley emerged from his place of concealment. He glided to the front door, opened it, and made a sign to a man who was watching for him from a small summer house that stood on one side of the yard. The stranger joined Lumley in the hall, and he whispered:

"Your aid will not be needed here. I have changed my mind about taking his life. It will be more to my interest to let him live a little longer. Follow the woman who left just now; get on the same train with her, and rob her pocket of a paper that is of vital importance to me. Get it at all hazards, and five hundred dollars shall be your reward."

"Five hundred shiners!" chuckled the man: "That is more than old Spring would have paid me for the whole job. Rob her? to be sure I will; and you may feel certain of getting the paper before dark."

"Be off then with you, and consider your fortune made if you are successful."

The man drew down his hat, and set off at a quick run toward the station. He had half an hour before him, and knew that he could reach it in time for the train. He had seen Madam Latude get into the phaeton, and he would have no difficulty in identifying her as the person he was to rob.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A STORMY INTERVIEW.

LUMLEY returned to the apartment in which slumbered the helpless being he had come hither with the fell purpose of destroying. He knew that no one was in the house except the sick man and a young girl, whose cries for assistance could not be heard, for the cottage was lonely and thickly surrounded by trees. He wished, if possible, to avoid alarming her; as it was especially important that he should be unseen by her, his first act was to lock the doors leading from the room, and put the keys in his pocket.

His heavy steps upon the floor aroused the sleeper, and he looked with a terrified glance upon his visitor. Lumley strode in front of him, and with an expression of sardonic scorn, said:

"So-o—I have ferreted you out at last, my precious cousin. I dare say you thought it was a clever trick to practice on me; pray why have you left my care, and concealed yourself here, while I have been using every effort for the recovery of your estate?"

"So I have ascertained," replied Gayoso, sulkily. "You have done exactly as I predicted: claimed to be the true heir yourself, and instituted proceedings in your own name. I warn you that if your purpose in coming hither is to put me out of your way, your crime will be speedily detected. I have friends who are aware of my existence. I am no longer as helpless as when I lay in that miserable garret at your mercy."

"Wretched driveller! you are as much at my mercy as you ever were; for I am reckless and resolute to come off the winner in this contest, or perish in the attempt. Do you suppose I will be foiled by such an imbecile as you? Ha! ha!"

His savage laugh made the heart of the listener quail, and his hair seemed to rise upon his head, as he met the fell glance fixed upon him. He feebly asked:

"Do you—do you intend violence toward one so helpless as I am?"

"So much the better for my purpose, for I warn you that I value your life as little as that of any dog that threatens to thrust his fangs into my vitals. I hate you; you are an obstacle in my path, and why shall I not destroy you? I can accomplish it so quietly that no one will even suspect that violence has been done to you. See the tiny instrument by which death can be wooed as a friend, and no accusation of murder can be sustained."

The eyes of the trembling wretch to whom these words were coolly addressed followed his motions with a terrified stare, as Lumley took from his pocket a small curiously shaped instrument which looked more like a child's plaything than a means of dismissing the subtle tenant from the human frame.

It was a small golden cimeter, with a slight elevation along the outer edge of the curve. Lumley went on to explain its use with diabolical precision, as he gloated on the abject terror expressed in the pallid face before him.

"In this tiny handle is a spring which sets in motion a portion of the deadliest poison known to chemical science, and one which baffles the keenest research after death has taken place. The deadly fluid is driven through the minute tube contained in this ornamental edge, and a slender needle steeped in its venom springs forth to pierce a vein—and like a flash of vivid lightning, it strikes you dead where you sit. The most scientific investigation will not reveal the means by which your dastardly soul was set free to consort with its fellow demons. The verdict will simply be 'found dead,' and this woman who has undertaken to circumvent me will then find that unless she remains very quiet, it will be the worse for her."

Gayoso writhed in his seat, and endeavored to rise, but he only sank back again with a feeling of utter helplessness. He faltered:

"But Miss Euston's lawyer knows that I am living; that you are an impostor. Of what use then can it be to destroy me?"

"Use?—none, perhaps, to the cause your stupidity has ruined for us both, but I can at least have the satisfaction of wreaking my revenge upon a spiritless renegade like yourself. Since I cannot have the fortune, you *shall* not, so say over your last prayer, for your hour has come. Five minutes are all I can give you."

He took out his watch, and placed it before him on the table. The miserable wretch who sat cowering and helpless, regarded him with dilated eyes, and horror-stricken expression.

At length he gasped:

"I know you, Alfred. Your object is to extort money, or the promise of it. Speak—what do you require as the price of my life?"

"All that a man bath, will he give for his life,' saith a book that you and I are not over familiar with. What do you think of its truth, *mon ami*? for you are in a position to judge, if ever a man was."

"Think! I think that you are a devil, sitting there gloating over that infernal machine, which you have prepared to destroy me, as coolly as if I were a brute."

"Why should I respect the human nature within you, when you have so often ignored it yourself? Your life, at any rate, is forfeited to the law, and why should I scruple to take it any more than the butcher hesitates to take that of the animals he daily sacrifices to human wants? What respect had *you* for the 'divine principle,' when you struck the blow that freed it from the body of the South American whose name you took, together with something better worth

having? Of the Italian boy, who begged for life with his latest breath? Of——"

"Hold!" shrieked the listener. "Look! your words have evoked the bleeding phantoms that make my life a misery. There! there!" and he pointed with frantic gestures toward the dimmest corner of the room. "Why should that Spaniard come to jeer at me, for I killed him in a fair fight. The boy merited his fate, for he had played the traitor to me. But the last! oh, this is a vision of dread—of unspeakable horror, as it rises before me with its mocking lips, and gaping wounds! Away! touch me not with those bleeding fingers; take your face from mine; its icy breath is of the charnel house, and strikes death into my soul!"

Lumley gazed with contemptuous curiosity upon the writhing form and distorted features of the unhappy man. His hardness of nerve, and strong health, enabled him to bear his own load of evil lightly as a feather, and he had a vivid scorn for the man who could commit crime in a moment of temptation and then drivel over its memory. He uttered a fierce exclamation as he saw Gayoso sink back nearly insensible from terror and exhaustion.

He seized the wine bottle, forced a portion of its contents into his mouth, and watched for his revival with some anxiety. As Gayoso again unclosed his eyes the expression of fear and anguish that convulsed his features would have been terrible to any other beholder than the hardened being who stood over him. He faltered:

"Have you given me my death-blow, Alfred? Am I on the way to the Inferno my victims have prepared for me?"

"You are on your way to it fast enough without any help from me, old cove; so just shake yourself up, and talk like a man of sense. Buy the miserable remnant of life left you at the price I choose to set upon it, and you may linger on until you are a second Methusaleh for me. I have given

you a good fright which will teach you how to tamper with me, and give you a clear comprehension of what you may with certainty expect if you try to play me false again."

As he thus spoke Gayoso revived a little, and feebly asked:

"What do you demand of me?"

"The half of your anticipated fortune is a moderate price in exchange for your life."

"That is impossible; I should have nothing left for myself."

"How so? That is a kind of arithmetic I do not understand. Pray what becomes of the other half of your estate?"

"It is gone—already pledged to assure me the possession of the moiety that will be left."

"So-o—I begin to comprehend your game. You have offered terms to the opposite party?"

Gayoso shrank from the fierce eye bent upon him, but made no reply. Lumley fiercely asked:

"Will they accept the half, and relinquish the remainder without a contest?"

"I believe so."

"It is well for you that you spoke the truth, for I will deal with you at once if you attempt to deceive or tamper with me. Since this settlement is in process of negotiation, you will soon have the control of a cool hundred thousand. Of that sum I demand half; share and share alike was my motto as long as I had money, and you must perforce exercise the same liberality toward me."

"Yes," replied Gayoso, bitterly, "I well remember how equally we shared when it was my evil fortune to be thrown upon *your* generosity. But it is useless to quarrel; I know that I am in your power, and I know of old how unscrupulous you are. Yet I cannot see how I am to convey to you the right to property which is not yet in my own possession."

"I will take that risk. Give me your note for fifty thousand dollars, to be paid over to me when you have regained your fortune. You know very well that you *dare not* evade the payment whenever I may demand it, for the circumstances of your past life have placed you too entirely in my power."

"And you equally in mine."

"Not quite. I have only to seek Ernest Linden, whisper a few sentences in his ear, and all your fortune would not save you from the bloodhounds of the law he would set upon your track. *My* misdeeds are not so easily brought home to me; and, moreover, I intend to fortify my position by a brilliant marriage. My wife's family will be forced to sustain me, and the connection I shall form with the family of the man who would give half his life to know what I can reveal, will always hold you in check."

"Who can you mean? What miserable girl has fallen into your snares, and how is she related to Linden?"

"The happy creature who will claim me as her devoted slave, is no other than the beautiful Miss Euston, on whom you have bestowed the half of your fortune. Now write the note for the sum we have agreed on as the price of your life, and acknowledge that I am cleverer than you, for, after all, I shall secure three-fourths of your inheritance. Ha! ha! I can well afford to be merry over such a prospect."

Gayoso darkly regarded him, but he made no movement to obey his command. Lumley did not, however, choose to notice the fury which he knew to be so impotent; he drew paper toward him, dipped the pen in the ink, and offered it to his scowling companion. He motioned it away, and doggedly said:

"I don't think I shall comply with your demand. I cannot live much longer, and the price at which you value my worn-out life is too great."

"Oh, well," was the cool reply, "if you prefer it, you can

go and join your victims in the nether deep to which you sent them. Perhaps that will serve my turn as well, for Miss Euston will then retain the whole estate, and my union with her will make it mine."

"Are you certain that she will accept you?"

"Certain; her uncle is in my favor; her most intimate friend is warmly in my interests, and the young lady herself treats me with immense consideration. Since you are so ready to give up the ghost, perhaps you will hold your arm steadily, and let me spring this "Release" upon the artery in your wrist: that will be as good a place as any. Your left wrist, because the heart lies on that side, and the effect will be more rapid. Bare your arm, and you are a denizen of this planet; I touch your wrist with this tiny weapon, and presto! you are in another world! Quick work, old fellow; but I hope you'll not be coming back to reproach me for giving you freedom from all your aches and pains."

While Lumley rattled on in this horridly grotesque manner, he keenly watched the effects of his words upon the person he proposed to dismiss from existence in this summary manner. A vein of absurdity, which he knew was in the nature of Gayoso, was touched, and he laughed! A strange, hollow sound it was, but Lumley comprehended its meaning. He dropped the instrument of death in his pocket, and said:

"I perceive that you have thought better of it, and are ready to come to terms. Write the note, and be generous enough to wish me 'God speed;' for I can enjoy the money, and you cannot. What will be left is far more than you will need, so scratch away, and have done with the job."

With a heavy sigh, Gayoso obeyed the command, and pushed the paper toward him. Lumley examined it carefully, and after securing it in his pocket-book, said:

"Thank you, Albert; you have done the genteel thing at last, and I am only sorry that it was done through com-

pulsion. I would not advise you to attempt to repudiate this little transaction, because if you do, I will find you wherever you may hide, and wreak a vengeance upon you, that so feeble a soul as yours could never imagine. Don't attempt to warn Miss Euston either, because that treachery will be as fatal to you as the other. Peach to her or hers, and I peach to Linden, so we will be quits."

He quietly replaced the keys in the locks, and turned them; then nodding with an expression of insolent triumph, passed out of the room, leaving his despoiled victim in a state of rage, fear and excitement, which threatened to destroy him. Gayoso raved in impotent fury, anathematized the hour in which he was born, and invoked curses on the head of him who had just left him.

Luella came in pale and trembling, but he ordered her from his sight, and sat there in the gathering darkness, indulging his wrath until Madame Latude returned, pale and excited, to inform him that her pocket had been robbed of the important paper entrusted to her care. She was quite unconscious of her loss until she reached the lawyer's office; when it was discovered, Mr. Spring refused to believe that she had possessed such credentials, and treated her whole story as a fabrication.

In the meantime, Lumley returned to New York by a late train, and on alighting from it at the depot a handkerchief was waved as a signal from a carriage, in which sat a woman so heavily muffled as effectually to disguise her person. Lumley soon reached the side of the vehicle, and putting his head into the open window, said:

"So, you're here, sure enough."

She eagerly whispered:

"I have waited here an hour to see you. Tell me, is the wretch dead?"

"Can't you wait for the police report to-morrow?" he mockingly asked. "That will give you all the details."

"Pshaw! how can you trifle so, when I am so anxious to know if my enemy is out of my path. What have you done?"

"Nothing that will please you, for he still lives, and is likely to live. I got all I wanted without extreme measures, and you must find some one else to silence his tongue for you."

A stifled cry, more like the wail of a baffled hyena than that of a human voice, broke from her lips; it frightened the horses, and they commenced rearing in an alarming manner.

"Hullo there! get away from my carriage, Mister, or I'll find means to make you."

With skill the driver reined in the restive animals, but they started off at a brisk pace, and Lumley was left behind.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AN OLD MAN'S DARLING. THE PLOTTERS.

MRS. PIERRE sat in her parlor with her new adorer. Mr. Euston had arrived at that period in life when a fascinating woman can "fool a man to the top of his bent" by a few adroit flatteries. At fifty-five the well-preserved beau really considered himself irresistible to the beautiful widow, and she sat beside him with an expression of sweet contentment upon her face, which induced him fully to believe that she responded to the sentiment he had just uttered, to the effect that his heaven was there, that he asked of fate nothing brighter than the companionship of so charming a creature as herself. He really made love like a sophomore, and while she lifted her dark eyes to his with a most bewildering expression, and said:

"How charmingly poetry and passion are blended in your nature, my dear friend," her internal thought was:

"What an old dunce, to talk to a woman of the world like a boy of eighteen. I wonder if he will quote Byron next."

As if following her thought, he threw up his eyes, and exclaimed:

"Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness,  
Where transport and security entwine!"

"That is just my own idea," said the Syren, sweetly, "and fortunately we can carry it into execution. The world will cavil at our union so soon, you know, but that can be evaded by a trip to my own beautiful home. Consent, dear friend, to accompany me to my plantation in Cuba, and I will there bestow upon you my hand."

"My adorable Lonore, how shall I express the ecstasy that fills my overflowing heart at this proposal? I had thought of this way to evade the carping criticisms of those unimpassioned souls who cannot comprehend such love as ours, but I hesitated to propose it. Since you think it feasible, my angel, let us go without delay. I am at your command at any moment. Can we not make our preparations to leave on the next steamer for Havana?"

She shook her head with a little laugh that sounded like the chime of musical bells, and said:

"Your ardor is positively delightful; to be loved in this way is something to boast of in these days of heartlessness and folly. But—I must make some stipulations before I consent to give up the balance of my days to love and retirement."

"Name them; your wishes must be laws to me, Lonore."

After a slight pause, she said:

"The interests of my place compel me to return to Cuba for a season, and I have already invited your niece to become the companion of my voyage: some inexplicable



coolness has grown up towards me on the part of Mrs. Euston, and Clara reluctantly declined my invitation, for Cuba has a great attraction for her imagination. I am sure she would not have refused me if her own inclinations alone had been consulted."

The lover flushed, as he replied:

"Mrs. Euston has heard of my devotion to you, *ma belle*, and hinted to me that it is rather early for me to be seeking another soother of life's weary monotony, as if time, measured by the heart, is not lengthened out to centuries, when ordinary people only count months or years."

Mrs. Pierre eagerly inquired:

"You think, then, that her coolness has no other origin?"

"How should it, my fair houri? My sister-in-law must feel honored and delighted when she learns that you will bestow your fair hand on my unworthy self."

"Ah, dear sir, do not depreciate your own merits. The name of Euston can only be an honor to her that bears it; when it becomes mine, I shall wear it with pride, and seek by all means in my power to render happy the noble man who will bestow it upon me."

He gallantly kissed her hand, and said:

"What are your wishes with reference to Clara? I am her guardian, and if I desire her to make a trip to Cuba under my protection, there can be no impropriety in her doing so."

"How charmingly you anticipate my wishes. That is the thought I have had, but dared not express. Your presence will be a sufficient sanction, but I would not advise open opposition to Mrs. Euston; her influence with Clara is so great, that she will never consent to take a step her mother disapproves. The trip to Cuba will be a failure, if your niece knows beforehand whither she is bound."

"Then how can we take her with us?" asked Mr. Eus-

ton, with a perplexed air. "I am at a loss to understand your *finesse*."

"Yet it is very simple. Mrs. Euston will never consent that the presence of Clara at our marriage shall seem to give the family sanction to it. Can you not invite your niece to visit the magnificent new steamer just finished for the Havana trade, bribe her maid to pack her trunk, and get it quietly on board. When once we are fairly at sea, we can explain and excuse the *ruse* we resorted to, to afford her the pleasure of a trip she only felt bound to decline in compliance with her mother's wishes."

"Excellent! charming! I declare you are quite a feminine Machiavel. But why should Mrs. Euston be so violently opposed to our union as you seem to suppose? This extreme measure, after all, may be unnecessary, and I do not exactly like taking away my niece without her own consent."

"Very well, you can act as you please," and Mrs. Pierre withdrew her hand from his tender clasp, and turned her head away. "I have only this to say, that protestations of attachment have very little weight with me, unless they are sustained by actions."

"But, my angel, you are unreasonable. Explain to me *why* Mrs. Euston should object to this trip for Clara, and if I can see the necessity of acting on your suggestion, I am ready to do so."

"That is the very thing I cannot explain, for who can account for the whims of a prudish woman like your sister? That her manner to me has changed—that I am not as cordially welcomed as I once was, I can plainly see. There are two reasons for this: one we have already referred to, the other is my friendship for Albert Lumley, and my strong desire that he shall regain his inheritance only through a union with Clara."

"Hum—really, I did not suppose Mrs. Euston has any apprehensions on this last score. Clara seems entirely indifferent to Mr. Lumley."

"That only proves how little your sex understands ours. I am certain that the progress made by Mr. Lumley in Clara's favor has alarmed her mother, and caused her to withdraw her darling from my influence. You can see, dear sir, that it is for the best interests of your niece to accept the hand of Lumley, for if she refuses to do so, she must eventually be left penniless and dependent upon her stepmother. On the other hand she will gain a devoted husband, and retain a brilliant position in society."

"And by lending myself to this deception, I shall only be promoting Clara's true wishes, as well as her best interests? Do I understand this to be your conviction, Mrs. Pierre?"

"If you love me, call me Lonore," said the seductive lips with their blindest modulation.

"Lonore! sweet, fascinating name! how happy I am that I am permitted to call you by it! To cherish the hope that the dearer one of wife will ere long be mine to bestow upon you."

"You seem to forget my condition; for you evade the possibility of granting it. After what I have said, is it not clear that Clara will be charmed to be enabled to spend the remainder of the winter in the tropics, if she can do so without blame from her mother? The feelings of the poor child will thus have some chance to escape the polar atmosphere that now surrounds them, and expand beneath more genial influences. I assure you, that Clara will welcome the freedom that enables her to make her own choice of a husband."

"What you tell me takes me quite by surprise. I had an idea that she prefers young Ashton before any other admirer."

"What! the lawyer's clerk!" she exclaimed with extreme contempt. "That would indeed be a fitting match for Clara Euston! Ashton is a mere drudge, who has a mother dependent upon him, and may be able to marry in a score of years. I have been surprised that Mrs. Euston encourages him to

visit her house, but I believe she piques herself on her unworldliness, and values people according to their personal merits. But you, dear sir, are a man of the world, and you must see how fatal to Clara's prospects such an entanglement would be. I have done all in my power to make such a misalliance odious to your niece, and I assure you that nothing is now wanting but your co-operation in my plans to make her the wife of Lumley."

"This assurance makes me very happy, *belle* Lonore, and you may count on my aid to the utmost limit that my position as guardian to my niece will enable me to afford you."

"A thousand, thousand thanks! best, most adorable of men! I shall be a fortunate and happy woman to claim your generous heart always as my own. To feel that I am daily growing up to a higher stature in such noble companionship!"

Mr. Euston began to think himself much better than he had hitherto imagined, and wondered that the world should so long have depreciated his true value. Of course he hourly became more deeply infatuated with the artful woman who had made this remarkable discovery, and implicitly yielded to her slightest wish.

The plan to entrap Clara into their power was fully discussed, its details arranged, and the deceived guardian finally parted from his betrothed with the conviction that his niece concealed her preference for Lumley because she knew it would displease her mother; that Clara's true wishes, as well as her interests, would be best served by a union with him, either with or without Mrs. Euston's consent.

At the urgent solicitations of the ardent lover, Mrs. Pierre promised to make arrangements for immediate departure, as the steam-ship she had referred to, would start on her first trip in three days from that time. After a

most sentimental adieu, the elated lover departed, but the satisfied smile would have died from his lips, could he have seen the expression of utter weariness and disgust with which his *fiancé* threw herself upon the sofa, and scornfully muttered:

"I have triumphed over the old foggy, and I can turn him around my finger. Oh! what a verdant antiquity it is, to believe that a creature so full of life and passion as I am, can be enamored of a well kept mummy like him! I almost wish I had never meddled with this affair, for I am paying too dearly for its success. His wife! laugh! his angel, ha! ha! Many men have called me that before his turn to be cozened came. I wonder how many of them think me one now? Only the last fish that come to the net, are stupid enough to share that delusion, I fancy.

"Well, it is amusing enough where one's only object is to flirt, but when marriage is the question it assumes a more serious aspect. Retirement with *him*; love in a cottage, or rather the lodge in some vast wilderness of which he absurdly raves. A wigwam I suppose; at any rate it would be as unbearable to me as the meanest Indian hut if we were to become its joint tenants; yet I have promised to marry this man. Fortune has come to a desperate strait when such a marriage is imposed as a necessity upon me.

"Heigh ho! Mr. Euston can assure me the enjoyment without which I cannot live. He can screen me from the whispers of malevolence, and give security to the position my own cleverness has gained for me. Alfred tyrannizes over me—I must have a protector, and I suppose the Honorable Henry Euston is as suitable a one as my waning beauty can hope to win."

A quick rap upon the door interrupted her reverie, and she indolently raised her head, as she said: "Come in, Albert; I know it is you by your imperious knock."

Lumley entered, closed the door carefully, and sat down

in front of her. The gas light fell full upon his face, and she saw there the flush of wine, and the reckless expression he always wore when successful. She disdainfully said:

"In spite of all my warnings, you have been drinking again. Where have you been, and how have you been occupied since you left me this afternoon?"

"And you," he retorted, "have recovered from the spasms into which you threatened to fall when I went away. We have been congenially employed; for I have been frightening a coward into making my fortune, and you have been deluding a fool into securing yours."

"I do not understand you," she frigidly replied.

"Ha! ha! you are duller of comprehension than usual, my brilliant Lonore. Did I not meet *your* dupe as I came hither, wearing the smile of a happy lover? How many falsehoods did it take to wheedle him into the belief that he is a demi-god, who is only appreciated at his just value by your adorable self?"

"Pooh! don't make yourself disagreeable. Mr. Euston is a good *parti*; but you know that I have endeavored to fascinate him mainly to advance *your* interests."

"Oh—yes—I comprehend. One eye to my affairs, both wide open to your own; but I don't complain, and things are now in such a fix that it becomes doubly necessary to secure the fair Clara. What have you done toward that?"

"Everything—the plan is settled in all its details. Mr. Euston goes with me to Cuba in the next ship—Clara accompanies us; when we are safe on the plantation you can join us; by that time Mr. Euston will have no will but mine, and that will give his niece to you as your wife."

"Bravo! magnificent! I honor the scheming brain that can carry its plans into effect. You really deserve entire confidence, madam, and I am going to tell you something that will please you. I have discovered Albert's retreat."

Mrs. Pierre started up, full of eagerness and animation.

"Where is he? What have you done? Ah! now I comprehend your expression of triumph. Tell me all about it quick—quick! for I am thrilling with impatience."

Lumley took from his pocket-book two papers, and held them up before her.

"I frightened the poor craven into giving me this note for fifty thousand, to be paid when he regains his property; the other is more important still. It was stolen from Latude's pocket by a trusty agent of mine, when she was on her way with it to old Spring. This agreement binds Albert to a compromise with Miss Euston, by which she retains half the estate. Thus you see I hold in my hand three-fourths of what we have so deeply schemed to gain, if I can only secure the hand of the girl."

Mrs. Pierre examined the papers, pondered a few moments over them, and then gravely said:

"A fit of penitence has suddenly come over me, Albert. You have gained the means of securing a handsome sum. Rest satisfied with that, and let us relinquish this nefarious scheme which will only give you a reluctant bride, and wed the poor girl to misery. Since I promised to accept her uncle, I begin to feel pity for Clara. Get this money from your cousin, and let us go to some other place, where we can live handsomely on the spoil you have won. I have my jewels, which are worth a little fortune if I choose to sell them. I believe I will do so, sooner than marry old Euston, for the thought becomes more repulsive to me every hour."

His heavy brows knit together, and lurid anger flashed from his eyes, as he listened.

"'Tis well for *you*, who suggested the plan I have carried out, to falter now, when I hold the prize almost within my grasp. Your jewels! Worthless paste! glittering with as false a lustre as their mistress. A great resource would *they* be, indeed!"

"What can you mean?" she asked, in alarm. "The gems are real: my mother wore them, and there never was a doubt as to their genuineness. Have *you* been tampering with them?"

"And if I have?" he insolently asked. "What then?"

Mrs. Pierre grew extremely pale, and burst into tears.

"Oh, Albert! Albert!" she sobbed; "false to me—to every one who ever trusted you! Why have you defrauded me thus? You knew those jewels were my last resource, and yet you have deprived me of them."

"Tush! I will pay you back again, Lonore. I needed the money—was forced to have it, in fact—to carry on our game; and I thought it best to say nothing to you about it. Besides—I will be frank with you—I thought that the time would come when you must be made to feel your entire dependence on the success of this enterprize. With that resource to fall back on, you might shrink from the trial at the most important moment. You see I was right. Now you *must* go forward, or sink into poverty and wretchedness. Look—here is Albert's note. I will share its proceeds equally with you, and advance your interests in every way in my power."

Mrs. Pierre wiped away her tears, and her eyes glittered with contemptuous anger, as she replied:

"What faith can I place in the promises of a man so unprincipled as you are? You will find means to convert my share of the money to your own use, as you have done everything else that belonged to me; yet I blindly and wilfully follow your steps. Already have I plunged into falsehood and infamy to reinstate your fortunes, and this shameful fraud is my reward."

Lumley coolly shrugged his shoulders.

"Relieve your mind by scolding, Lonore; I am used to it. But I think you are very unreasonable to break bridle in this manner just as the reward of our cleverness is falling

within our grasp. What have you schemed for, toiled for, these many months, but to place me in the position I now occupy? You have ensnared a rich and honorable man, who will be your slave the balance of his life; and yet you cry over the loss of a few glittering stones, that dandies and foolish women set so much store by. Euston can give you plenty more."

"I do not want him, or his jewels either," she passionately cried. "I am not yet lost to every true womanly feeling, and I cannot brook the thought of marrying this poor old dupe. I fascinated him for *your* advantage. I would have lured him even to Cuba; but when Clara was secured to you, I intended to disgust him with my caprices, and evade the last sacrifice. But you have made me dependent on *you*, and I feel that such a fate would be a worse bondage than to become the wife of Mr. Euston."

He sneered:

"I thought your outbreak would lead to that conclusion before it ended. Believe me, you cannot do better than to take this sentimental adorer, Lonore; for your beauty is not so brilliant as it was, and your wit has wounded many who would gladly aid your downfall. Once breathed upon in the set to which you have gained admittance, your reputation can only regain its lustre through the added polish of a patrician name. You may leave New York under a faint haze of suspicion, but when you return as Mrs. George Euston, and I bring Clara back in triumph as my bride, they will float away as speedily and gracefully as a fog bank before the morning sun. You see I can be poetic as well as old Baldy—beg your pardon; but I hope you don't sing Uncle Ned to him—he might consider it personal, you know, as he has a smooth spot where the hair ought to grow, and a mighty soft one under it, eh?"

As Lumley thus rattled on, he watched his companion's face keenly. The momentary outburst of passion gave

place to a moody stillness, and a stray tear occasionally gathered on her long lashes and fell unheeded on her clasped hands. It was not in his nature to be deeply touched, but he felt some compunction for what he had done when he saw how deeply it affected her. He drew nearer to her, and attempted to take her hand, as he coaxingly said:

"Come now, Lonore, don't make a fool of yourself. I am tired of this. It is something new for you to come the sentimental over me. It isn't becoming to you either; and I'll be hanged if old Euston wouldn't fly the track if he could only see how ugly you are when you're in the dumps."

He had touched the right cord: she looked up at him, dashed away her tears, and exclaimed, with a hysterical laugh:

"Albert, you are the most ridiculous creature on earth, except myself. I am a fool to cry over what cannot be helped, I know very well; and, after all, our prospects are by no means desperate. My diamonds will pass for genuine as well as when I thought them so; and it is better to become an 'old man's darling' than remain your slave."

"Now you're a girl after my own heart once more," he good-humoredly replied. "I never intended to conceal from you the use I had made of your jewels, when the right time for telling it came. I regard them only as a loan; and when I can lay a good grip on some of the 'Indispensable,' I will pay you up fair and square—'pon honor, I will."

"Do not pledge your *honor*, or I shall be sure the debt will never be cancelled," was the sarcastic rejoinder. "I shall find means to exact payment when you are in a condition to make restitution. Now we will be sensible, and discuss our plans for the trip to Cuba, and see if no means can be found to induce Clara to give you her hand without using compulsion."

Lumley shook his head.

"*That* miracle will never happen; I know the signs too well. If Miss Euston ever becomes my wife, it will not be with her own consent. But if you can only get her safe to your plantation, I will answer for the rest. *Then* the game will be in my own hands."

Mrs. Pierre sighed heavily, as she replied:

"And I am afraid you will be unscrupulous in playing it out."

"What else can you expect? I have staked everything in this affair; and when final success can be gained by disregarding a girl's tears, do you think I'm the man to hesitate? Pooh! leave drivelling to such precious spoonies as my cowardly cousin. *I'm* not of that sort, as you ought to have known long ago."

She reflected a few moments, and then said:

"You must not go over with us: Clara would at once suspect our object, and on our arrival in Havana, she might refuse to go with us to Mirandola."

"I can easily follow you in the next steamer. It is lucky that you still retain control of the place. We must make good use of the time left us, for the tide that has so long set in our favor will soon be on the ebb."

Mrs. Pierre sighed heavily, and sat with compressed lips, and dreamy eyes, until Lumley impatiently said:

"What has come over you, Lonore? Is this the way to meet the crisis of our destiny? Shrink back now—lose courage—and all is lost. Think what we may attain by stifling this inconvenient burst of penitence; then look, if you dare, on what we shall actually become if we fail at last."

She shivered, and covered her face with her hands.

"I know it all, Albert; but this poor child loves and trusts me. I feel more tenderness toward her than I thought I could ever again cherish for any human creature. It is a base and cruel conspiracy that we have formed

against her, and, if I could, I would retrace my steps—would leave her to seek happiness, for with you she must be miserable."

"How do you know that? I shall be very devoted to her for a few weeks. I shall bask in the sunshine of her smiles, and make the little thing love me in spite of herself. My adoration won't last long, perhaps, but what *does* last? I rather think that the story of our first parents in the Garden of Eden is only a myth intended to typify the short-lived sweetness of wedded bliss. A few weeks of delusion and then the gates of the paradise are forever closed, and the flaming sword of necessity drives the disenchanted pair out among the harsh realities of life, and the real struggle begins. Faugh! I really believe I am getting sentimental myself; but one thing is certain, Lonore, I am resolute to win in this venture, and you *shall not* shrink back at the most important moment. Clara Euston must go with you to Cuba, and in a month from to-day, she shall be Mrs. Lumley. Then I return here to take possession of what I have so hardly earned."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### A VOYAGE TO CUBA PLANNED, AND AN ABDUCTION.

IN compliance with the wishes of her mother, Clara endeavored to withdraw herself from the fascinations of Mrs. Pierre's society; but the intimacy the widow had succeeded in establishing with her, rendered this exceedingly difficult. Too keen-sighted not to be quite aware of the state of feeling which existed toward her, Mrs. Pierre chose to ignore the slight reserve assumed toward her, and still continued to make her unceremonious calls, even after Miss Euston had been excused to her more than once.



Mrs. Euston was preparing for a musical soiree and as Mrs. Pierre was not a musician, it afforded her an opportunity to have a re-union at her house, in which that lady was not included; for of late it seemed impossible to avoid being seen in public with her, earnestly as she desired it.

Mrs. Euston was not naturally a suspicious woman, but vague and flitting rumors began to assail the position assumed by her who so lately had been the idol of the hour. The fabulous wealth which rumor at first bestowed upon her, was now said to be really as unsubstantial as the brilliant visions to which it had given rise in the minds of her adorers.

It was eagerly whispered that she was bearing only a translation of her name into a foreign language, and the unromantic one of Stone was really her true cognomen. This had been bestowed upon her by a young American sea captain who had fallen in love with her in a transient visit to Havana, while boarding in the same house with her. Her husband died, leaving her some money, which she soon squandered in reckless profusion, and as the last resource of desperate fortunes, she had visited New York in the hope that her beauty would captivate some wealthy simpleton, and induce him to give her his hand.

These things were circulated in whispers, for as yet there was no proof to sustain them, and as long as Mrs. Pierre herself maintained an undaunted front, and lavished her charming blandishments on those it was her interest to captivate, no voice was found bold enough, to accuse her openly. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that time must unveil the character of her pretensions, and show whether she stood upon a golden foundation which would cast its dazzling radiance over greater faults than hers, or only on a gossamer cloud, borrowing all its splendor from a brilliancy as delusive as it was captivating.

Clara would not permit these insinuations so be repeated

before her. With the enthusiasm of a young and generous spirit, she refused to believe that one she loved and trusted could be other than she seemed. She dutifully complied with her mother's wishes, but her heart secretly clung to one she believed basely slandered by those who envied her success in society.

When Mrs. Pierre spoke of the necessity of a speedy return to Cuba, and invited her young friend to accompany her, Clara's first impulse was to express delight at the thought of exchanging the bleak winds of the north for the bloom and verdure of the tropics. But she candidly admitted that much as she desired to accept the invitation, her mother would never consent to part from her for so long a journey.

"Ah, Clara, dear, do you not think that your mother is just the least little bit too exacting?" asked the honeyed voice of the Circe.

"My mother is my best friend, and she loves me tenderly," replied the young girl, earnestly. "When I have sometimes acted contrary to her wishes, I have always found afterwards, that my happiness would have been best served by listening to her advice."

"Yes, darling; I know that Mrs. Euston is the tenderest and most affectionate of mothers, but still there is such a thing as straining a cord until the tension forces it to snap. You should begin to exercise some judgment of your own, for you are quite competent to judge what will promote your happiness. You will soon become the mistress of a house of your own, and you should learn beforehand how to walk without leading strings. Excuse me, my love, but I feel this so deeply. I can see no rational excuse for depriving you of a visit which must afford you so much pleasure."

Clara eagerly replied:

"You misjudge Ma Nelly, Mrs. Pierre. She has always endeavored to make me feel that I am responsible for my

own acts—to make me a self-dependent and reasonable being. I know that I owe everything to the judicious training she has given me. I should really like to go with you to Cuba very much, but if she disapproves the plan, I must give it up. In an affair of this kind I would not act in opposition to her wishes. It would be too selfish. Besides, when my fortune hangs in the balance, as it were, I must not incur the expense of the trip.”

“Nonsense, child. The estate will be yours, either one way or the other. If the law does not give it to you, the priest will. So send pecuniary cares to the wind, as unworthy of consideration.”

Clara flushed deeply, and an expression of reserve came over her features, as she said:

“I thought you understood my feelings better by this time. If the law awards the estate to Mr. Lumley, it becomes his without the incumbrance of a wife. It is impossible for me ever to bestow my hand upon him. If it is a part of your plan to invite Mr. Lumley to be your guest while in Cuba, nothing would tempt me to go, even if mamma’s consent were assured.”

“Oh, you absurd creature! don’t you know that his interests chain him here? I hope you will not fancy that I am endeavoring to entrap you into a voyage with your adorer, and a residence under the same roof with him; that would be unworthy of my friendship for you. But I will urge you no further, my sweet Clara. I will only ask as a last favor to me, that you will see me on the ship before she leaves port. You expressed a wish to visit the new steamer, and your uncle will readily accompany you to her on the day she sails. You will not refuse to come down and bid me adieu, my dear friend?”

“If my uncle will be my escort, there can be no reason why I may not see you there,” was the unsuspecting reply. “Yes—I think I can promise to come down on Thursday. I will speak to my uncle to-night about it.”

“Oh, he already knows *my* wish and will offer to take you down,” was the reply, with a half smile and a meaning glance which Clara at once interpreted aright. She kissed the cheek of her false friend, and heartily said:

“I am so glad that my uncle’s future wife will be one I can love. Yet do you know, I scarcely believed that you could like him well enough to accept him, though the rest of our world seemed to think differently.”

“The world is a harsh judge, Clara. Its voice will say that I am actuated by interested motives in marrying your uncle, but *you* will exonerate me from such a charge. I have been told that his first marriage was not happy, therefore I excuse his rather premature devotion to myself. I am anxious to make up to him the large arrears of happiness due to one who has known so few joys of domestic peace. I am considered worldly, my Clara, but my heart is very tender, my tastes very simple. I trust I shall make him a good wife, for I have promised to give him my hand so soon as propriety permits.”

“Thank you for this confidence,” replied the young girl, with brightening eyes. “Uncle George will of course follow you to your own home; then, perhaps, I may be able to accompany him, for I should be so happy to witness your marriage.”

“You *shall* witness it, my love. Your uncle has already decided that you shall accompany him when he goes to Cuba to claim my hand. Promise me that you will overcome every obstacle, and be the companion of his voyage.”

“I think I may safely make that promise, for Ma Nelly will be quite satisfied when she hears the occasion that induces me to go, and feels assured that I am under the protection of my guardian and nearest relative.”

Mrs. Pierre had accomplished one of the objects of her visit, and she arose to go. She carelessly asked:

“What is your engagement for to-night, my dear? Perhaps we may meet, as I, too, am going out.”

Clara blushed slightly.

"I am not going out. We have a few musical friends to-night; we are to play portions of a new opera, and no one is asked but those who take a part in the performance."

"And I unfortunately am not musical. So much the worse for me. But I should really like to play the part of audience to-night, if I can play no other. Shall I look in upon you in the course of the evening, or is the reunion strictly *exclusive*?"

"Of course we will not exclude *you*, since you will be so obliging as to honor our performance, by listening to it. Uncle George will probably not be present, as he cares very little about the 'concord of sweet sounds.' If he learns, however, that his day-star will shine upon us to-night, he will probably come. Shall I dispatch a little note to him?"

"Do not trouble yourself, *ma chère*; I shall see Mr. Euston before your note can reach him, and I may succeed in bringing him with me. *Au revoir*, my darling Clara. I am more tenderly bound to you than ever."

The two parted, Clara sought her mother to inform her of the invitation so skilfully beguiled from her. Mrs. Euston was very much annoyed.

"It really seems impossible to evade Mrs. Pierre in any way. She is resolute that I shall assist her to maintain her footing on the eminence that is sliding from beneath her. I really did hope that for once I had avoided asking her."

"Dear mamma, it is *necessary* that we sustain Mrs. Pierre against the slanders of her enemies, for calumnies I am certain they must be," said Clara, earnestly.

"Why necessary, my dear? We can have no interest in re-gilding the tarnished fame of such a woman as I am afraid Mrs. Pierre will prove to be. She has no claim on us."

"She has a much stronger one than you imagine, for she

will become one of ourselves as soon as propriety will permit."

"She has then confided to you the fact of her betrothal to your uncle?"

"She has; and she expressed herself so charmingly, that I was touched and pleased at her attachment to my uncle."

"Oh, my unsophisticated darling, you know nothing of the intriguing nature of such a woman as this. She is a riddle even to me, and when read through, I am afraid she will prove anything but noble and true. Do you for a moment image that a brilliant belle like Mrs. Pierre can be fascinated by an elderly gentleman, who has nothing about him that can attract a woman of her stamp? Oh, no; if she has really accepted Mr. Euston, the stories about her vast fortune are mere inventions, and she is in pursuit of a husband who can give stability to her assumed position. It cannot be too late to warn your uncle to examine into her antecedents before he makes her his wife. His infatuation cannot have destroyed all prudence. I must exact a promise from him to ascertain *who* Mrs. Pierre is, and what is her real connection with Mr. Lumley, before he commits the folly of marrying a person who may turn out to be a mere adventurer."

"Oh, Ma Nelly, do not call her by such a name, please. I am sure she must be good, or my heart would not go out toward her so tenderly as it does. I know that she has met with heavy pecuniary losses, for she told me so some time ago, and even if she does accept my uncle from motives not altogether free from a taint of worldliness, she is so gentle, so lovable, that she will make him far happier than aunt Emily ever did. Mrs. Pierre has had her love dream, and has seen its object snatched from her in the prime of life. She respects my uncle, she loves his nearest connections, and she feels that as his wife she can ennoble his life. Dear Ma Nelly, do not let the malicious gossip that has assailed her prevail over your natural sense of justice."

"My child, I listen lovingly to your defence of your friend, nor am I disposed to judge a sister woman harshly. I will suspend my judgment on Mrs. Pierre until the accusations are clearly made out, and positively proved. She shall have the benefits of the doubts that exist in her favor, but I must speak plainly to your uncle of the necessity of investigating the vague rumors that begin to assail her, before he goes too far to recede honorably."

"I am sure he will not listen to you; but you will of course do what you feel to be right. In the meantime, I will believe her innocent till she is proved unworthy of my affection."

"Do so, Clara, for I would not willingly destroy the loving trust of a pure nature, and implant suspicion in its place. Your uncle will doubtless be here to-night, and I will find an opportunity to speak a few words in private with him."

That evening Mr. Euston came unaccompanied by his enchantress, and he seemed evidently annoyed and disappointed that she was not there before him. He managed to slumber throughout the performance, for he considered music a bore, and felt a sense of relief when the last vibration of the finest composition died away upon the air. He was occasionally tempted to endure such a penance for the attainment of some particular object, but this evening he thought the time interminable. The lovely widow had assured him that she would be sure to look in upon them before eleven o'clock, and Mr. Euston only aroused himself whenever the door opened, in the hope that his enchantress would enter.

At length his impatience was rewarded by the brilliant vision of Mrs. Pierre in a fancy dress representing Night, and the floating drapery spangled with stars, the crescent that glittered above her queenly brow, set off her beauty to the greatest advantage. She explained that she was on

her way to a fancy ball, but could not resist the temptation to accept the invitation of her dear friends to look in upon them a few moments.

A gentleman in a domino accompanied her, who seemed desirous to maintain his incognito, but Clara detected Lumley as soon as he ventured to speak.

"You can't tell who I am, Miss Euston. I'll bet you my head for a football you can't," he said in a lugubrious voice, from behind his mask.

"As I do not play football, Mr. Lumley, I decline accepting the wager. But you see you would have lost."

"By Jupiter! how did you know me? I'm sure I hardly knew myself when I looked in the glass and saw what an ugly goblin this thing makes me look like. Ain't it deucedly ugly now?"

"Your sex should be indifferent to mere looks; it is the province of mine to set a value on externals. The 'lords of creation' should seek to charm by something of more real worth."

"Plenty of the rhino, for instance. Look at Night now; see how blandly she is flashing the light of her eyes, and her diamonds, upon that innocent old greenhorn, your uncle. He is of more substantial worth, you see, than any of the fine beaux around. No wonder the robe of Hymen is painted of a saffron tint: it takes its hue from

Gold! gold! gold! gold!  
Bright, and yellow, and hard, and cold,  
Molten, graven, hammered, and rolled,  
Heavy to get, and light to hold;  
Hoarded, bartered, bought and sold.

\* \* \* \* \*  
"Price of many a crime untold,  
Gold! gold! gold! gold!  
Good or bad a thousand fold!"

"That is the only sensible jingle of rhymes I ever have seen, Miss Euston. Hear how trippingly it goes:

"Gold! gold! gold! gold!  
Heavy to get, and hard to hold."

"And how true it is."

"Especially the last lines," said Clara, innocently:

"The price of many a crime untold,  
Good or bad a thousand fold."

He started and looked keenly at her. Had she fathomed his base and cruel designs towards herself, and thrown this out as a hint? Had his accomplice betrayed him? and a baleful glance was darted from the shelter of his mask towards the unconscious Mrs. Pierre: she was smiling and talking in her most charming manner to the circle which had gradually drawn around her, and Lumley felt reassured. He said:

"The last line illustrates the different use that will be made of our disputed inheritance, unless you condescend to become its joint possessor, when the decree is made in my favor. In your hands, it would produce good a thousand fold; in mine, only bad—bad—a sure crop of evil. Doesn't your conscience tell you that it is your duty to save the poor waif that fate has stranded at your feet?"

Clara shook her head.

"I am afraid my conscience is very obtuse, for no such responsibility has been suggested to it. No, Mr. Lumley; you must be accountable for your own manner of spending your fortune whenever it comes into your possession."

"You acknowledge my right to it then?"

"I shall do so, when the law decides that it is yours."

"The law, pooh! I think you claim to be a just woman, Miss Euston. If I win I offer to endow you with the wealth by giving you my hand. If you win, you cast the son of your old friend into poverty. Is this right? Can you do it with a clear conscience? No—there is but one way to settle the matter—marry me—I love you better than any one else can, though I have an abrupt way of telling you so."

"Mr. Lumley," said Clara, "I entreat—I insist that this shall be the last time you address such language to me. If

you are really the heir of my godfather, take every cent you are entitled to claim, use it as you choose, but leave me to pursue my own ideal of happiness and peace. It is not to be found in a purely mercenary marriage, as a union with you would be. I thought I had already spoken plainly enough, but you will not listen to my refusal; you really persecute me."

"Because I *must win you*," he emphatically said. "I will not take even this cruel rejection as final. No, Clara; the day shall come in which you will voluntarily give me the fair hand I so ardently covet."

He bowed over the ungloved hand, on which glittered diamonds of great value, and smiled sardonically as he calculated their worth. Yes, he truly coveted the hand, that he might despoil it of its decorations.

Clara turned away, deeply annoyed at his pertinacity. Of late, she never encountered him in the most casual manner, that he did not seek an opportunity to speak of his passion for her; and the deep revulsion of antagonistic natures had taken complete possession of her. She recoiled from the glance of his eyes, the sound of his voice, with a sensation of sick loathing, for which she vainly chided herself.

How Mrs. Pierre could admire—could hold in high estimation such a man as Lumley, was a mystery to her; yet he was her friend, almost the only one she claimed as such. But the vital services he had rendered her gave him strong claims upon her, and Clara's affectionate heart was ready with an excuse for the artful woman who had so deeply fascinated her.

A few moments sufficed to throw the spell of her witchery over every one in that room, and then with the brightest of smiles Mrs. Pierre took the arm of her cavalier and departed. It was not often that she went in public with Lumley, for she was very careful to avoid the appearance of



too great intimacy with him. She did not wish the gossip of society to link her name with his, for too much was at stake to permit their true relationship to become known. Should it be suspected, the claim to the Lumley estate would be blown to the winds.

Mrs. Pierre was the half sister of the man for whom she dared so much. The father of Alfred Lumley married early in life in New England. He was the captain of a respectable merchant vessel, and soon after the birth of his son he left New Bedford never to return. His wife, with whom he had not lived happily, died when the boy was ten years old, and in another year Alfred was sent out to Cuba by the command of his father; who had formed a new connection there with a wealthy creole: not a *quadroon*, for a creole simply means the native descendant of foreign parents of unmixed *white* blood.

Captain Lumley did not entirely abandon a seafaring life; for he made an occasional voyage when the monotony of a life on shore became too wearisome. His son always accompanied him, and the associations he formed both on sea and land did not tend to refine a nature originally coarse and overbearing.

Alfred grew into a rough, imperious youth, who tyrannized habitually over a fragile little sister, the only survivor of six children, and the latest born. Yet the little Lonore loved him with all the strength of her young heart; she would sob over his harshness, and retreat from personal violence only to creep to his side again, and beg for forgiveness when she had not been in fault.

This clinging affection increased with her years, and to advance the interests of her insatiable tyrant had been the one thought of her life. When she was nine years old her mother died, six years later her father perished at sea, and the wreck of a once noble fortune passed into the management of her brother, as her natural guardian.

There was no one to interfere, and Lumley dissipated the income: involved the estate more deeply than ever, and ended by marrying his sister to a young boon companion of his own, before she had completed her seventeenth year.

The story related by Mrs. Pierre to Mrs. Euston had a shadowy resemblance to truth. She did make a bridal trip to Europe, and her brother went out as supercargo on the same ship. On their voyage her husband died, and Lumley performed for her the services claimed as the promptings of benevolence alone. He saved for her a fragment of her deceased husband's estate, which he took care to spend on his own pleasures.

A few more years of reckless dissipation, and the young widow's fortune was a complete wreck. Nothing remained to her save a trebly mortgaged plantation, and some valuable jewels which had belonged to her mother.

When her available resources were all gone, Lumley returned to his early mode of life; he led a disreputable, rollicking sailor's life, and visited nearly every quarter of the globe. In Paris he encountered his cousin at a gambling house; the similarity of name, and the remarkable resemblance between them, first attracted them toward each other. On comparing with him the recollections of boyhood, Lumley became convinced that the reckless wanderer was the son of his father's only brother, a wealthy merchant of New York.

These congenial spirits spent several years together in such pursuits as may be inferred from the conversations held between the two since they have been introduced to the reader. Lumley gradually acquired the certainty that his kinsman was heir to a large estate; that he held locked in his own mind the secret receptacle in which family papers were concealed which would always enable him to claim his inheritance. Gayoso, as he called himself, had not communicated with his family for many years; he was



ignorant whether his father was yet living. So long as health enabled him to enjoy the wild and vicious life he led, he was indifferent to his claim to fortune.

At length his excesses began to tell upon his constitution, and he commissioned his cousin to write to New York and make inquiries about his father. The reply duly came, with an account of the death of the elder Lumley, and the disposition he had made of his fortune, in favor of his god-daughter, Clara Euston.

By the time this letter reached him, Gayoso had been attacked by partial paralysis, and found himself completely in the power of his unprincipled kinsman. The plan of the latter was soon formed: he would assume to be the heir, and claim the estate as *his own*; but suspecting his intention, Gayoso tenaciously refused to reveal the hiding-place of the family papers, till the secret was wrenched from him by the mysterious power of the clairvoyant.

Through mingled motives of interest and affection, Lumley enlisted his sister in his service. He showed her that her own ruin was nearly consummated; a few more months and the mortgage held upon her property would be foreclosed, and herself rendered homeless; he could still raise money; they would go together to New York, and use all the craft and guile with which nature had endowed them, to secure the estate of which they considered themselves the lawful heirs after the death of the imbecile son, who could not live many months.

Thus reasoned these two—one thoroughly bad—the other only weak, and fond of luxury. The letters Mrs. Pierre brought with her were genuine; her mother's connections were people of influence; but she sedulously concealed the fact of the relationship between herself and her brother, as that would at once have defeated his claim to be the son of Thomas Lumley.

She appeared in society as a widow of vast fortune,

sought and obtained the entree to Mrs. Euston's house, in the hope that she could bring about a marriage between the heiress and her unprincipled brother.

Mrs. Pierre had never seen Gayoso. Lumley assured her that no harm should happen to their unhappy cousin; that he should always be well taken care of, and she quieted the scruples of her conscience in the best manner she could. Sometimes they would make themselves heard, as we have seen; but they always yielded before the influence of her brother. She loved him yet, though not with the blind affection which had filled her childish years; and she had learned to fear him, as helpless women dread unscrupulous and ferocious natures.

Mrs. Pierre had become attached to Clara, and she shrank from the thought of the final wrong; but once embarked upon that sea of evil, and there was no returning. She helplessly felt herself abetting the crime of abduction, and luring on a young and trusting heart to ruin and misery. A few more hours and the die would be cast which must give her own hand to Mr. Euston, and place Clara in such a position that only a miracle could prevent her from becoming the victim of her lawless brother. She dared not retreat now, shrink as she might from the consummation to which all her efforts had so long tended, and she felt that she was powerless to avert the consequences of her own acts.

Immediately after Mrs. Pierre's departure, Mr. Euston arose to go. Mrs. Euston requested him to call at an early hour on the following morning, as she had business of importance to confer with him about.

Suspecting its nature, and resolute to show her at once that his mind was unalterably made up to make the fair widow his wife, he came in with an expression of elation upon his features, and a will of adamant in his bosom. He carelessly said:

"I believe I know beforehand what you intend to say,

Ellinor; and I think it as well to tell you that it will be time lost to attempt to change my will."

"I know that, brother George; but where the question is one of such vital importance, I must speak, even if it should prove in vain. Both your happiness and respectability are involved in this matter, and you should not enter into a union for life with the rash ardor of a boy of eighteen. You will listen to me, I hope?"

"No, madam, I *will not* listen to you. I will not have a breath even from *your* lips sully the fair fame of the woman who is to become my wife. I may be an old fool, and I dare say I am, but I love her, Ellinor; love her as I never loved in the days of my youth. She is the most exquisite of women! I have once made a marriage of convenience, but in this my heart is engaged. I would take Lonore to my bosom if she were penniless, homeless, outcast, and give her all that fortune has bestowed on me, feeling that in so doing I conferred honor on myself, more than on her. *Now* Ellinor, have you the heart to repeat to me all the gossip which fools and knaves are uttering against her? I tell you I close my ears to it; I will lift her above it, and when she bears my name, I will make them afraid to breathe a syllable derogatory to her."

Mr. Euston's figure seemed to dilate, and acquire a dignity it had never before possessed. For the first time in his life, his sister saw him really aroused and in earnest. His first wife had been a silly butterfly of fashion, who treated him with civility, but made him feel every day that he was of far less importance to her happiness than a magnificent dress, or a fine *parure* of jewels. He had never known the sweet flattery of affection, and its skilful simulation by the enchanting widow had completely enthralled him. In her defence, Mr. Euston felt as chivalric as the most devoted knight-errant of ancient days, and the bare thought of losing her aroused all that was antagonistic in his nature.

Mrs. Euston had respect for any genuine feeling, and with a sigh she said:

"I can do nothing, then; but I fear that you will bitterly regret the infatuation that leads you to give your hand to this beautiful siren. At least promise me that you will learn something of her former life before you take the irrevocable step which renders her reputation of vital importance to you."

"Quiet your fears, Nelly. I am going to her *own home* to claim her; if her pretensions are false, she would scarcely take me where I can learn her whole history. I would have married her here, and now, but she would not consent to our union so soon after Emily's death. For my part, I let 'the dead past bury its dead,' and greet the new sunshine as it falls upon me with deeper gratitude than I ever felt for that which has passed away. Poor Emily did not seek to make me happy, and my fortune purchased all that was necessary to make her so. She rests in peace, and I confess to you that her loss did not move me half as much as does the possibility that my new love may be separated from me."

"You are infatuated, brother; and I am afraid that the awakening from your dream will be terrible indeed."

"Well—yes—I am infatuated, and no true love is worth much unless it has some such element about it. I will not believe a word against Mrs. Pierre. I ask of you to sustain her against her enemies, by such support as you well know how to give. I *insist* that Clara shall show her respect for my future wife by seeing her on the steamer before she leaves. I will take her down myself, and keep her under my own protection, I assure you."

"I am sorry that you have asked this, because it is my wish above all things to keep Clara free from doubtful associations. If you choose to make Mrs. Pierre your wife, I cannot of course prevent it; but I must think that she has

thrown her spells over you, to obtain power over the fate of your niece, that she may bestow her hand on Mr. Lumley, between whom and herself an intimate relation exists; of what nature you should be anxious to fathom. I beg, Mr. Euston, that you will not insist on taking Clara to the steamer."

"But I do insist; and I think you guilty of disingenuousness, Ellinor, in speaking thus of Lumley and Lonore. She explained to you the origin of her intimacy with him, and you accepted that explanation. I do not ask you to permit Clara to see her off, but I *demand* it as the right of my future wife to have this courtesy extended to her. I shall call for Clara at four o'clock to-morrow evening, and I shall be irrevocably offended if she is not ready to accompany me."

He arose, bowed stiffly, and seemed to be waiting for her decision. Mrs. Euston did not wish to have a rupture with her brother-in-law, and she thought it better to choose the lesser evil of the two; she therefore reluctantly said:

"Clara will be obedient to your commands, for she wishes to see Mrs. Pierre again, and I cannot place my authority in opposition to her wishes, and your own. I trust that no evil result to my child will spring from it, though I feel a strange unwillingness to permit her to go, even with you."

"Tush! nonsense! your imagination has played you absurd tricks before to-day, Ellinor. With me, nothing that is not for Clara's good can happen to her, so quiet your fears. I shall expect to find her ready at the hour named. Good morning, madam."

As Mr. Euston passed out, a neat-looking maid servant who stood in the back part of the hall watching for his appearance, was beckoned towards him. He hurriedly whispered:

"It is all right, give warning as if about to leave; pack your young lady's things, and have the trunks taken out as

your own. Go to the Havana steamer at three o'clock on Thursday; my man will meet you at the Park, and put you on board safely. Remember that it is only a pleasure trip I am securing for Miss Euston to which her mother is opposed: but for your life do not betray me to Clara, as that would spoil my plan."

The girl nodded intelligently, for she knew enough of her young lady's wishes to be aware that she was much disappointed in foregoing the invitation of Mrs. Pierre, and she thought it an agreeable *ruse* on the part of Mr. Euston to give his niece a pleasurable surprise. She was diligent and expert in the performance of her task, and at the appointed hour the maid with her own wardrobe, and a sufficient supply from that of her young mistress to serve her in the tropical land to which they were bound, were safely bestowed upon the steamer.

Kate was instructed to keep herself out of sight until Clara was informed of the trick played upon her by her grave and respectable uncle, when it would be too late to return to the protection of her mother's roof.

Everything thus arranged for the successful abduction of Clara, Mrs. Pierre held a parting interview with Lumley in which their final plans were settled. As they separated, he said:

"I advise you, Lonore, to make your silly old captive marry you before you reach Mirandola. It will be the only sure way to chain him to your galley, and he is so stupidly in love with you, that by using a little honey every day, and making him believe that a young dashing woman like you is attached to him for *himself*, you can live in clover the balance of your days."

"I will think of it; nay, I believe it will be best to do so," she replied. "Since the sacrifice is to be made, it does not signify whether it takes place a few days earlier or later."

## CHAPTER XXVI

## CLARA VISITS HER MOTHER'S PROTEGEES.

AFTER a few days spent at Mrs. Crump's boarding-house, a conversation between Mrs. Euston and Margaret Seyton had placed her in possession of the humble aspirations of the lace-weaver towards the attainment of future independence.

Mrs. Euston listened with sympathy, and an earnest desire to aid her; the result was, that a small shop was secured for her on a cross street leading out of Broadway, not yet much known to fashionable people, but her patroness promised that it should not long remain in obscurity, for she would bring her friends and acquaintances to deal at its modest counter.

A small stock of laces and other fancy goods were selected with great judgment and skill by Margaret, who seemed to possess intuitive knowledge of the business she was ambitious to enter, and she showed so much energy and forethought, that her patroness was more pleased with her than ever.

The money needed to start her in business, was chiefly furnished by Linden, as pre-payment for taking care of Madeline. Contrary to the expectations of her physician, a few weeks of judicious medical treatment in the asylum, restored her the use of her reason, and the violence of the first despair sunk into a species of apathetic quietness. She gladly accompanied her old friends to the new home provided for them, without asking why she was made their inmate, or who bore the expense of taking care of her.

All earthly interests seemed to have faded from her mind, and she moved about like one in a trance, whose feet trod the weary earth, but whose thoughts soared through illimit-

able space, seeking—seeking forever for a glimpse of the angel form she insisted she had beheld as it flitted from its tenement of clay. She would sit for hours in wrapt contemplation, communing, she declared, with the spirit of her lost child: and she seemed to derive so much comfort from this hallucination, that her companions made no attempt to convince her of its unreality.

But the whole of Madeline's time was not given to dreaming, for Margaret would gently draw her attention to the necessity of performing her part in their little menage; and with child-like alacrity she would attend to the wants of the blind mother, and perform such domestic duties as fell to her share.

Margaret attended to the shop, and when not waiting on customers, kept her nimble fingers busily employed in lace making; while the room in the rear, in which the three lived, was kept in order by the industry of Madeline. Margaret had, however, little time to give to her trade, for so many elegant women came to her humble establishment to purchase her most costly wares, that her stock in trade was soon nearly exhausted; and she thankfully saw before her a prospect of turning over her little capital so rapidly as to lay the foundation for a prosperous future.

Mrs. Euston had enlisted the sympathies of her numerous friends in favor of the widow and her daughter, but the young shopwoman, with her self-possessed, graceful manner, and sweet face, soon won for herself a place in the respect and good will of her customers; and those who once dealt with her, were sure to return whenever they needed such articles as she could supply.

How grateful this poor girl was for the helping hand held out to her in the sea of poverty in which she was plunged, language can never paint. She beheld herself rescued from want; from the haunting fear that loss of sight was to be her inevitable doom, and enabled to place her invalid

mother in comparative comfort. All these results she believed had sprung from her kindness to the unfortunate Madeline, and she felt the truth of the words her mother so often quoted—

"Cast thy bread upon the waters, for after many days it shall be found."

It was a brilliant morning; the snow had melted from the pavements, a cloudless heaven glittered in clear azure overhead, and the sun came down as a warm blessing upon the ever-moving crowd that sweeps onward through the length of Broadway. Clara Euston, in a dark blue merino walking dress, sable tippet and cuffs, and close-fitting capote trimmed with ribbons of a brilliant azure, turned from the fashionable thoroughfare, and came toward the new lace store.

Her fresh young face was bright with health and happiness, and her heart was full of joy in the present, and hope in the future. She had that morning received a letter from Ashton which breathed such tender and devoted attachment, that she began to feel as if something was due to him in return. She believed she had not quite made up her mind to bestow her hand upon him, but the certainty that he coveted it above all earthly treasures certainly gave additional buoyancy to her light tread, and to her heart a glad feeling of ineffable satisfaction. His letter had been enclosed in one to Mr. Spring, and bore only the date of the month; thus she was still kept in a state of tantalizing ignorance of his actual "whereabouts." She considered this a very absurd precaution, and pouted over it a little, but still satisfaction that she had heard from him was the predominant feeling in her bosom.

With her cheerful smile, and engaging manner, Miss Euston came into the tiny shop like a sunbeam, and even the face of the blind woman brightened when she heard the voice of her young friend; for Clara had been her mother's

companion in her recent visits to her new protégés, and had already made a warm place for herself in their grateful hearts.

"Good morning, Miss Seyton; how snug everything looks here. Really, Margaret, you have contrived to give quite an air of elegance to your sale room. Those draperies of cut paper have a charming effect, and you have arranged your fanciful merchandize with the skill of an artist. I trust the balance sheet is only as attractive as the outward seeming."

"I believe it is satisfactory, Miss Euston," responded Margaret, smiling brightly, "and I thank you very much for your kind appreciation of my taste in decoration. It only adds another kindness to those you have already bestowed upon me. I am getting on much faster than I had dared to hope, and with industry and good management, I can look forward to an independent future. Oh, Miss Clara, I will not speak of my gratitude, because I know it is painful to you; but when you think of the good you and your angel mother have accomplished for me, it will give you faith to walk in the noble path you have marked out for yourself."

"Hush, Margaret; do not talk nonsense. We have only done what is commanded us, and are we not selfish enough to think of the voice which will one day say, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, have ye done it unto me,' and claim our reward for only rightly using the means *He* bestowed upon us? Do not give credit to the earthly stewards who would feel self-condemned if the blessings intended to be diffused, should be selfishly hoarded for their own gratification."

"I will say no more, Miss Clara; but I shall only feel the more for suppressing its expression. Won't you come in a few minutes and see mother and Mrs. Gordon? They will both be brightened up by hearing the sound of your cheerful voice."



"I desire to see Mrs. Gordon particularly," replied Clara, in a low voice; "for mamma wishes to know how she is since she came to you. We feel much solicitude about the state of her mind, for mamma cannot bear the idea of again sending her to the Asylum."

"I do not think it will be necessary; but you can judge for yourself. She is perfectly quiet now, and sits for hours dreaming of her lost child; but when I remind her of the necessary business of life, she goes quietly and diligently about her tasks. It is better for her to have something to do that calls out her active sympathies, and it is beautiful to see the devotion with which she waits on my mother. The blind Christian is gradually leading back the benighted soul to a belief in the great All-Father, whose mercy she had doubted; whose power she had almost defied. Oh, Miss Clara, it brings tears to my eyes, and softness to my heart, to hear the simple teachings of that helpless old woman, who trusted when I almost despaired; and see how her trust has been answered!"

"'Hope on, hope ever,' is a good motto," replied Clara, cheerfully, as she followed her toward the inner room.

A door half of glass, shaded by a white muslin curtain, admitted Margaret and Miss Euston into a comfortable room, well lighted by two windows that looked into a small yard. A few necessary additions had been made to the furniture which Margaret and her mother formerly possessed, and a bright fire made the apartment quite cheerful. The sun was shining through the windows, and Mrs. Seyton sat within its influence, feeling with satisfaction that the golden beams were falling upon her, though she could not see them. While she felt their warmth, memory went back to other days, and brought to her mental vision vivid pictures of sunny meadows and cool, shadowy forests, through which golden tracery gleamed upon the grassy sward, as the breeze rippled among the stately trees, and tossed aside their branches.

As usual, Mrs. Seyton was busily engaged in knitting the brilliant webs which had suddenly become so popular among their customers, that the old woman began to dream of acquiring an independence for herself, without the aid of her daughter. Madeline was placed on a low seat almost at her feet, and just now her fingers were employed in weaving together a wreath of flowers, in which all those that typify the immortality of the soul were to be found. Clara instantly knew that it was intended to ornament the grave of her son, and she regarded the wan and wasted face with an expression of deep compassion. As the young lady entered, Madeline looked up vaguely, but immediately returned to her occupation, as if quite unconscious of her presence.

Mrs. Seyton already knew Clara's step, and she put forth her wrinkled hand as she said:

"Welcome, daughter of love and compassion; fairer than Sarah, more to be desired than Rachel, for whom twice seven years of toil were given, I am sure you are. Pray come near to me, Miss Euston, and let me feel the influence of your sweet presence."

Clara clasped her hand in both her own, and sat down close beside her.

"I am glad to see you looking so well this morning, Mrs. Seyton, but I beg that you will not flatter me by such comparisons as those you have just made. I am vain enough already, I am afraid."

"Oh, my dear young lady, I do not seek to flatter you. God knows that I would not dim His precious word by blowing the breath of adulation upon such a soul as yours. It is written, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' but I feel it to be a blessing to receive from such as you and your noble mother. May the Great Ruler save you from harm, and give you his most precious blessings, is the burden of my hourly petition."

"I thank you, indeed, Mrs. Seyton, for are we not also told



that 'the prayers of the righteous availeth much?' and I am very sure *your* petitions must bring good to those on whom you invoke blessings. The certainty that an humble Christian like yourself remembers me in her daily prayers, will give me double trust in the future."

Clara turned to Madeline, gently stretched forth her hand toward the flowers she held, and asked:

"May I examine them? They seem to be beautifully made."

She turned those wild, sad eyes upon her, and said:

"If a creature so bright and happy as yourself can bear that a breath from the charnel house shall breathe its chill air upon you, touch them. But if you shrink from death and the grave, leave them to one who has nothing brighter to think of. Miss Euston, you have nothing in common with me and my sorrow; do not, then, let its shadow come near you; better not even let the death flowers brush your hand, for their contact may bring you sorrow."

"I am not superstitious, Mrs. Gordon, and I feel so sorry for your bereavement that I should be glad to assist you to decorate your boy's tomb. A friend has placed a monument over his grave, and my mother bade me tell you that you can visit it with her this afternoon, if you feel well enough to go to Greenwood."

Madeline rocked to and fro with her hands clasped over her eyes, and the flowers fell scattered around her. She presently looked up, and asked:

"*Who* put that cold, hard stone over my little lad? Wasn't it enough that his life was passed in darkness, but his grave must be shut out from God's sunshine. No, no, let grass and flowers spring from his ashes. I do not wish them to be clogged in darkness, turning to clods of dull earth. Let it be taken away, Miss Euston—let it be taken away."

"Come and see it first, Mrs. Gordon," replied Clara,

gently. "Your boy's tomb is a beautiful work of art; it is only a shaft of marble, on which is poised an angel bearing a child away to the better land. The warm beams of the sun can still fall upon his last resting place."

"And *who*, I again ask, placed that expensive monument upon the grave of *my* child? Is it not a sad mockery that the being who perished of want, should lie in Greenwood with sculptured marble adorning his solemn place of nothingness? Oh! Miss Euston, your mother would not have done this; who then has? I insist on knowing."

"You must apply to mamma for information on that subject, for I do not myself know."

Madeline searchingly regarded her; she slowly asked:

"What name was inscribed upon this marble folly?"

"None; near its base is a female figure in bas relief, representing Grief—a delicate allusion to his singular name."

"Singular as it was, it was his birthright. Yes—from the cradle to the grave, his name was most appropriate to one banned, forsaken, as he was. I know whose pride erected that statue, and I repudiate it; but I do not know his true name. I *never* knew the true name of the man I once loved better than aught else on earth. He called himself Ernest Gordon, and as such I sought him, but found him not."

Clara flushed and then grew pale. Ernest Gordon was the baptismal name of one she loved and admired too much to believe him capable of such wrong as was here shadowed forth.

Madeline caught the expression of her face, and she said:

"Ah—I see that you suspect, if you do not actually know him. But I will not again ask his name, as your mother might be displeased if it were revealed. I will gather up my flowers and put them away, for it will be useless to carry my poor offering to a sculptured tomb. It was the humble grave of *my* child I sought to deck, not the haughty resting place of an aristocrat's son. Ah me! he should have placed

a figure of gaunt famine over him, as most appropriate to his actual fate."

"Do not put aside your flowers, Mrs. Gordon: they are the most beautiful offerings which can be brought to the dead, for they are types of our evanescent existence, and therefore always touching to the heart. Finish your wreath, I entreat, and take it with you this afternoon to Greenwood."

At length Madeline was persuaded to go on with her occupation, and Clara turned to Mrs. Seyton and inquired if she could further serve them in any way, as her mother wished to know if they were quite comfortable in their new quarters.

"Many thanks to your kind mother; we are more than comfortable—we are hopeful and happy; we are contented in the present, and have fair prospects in the future. Bear with you, Miss Euston, the united thanks of three grateful hearts."

"I will be sure to inform mamma of all you have said; and now, Margaret, I will go into the shop with you, and select some gloves, as I need a supply."

She bade Mrs. Seyton and Madeline good morning, and passed into the outer room. While she was selecting the colors she preferred, a tall, fair woman came in, and inquired for handkerchiefs. As Margaret turned to get them for her, the eyes of the stranger were attracted toward Clara. She fixed a pair of clear, luminous, gray orbs upon the young girl, and an expression of intense interest gradually shone in them. She pretended to be examining the handkerchiefs offered for her inspection, but was evidently not thinking of them. Margaret took out a pair of lace gloves, elegantly embroidered, and said:

"Try the effect of one of these on your hand, Miss Clara; they are the most elegant I have ever seen."

Clara removed her own glove, drew on the lace one,

admired its beauty, and ordered the pair to be put up with the others. As she laid them back upon the glass case, the rosy palm of her hand was turned towards the stranger. She started, glanced keenly at the sweet face of its owner, and suddenly stretching forth her own hand, said:

"I trust you will excuse me, young lady; but the strong attraction that draws me towards you will not be repelled. Let me look at your hand, I entreat; for the lines I caught a glimpse of just now, seem portentous of some calamity at this crisis of your life, which a timely warning may avert."

Clara buried her hand in her fur cuff, as she replied:

"Excuse me, Madam, but this seems very singular. Are you a fortune-teller?"

"Not a vulgar dealer in cards, but a reader of Fate through natural sympathies. I feel that I have been thrown upon your path to-day for some purpose best known to the Power that guides our steps; and my instinctive affinity with you bids me not to neglect its warning. Let me look at your hand, I entreat."

Influenced in spite of herself by her earnestness, Clara timidly held out her hand. The stranger turned the soft palm to the light, and carefully perused the lines. She said:

"Your life has been free from care, as any one may see who looks into your undimmed eyes, without the aid of palmistry; it promises to be a prosperous and happy one, if a near and imminent danger is avoided. I warn you not to take a sea voyage. If you do, the consequences may be fatal to you. Be careful with whom you trust yourself within the next forty-eight hours. After that, the danger will be past, provided you attend to my caution. I dare say you think me mad to speak thus to an utter stranger; but the spirit that rules me bade me do it, and I obeyed."

She relinquished the hand, and hurriedly resuming her glove, Clara said—

"I thank you, madam, for your interest in me, though I am at a loss to comprehend its source. If two days of caution will secure my future happiness, I may surely promise them to you. I have at present no idea of taking a sea voyage, though I admit that one would be very agreeable to me. Good morning."

"I see that you think me insane, young lady; but before Friday morning dawns, you will know that there is 'method in my madness.' I conjure you to remember what I have said. I see the danger looming before you, though I cannot precisely ascertain its nature. Your want of faith breaks the link which brings me in rapport with your future."

Clara smiled, nodded to Margaret, and tripped from the shop, convinced that the stranger was a fit candidate for the lunatic asylum. As the door closed, the woman turned to Margaret, and inquired—

"Do you know the name of that young lady?"

"It is Miss Clara Euston."

"What! the heiress to the Lumley estate, now in dispute?"

"The very same; and I do hope the suit will terminate in her favor, for a more noble use could not be made of money than she makes of hers. I owe everything I have in the world to her and her mother."

Madame Latude did not listen to her. She hurriedly pushed aside the box of handkerchiefs, and left the shop. When she reached the street, Miss Euston had already turned into Broadway, but she followed her as rapidly as possible. A sudden impulse moved her to communicate with Clara, and inform her of the actual position of her affairs, together with the nefarious robbery which had been perpetrated on herself a few days before.

She reached Broadway, saw the young lady crossing towards the Park, and she walked rapidly down the street. Preoccupied and careless, the throng of vehicles at that

point did not detain her; she went on like one in a dream; was struck down by an unmanageable horse, from beneath whose feet she was lifted and carried into a store. She was quite senseless and unable to give a clue to her name or place of abode; the owner of the establishment ordered her to be conveyed to a charitable asylum, where she would be taken care of until she recovered sufficiently to make known her residence.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### WHAT ONE WOMAN CAN DO TOWARD MAKING A HOME WRETCHED.

CLARA had made an appointment to meet her mother, and, after making a few purchases, they entered the carriage, which Mrs. Euston ordered to be driven to Mr. Linden's, she explained that, since Clara went out, a message from Mrs. Gaston had urgently requested her presence, as the family were in distress at the singular conduct of Mrs. Linden.

Of late, Mrs. Euston had so frequently been summoned on a similar errand, that she was becoming heartily wearied with the caprices of this strange being. Mrs. Gaston was a delicate woman, who could not bear unusual excitement without suffering from violent nervous headaches; and the constant strain on heart and mind which Mrs. Linden of late had perseveringly kept up, told upon her health in a most painful manner. When she could no longer bear her burden alone, she sent for her old friend to aid and advise her in the unhappy condition to which those she most loved were reduced by the conduct of this monomaniac.

Mrs. Linden suffered no member of the family to have an hour of repose; she invaded even the sanctuary hitherto held sacred to the venerable father, and daily threatened

him with bringing a suit against his son for bigamy; asserting that Linden had another wife living at the time he gave her his hand. Vainly did he offer an explanation of his true position, which has already been given. Mrs. Linden returned to it again and again, as a means of torture, for she saw that the fear of any fatal consequences to himself was not felt; the real dread arose from a morbid pride, which caused the family to shrink from the exposure of the misalliance with Madeline, and its wretched results.

When the carriage stopped in front of Mr. Linden's house, Mrs. Euston said to Clara:

"I do not wish you to come in with me, my dear. Trouble and sickness are here, and I can best aid them by going to my old friends alone. You can return home, and send the carriage for me this evening."

Clara submitted to her mother's wishes, and was driven away, while Mrs. Euston entered the house of unrest. She was taken at once to the darkened room in which Mrs. Gaston lay, suffering from acute spasms of pain. She put out her hand and said:

"I am so glad you have come, Ellinor, for the house has been in a turmoil all the morning; and, as usual, the excitement has made me quite useless."

"What has happened now? Another caprice on the part of Mrs. Linden? I really thought she had exhausted the catalogue, and could find no new method of torment."

"It is only a darker phase of the old annoyance, Ellinor. She has attacked my father with her complaints; of late, she leaves him no leisure—no quiet, and his health is breaking fast. Oh! Nelly, to see his venerable head dragged to the dust by this wretched woman, is more than I can bear! She rushes into his room at all hours, with her frantic complaints against my brother because he does not love her; and when the door is locked against her intrusions, she lies upon the floor beside it, and fills the house with her frantic cries. Oh! it is disgraceful! It is terrible!"

"Cornelia, you describe the vagaries of a maniac. Is Mrs. Linden an opium-eater? I have sometimes suspected it, from the singular appearance of her eyes, and her fitful manner."

"I have lately discovered that she uses morphine to excess, and to-day she is delirious from its effects. Hark! do you hear that cry? It comes from Amelia's room. Go to my father, Nelly, and inform him of the cause of the spasms she is suffering from. He is excitable, and easily alarmed; soothe him as you best know how, and comfort the poor old heart that is breaking over the wretched fate of his only son."

Mrs. Euston pressed her hand, and at once proceeded towards the library. She shuddered as the wild cries from Mrs. Linden's room echoed through the spacious hall, and when she reached the door she paused an instant to recall that evening on which she had entered that same apartment to announce to the father the news of his son's marriage. Though her own hopes were blighted, how sincere had been her wishes for Ernest's happiness; yet how futile had they proved; for *this* was the result of the brilliant match his friends supposed he had made.

"What was the mystery of that unnatural union?" she again asked. "What would be its ultimate result to those connected with this dire incarnation of evil and malice?"

Her knock upon the door was unnoticed, and softly turning the bolt, she entered. In a large chair in front of the fire sat Mr. Linden, with his hands pressed upon his ears, his head bowed on a table that stood near him, over which his long gray locks floated, as he endeavored to shut out the sounds that sent a bitter pang to his haughty spirit. *Disgrace* had come to his aristocratic home, through the wife that, he remembered with remorse, he had for a season considered more worthy of his son's position and talents than his own cherished Ellinor.

How had his pride exulted in the noble blood—the reputed wealth of his new daughter; and how lowly was it now abased! Every menial in the house knew that Mrs. Linden was raving from delirium, brought on by the excessive use of a stimulating drug, and he knew that every hour of his unhappy son's life was embittered by the fantasies of the creature who was never entirely free from its influence.

Mrs. Euston placed her hand upon his arm before he was aware of her presence, and when he lifted his venerable face she saw that it was wet with tears. The old so seldom weep that there is something appalling in that excess of emotion which produces tears. She took his tremulous hands in her own, and gently said:

"Dear sir, you must not mind this so much. It is only a fit of hysteria on the part of Mrs. Linden; she will soon be quieted, I trust."

"Oh, Ellinor, she is possessed by an evil spirit! Last night she wailed beside my door for hours, and no persuasions, no force, could keep her from it. Three times Ernest took her away, and yet she found means to evade him, and return. Ellinor, this woman is a curse, and a blight to our house. Why will not Ernest put her away? I have entreated him to do so; have offered him money, as much as can be called for, to provide for her elsewhere; but she refuses to go, and he *dares not* compel her. Yes, I live to utter the wretched truth that my son is evidently in the power of this woman-fiend, and fears to act contrary to her will."

Mrs. Euston was silent; she had seen this herself; she had heard Linden indirectly acknowledge as much, and she could say nothing in reply. She could only caress his withered hands, and show by her manner how deeply she sympathized with him. Her glance fell upon the portrait which had so long hung over the mantel, and she saw with surprise that its face was turned to the wall. Mr. Linden remarked it, and feebly said:

"I could no longer bear that those baleful eyes should follow me. I turned it this morning myself. I wish some one would take it away; it is not so much like Amelia, but it is enough to make me heart-sick. I remember the years that I sat beneath that picture, and contemplated it daily, as if it had been a shrined saint, dreaming of the time I yearned for, when we should all be re-united beneath the same roof, a complete and happy family. O, Nelly! it is hard to bear the bitterest sorrow and humiliation in the days of our old age! A few more months, and I shall pass away, with no peace, no joy, to illumine the setting of my sun. I shall leave behind me bitterness, strife and misery. *That* is the hardest thought of all. Nelly, my daughter, my heart's child, promise me that you will never withdraw your friendship from my poor Ernest. O, if *you* had been his wife, how different would have been his fate! Yet, I exulted in the great match I believed he had made, and you knew that I did so. Can you forgive me, Nelly, darling?"

There was something childishly plaintive in his manner of making this appeal, and Mrs. Euston raised his hand to her lips, as she replied: "I promise to be a friend, a sister, to Ernest as long as we both shall live."

"Thanks for this assurance, Nelly. Hark! what sound is that? She is coming! she is coming! I hear her steps; her hideous cries. Shut the door quick! lock it—lock it! She makes me ill—*she* destroys me!"

Steps were heard running rapidly down the stairs, and through the hall, and the wail that at intervals had filled the house, was now prolonged into a wild shriek that drew nearer every instant. Mr. Linden trembled violently, and sank back on his chair overcome with excitement. Before Ellinor could reach the door, it was violently thrown open, and Mrs. Linden rushed in, an awful vision she never forgot. She wore a scarlet dressing robe trimmed with ermine,

which was torn away and fluttering in shreds from it; her black hair swept nearly to her feet, and was in the wildest disorder, while her face was convulsed with maniac passion. As she recognized Mrs. Euston she stopped suddenly, and said:

"So *you* have come to see me in the extremity of my degradation? The wretches in this house have drugged my food; they have made me mad by their persecutions, and now they insult me by sending for *you* to witness my wretchedness. Old man, I will disgrace your son for this. Blind dotard, you shall never realize the wish that lies nearest to your heart, for I will heap such infamy upon your name, that *she* will refuse to bear it, even after I am put out of the way. You and your son have poisoned me; I will bring the accusation against you both as soon as I am well enough to go out. That is, if I am ever permitted to regain my health again. Mrs. Euston, this accursed house is an Inferno which I advise you to avoid."

"I am not afraid to visit my old friends, and give them such comfort as they need," replied Mrs. Euston, resuming her position beside Mr. Linden, who seemed to be overcome with painful emotion. Mrs. Linden glared on her with an expression of savage rage, and stretched forth her hands as if she would gladly catch at her, and rend her in pieces. She viciously said:

"I hate you; you are the shadow on my path. You stand between me and the heart of my husband. He will not love me, because *you* look into his eyes and forbid it. Go away with your deceitful wiles. I—I abhor you, and I will—I must destroy you."

With the wild glare of insanity in her eyes, she sprang with a swift bound toward her intended victim with fingers extended and ready to clutch her throat and press the life from it, but as she sprang forward a powerful arm was thrown around her, and Ernest, aided by one of the men

servants, held her firmly in his grasp. The cries and denunciations were terrible as she was borne from the room struggling violently to free herself. After a pause, Mrs. Euston tremulously asked:

"Is Mrs. Linden often thus?"

"She is constantly subject to violent fits of fury, but she has never been so unmanageable until lately. She absents herself from home for hours, and we none of us know whither she goes, or who she sees; after these visits, she is more turbulent, more exacting toward all of us, until life in this once peaceful home has become a restless dreariness, which I am beginning to find unbearable. Amelia's vagaries are undermining the health of my son and daughter, and they are rapidly killing me."

"I think that Mrs. Linden should be placed in a lunatic asylum, and treated for the mania from which she is evidently suffering."

"I have told Ernest the same thing, but he refuses to place her there. He *fears* to let her go from beneath his own eye. Oh! Nelly, what is the dire secret that bound these two together? That holds him the bond slave of such a woman as this?"

If there had been any reply to give to this oft repeated query, there was no time to utter it, for Linden himself, looking white and exhausted, returned to the room. He said:

"I came to apologize to you, Ellinor, for the very humiliating scene that occurred here just now. My poor Amelia is suffering from temporary insanity; she escaped from those in charge of her, and came hither to annoy you. I beg that you will pardon her violence, and forget whatever she may have said that was displeasing to you."

"I certainly shall not remember the ravings of delirium to her disadvantage, but I really think you risk a great deal in keeping Mrs. Linden in the house with your family.



It is due to the peace of your father and sister that you put her under proper restraint until she has entirely recovered her health."

"I am fully aware of that, but she will not consent. I cannot remove her unless she does so."

Ellinor looked at him, and saw that fixed, marble look which indicates that the last verge of suffering is reached; she shivered with an indefinite dread that the crisis approached which would bring desolation and ruin to the friends she most dearly cherished, and she faintly said:

"Then advise your father and sister to remove to Ivy Cottage for a season. It is a familiar home to them, and they will at least find there the repose they so much need."

"And my poor old father must be driven from his own home by the creature I have brought into it!" exclaimed Linden, with a burst of passionate emotion. He rushed forward, threw himself upon his knees before the old man, and fervently said:

"Pardon me, my father! Cast me not out from your outraged heart, for I am more miserable than words may express. Go, I beg. Go, with our good angel, and leave this wretched Inferno, with its spirit of evil, to me and my despair!"

The venerable father placed his hands upon the bowed head, and tremulously said:

"Arise, Ernest, and nerve yourself anew to the task before you. I shall not leave you, my son, to bear your burden alone. I bless you, my boy; bless you fervently, and the good God will not always turn his face away in wrath. If you have sinned, you have repented; you are bearing the bitter penance, and we must not shrink from our share of the punishment. Thanks, Ellinor, for your kind offer; but you can best aid us by spending as much of your time as you can spare in this unhappy household. Your presence always comes to me as a soothing blessing."

Ernest arose, took her hand, and said:

"You will not refuse, Nelly? We all gain strength from your clear judgment, and serene temper. I will not intrude myself upon you, and my unhappy wife shall be so strictly watched that the recurrence of the violent outbreak of this morning will be impossible."

"While they need me, my place is near your father and sister," replied Mrs. Euston; "and I need no entreaty to induce me to remain."

Thus it was settled, and a brief note was despatched to Clara, informing her that her mother would not be home till late in the evening. A message was sent to Madeline, appointing another afternoon for the visit to her son's grave, and soon after, Mrs. Pierre came in for a parting call. When she found Clara alone she agreed to spend the remainder of the day with her.

Lumley called for her at twilight, but a little persuasion on the part of Miss Euston induced them to remain with her till the return of her mother.

The three spent a very lively evening together; the confederates were in the highest spirits at the prospect of the success of their nefarious scheme, and Clara soon felt the contagion of their gayety. She thought Lumley less *brusque* than usual, and he good humoredly told her that as he had relinquished all hope of success in his suit to herself, she must henceforth class him among her best friends. He exerted himself to be agreeable, and never had Mrs. Pierre shone more brilliantly in the most *recherche* circles than on this evening in the quiet parlor of Mrs. Euston.

Clara regretted more than ever that she must so soon part from her perfidious friend, and she said, with a sigh:

"I wish that Ma Nelly could have been prevailed upon to let me be the companion of your voyage. There is nothing that could have afforded me more pleasure."

A significant look passed between the two, and Mrs. Pierre said:

"Ah! *Clara mio*, that pleasure shall yet be yours. When I become your uncle's wife, your mother's scruples will be set at rest. Then I will claim you as my guest, and *Mirandola* shall put on its fairest looks to welcome you."

They parted with a promise to meet again on the steamer on the following afternoon; and Clara, unsuspecting and happy, went to her own room for the last time for many weary days; and was soon wrapped in the sound slumbers of youth and innocence.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### AN INVOLUNTARY DEPARTURE.

At the hour appointed, Mr. Euston called for his niece, with a feeling of exultation at having outgeneraled his sister-in-law, he saw the unsuspecting Clara enter the carriage with an expression of serene confidence in his protection, which should have been a severe reproach to his treachery.

Mrs. Euston had returned home late on the previous night, and immediately after breakfast again went to Linden Place, to pass the day with its afflicted inmates. Thus Clara's maid was left to make her preparations for departure without suspicion, for her young lady was engaged with company all the morning, and the supervision of her wardrobe was left to the care of her attendant.

Kate had informed the household that she intended leaving in the afternoon, as her mother, who lived in New Jersey, was taken suddenly ill, and required her presence at home. Leave of absence was of course granted her, and she dexterously had the trunks taken away by a porter hired for the occasion, when the other domestics were en-

gaged at their different duties, and could not comment on the singular fact that Kate should require two large trunks to take her clothing, on a brief visit to her sick mother.

Everything had been so carefully and quietly managed, that Clara had not a suspicion of the deception intended to be practised upon her. When they reached the wharf at which the magnificent ship lay, steam was already up, and her flags were unfurled ready for departure. Clara said:

"I am afraid we are too late, uncle. I scarcely think it will be safe to venture on the steamer, for they might take us off."

"No danger of that, my dear. The captain is an old friend of mine, and would not serve me such a trick. Besides, it is their habit to keep up a great show of starting at least an hour before they actually leave. You will find your friend expecting you, and surely you would not permit her to go without bidding her farewell?"

"Not willingly, I must confess; and I must risk a little, I suppose, to see her once more. There she is now on the look-out for us."

As the carriage was slowly driven toward the gangway, Mrs. Pierre was seen leaning over the railing fluttering her white handkerchief toward her friends. In a few moments Clara was safely beside her, and she exclaimed:

"Dear love, I am so glad to see your charming face once more; and your good uncle is welcome as the flowers in May. I have felt forlorn for the last half-hour, for Mr. Lumley had an engagement which prevented him from remaining till you came. I would not go below, but preferred sitting here to watch for your appearance. I am so glad you did not disappoint me."

"Now I am here, I am afraid I have only a moment to stay, for the steamer seems ready to bound away every instant."

"Oh, no, love: the captain assured me just now that we

should not leave the wharf for some time yet. His freight has not yet all arrived. You must not be disappointed in the main object of coming down; you *must* see this beautiful palace, which one might fancy Aladdin planned in a moment of illumination from his wonderful lamp. Come, let us go into the cabin at once."

Clara looked toward her uncle, who nodded, and said, "You have plenty of time before you—go with your friend."

Thus reassured, she entered a magnificent saloon, fitted up with the luxury of a palace, and amused and interested, she was lured on from moment to moment, until the sudden heaving of the floor beneath her feet gave her a shock of surprise, and she exclaimed:

"The ship is in motion! we have left the land! Oh, uncle, speak to the captain, and get him to let us on shore. Mamma will be so unhappy—so much annoyed. Indeed, indeed I *must*."

She seemed so much excited, so suddenly alarmed, that Mr. Euston thought it best to reassure her until it was too late to insist on being restored to her mother. He quietly said:

"Do not needlessly excite yourself, Clara. There is some mistake. I will see the captain, and get it corrected. He will not refuse to do anything I wish. There, sit down, child, and be quiet. I will return immediately after speaking to him."

Clara sat down as he commanded, for she was trembling so violently that she could scarcely stand. A vague fear of evil had suddenly seized her; she remembered the singular warning against taking a sea voyage which she had so recently received, and she was resolved, if she could evade it, one should not be forced upon her. She looked appealingly at Mrs. Pierre, but she calmly said:

"Do not distress yourself, Clara; it will all be right.

Remember that you are under the protection of your uncle, and he will not permit any evil to happen to you, even if the steamer has started on her voyage."

"But Ma Nelly will be so miserable. If I thought my uncle had played such a trick on me, I could hardly forgive him. He would not surely lend himself to such a deception?"

"My dear Clara, rest assured that your uncle will do nothing that is not for your ultimate interest and happiness. Rely on him, for he loves you very tenderly—is most anxious to promote your enjoyment in every possible manner."

"But I do not desire any enjoyment of which mamma disapproves. I hope that my uncle has not attempted to take me from my home without first obtaining my own consent to such a proceeding?"

"Hush, my love, here he comes; do not say what may deeply wound his feelings."

With a well simulated air of chagrin, Mr. Euston approached his niece, and said:

"You were right, Clara. The captain thought we were to be fellow passengers with our friend here, and has actually sailed with us on board. However, you need not feel annoyed on that account, for we can return in a pilot boat which takes the ship outside the bay. The night promises to be a little squally, but I dare say you will not mind that, if we can only get back home in safety."

"Oh, no, no! only get me back, and I shall be too thankful to find fault with the means employed. I shall have no fear of the rough weather, for I had rather risk it, than give Ma Nelly the fright she will receive when she finds that I have not returned home. What time can we get back, uncle?"

"That is uncertain, Clara. Make yourself contented child, and be sure that I will take good care of you. You should feel as safe with me as with your step-mother."

He spoke as if he was annoyed, and she regarded him gravely as she replied:

"She has never been a step-mother to me, uncle, and I never heard you call her such before. I would do nothing that she disapproves, even if you wished me to do it!"

"I am fully aware of that, and that is one reason why I have——"

A warning gesture from Mrs. Pierre stopped the imprudent avowal he was about to make, and she caressingly took Clara's hand, as she said:

"I am selfish enough to rejoice in the mistake which assures to me a few hours more of your company, my dear young friend. Come with me into my state room, and take off your wrappings. You will be more comfortable without them, and besides, supper will soon be served."

Clara mechanically followed her; Mrs. Pierre removed her bonnet and cloak, smoothed her hair for her, and talked all the time in so agreeable a strain, that the young girl was insensibly beguiled by her fascinations into thinking how delightful it would be if she were really embarked on a voyage to the tropics, with the consent of her mother.

Presently the bell rang for supper, and they went out to an elegantly served table. There was a large number of passengers, and among them several gentlemen, who were acquaintances of Mr. Euston and his betrothed. On their return to the ladies' saloon, they came in to call on her, and be introduced to her young friend. Much lively conversation ensued, but at first Clara was preoccupied, thinking painfully of the alarm with which her absence would fill her mother's heart; but gradually she was drawn within the charmed influence which hung around this woman as a spell, and she found herself talking gayly, and enjoying the passing moment, almost forgetful of the disagreeable position in which she was placed.

The hours sped on. It was surely time for the pilot to

give up his charge. Once there was a brief pause in the onward career of the steamer, and, soon afterward, the increased motion assured Clara that she had reached the open sea. She looked around anxiously for her uncle, but he had left the saloon, and when she whispered to Mrs. Pierre:

"I am sure it is time for me to get ready to leave," that lady instantly replied:

"You need have no fears, Clara; your uncle will be sure to see you safely off the ship, when it is best for you to leave. Enjoy the present, dear, and let dull care be the portion of him whose duty it is to watch over you."

Half reassured, thoughtless, and full of excitability, Clara was willing to repose confidence in her false friend, and the ship went bounding on her course, leaving land far behind her, while she laughed and chatted with the agreeable acquaintances she had just made.

At length it grew late; the gentlemen bade them good-night; the other lady passengers retired to their state-rooms, and Clara was left alone with Mrs. Pierre. She yawned, and indolently said:

"I wonder what can have become of Mr. Euston? Shall we venture on deck, and see where he is?"

"Had we not better send the stewardess to ask him to come to us? I am very anxious to know how long it will be before we set out on our return to New York."

"It will be quite safe to go ourselves, and I wish you to see night upon the ocean."

Clara timidly followed her, and in a few moments they stood on deck. She cast her eyes around, and in the vast dim profound, was startled to see no vestige of land. There was only the measureless ocean, stretching far, far away to the horizon's verge, where the stars seemed stooping to meet their counterparts mirrored in the lucid depths below. The deep blue concave was brilliant with them, for there was no

moon to dim their lustre; but down toward the edge of the wide expanse, a thin vapory haze was floating like wreaths of white mist. In the distance, a faint black speck was receding from them, and in the certainty that this was the pilot-boat in which she should have returned to the shore, Clara forgot the awe with which the grand scene before her had inspired her. She exclaimed, in a distressed voice:

"I am upon the wide—wide sea, and yonder flies the boat my uncle promised me to return in. O, what does this mean?—What *can* it mean?"

A gruff voice spoke beside her:

"It only means, Miss Euston, that your uncle had no mind to risk your life and his own, by venturing upon that little craft in the face of a coming storm. Look at those filmy clouds yonder; in a few hours they will fill the heavens with wrath, and the wind will blow like great guns. I advised your uncle not to risk taking you back on that cockle-shell yonder. If she escapes the storm now brewing, it will be a miracle!"

"And we?—what is to become of us?" asked the young girl, appalled by the idea of a storm at sea.

"O, *we* are staunch and tight. We shall outrun the violence of the gale, and only feel its highest breathings, while that boat runs into its very teeth. Be assured, young lady, that we will take good care of you, and your uncle will be answerable for all the rest."

At this point in their conversation, Mr. Euston joined them, and said:

"The captain has told you how it happened that I dared not keep my promise to you, Clara. Come out of the night air, and I will explain all that seems mysterious to you in your present position."

In silent consternation Clara followed him. When the three were again in the saloon, he caressingly said:

"Would it be so very displeasing to you, my dear niece,

to find that I have deceived you purposely, that I may afford you a pleasant trip, on which, I had reason to believe, your heart was once set? You are on your way to Cuba, Clara, to be present at my marriage with your friend. By this time your mother knows where you are, and that I alone am to blame in bringing you away without her consent. I trust, my love, that my efforts to give you a pleasant surprise will not be rewarded with ingratitude."

Clara burst in tears, in spite of all her efforts to retain composure.

"Oh! Uncle Gorge, how could you do this? Poor mamma! she will come after me—I know she will; for she will never have a moment's peace till she holds me in her arms again."

"Clara, this is silly. Was a daughter never separated from her mother before, that you make such a fuss about it? *My* protection, and that of my future wife, is surely sufficient to satisfy your fastidious mother. Wipe your eyes and make the best of it now, for the trip you are bound to take. My wedding will be a sufficient excuse for it to your friends. Come, cheer up. I know you will enjoy it when this first outburst of annoyance is over. I really thought I was doing something especially agreeable to you in getting you off so cleverly. You will find your maid in your state-room, with such things as you will need. Go, and sleep in peace, child; and wake up to-morrow in a mood to forgive and thank me for what I have done."

"I, too, must ask forgiveness, darling Clara; for I joined in the plot for carrying you off with me. I love you so much that I could not bear to give you up; and I had promised you that you should be present at my wedding. See—this was the only means of keeping my pledge, for we shall be married immediately on our arrival at Mirandola."

Clara permitted herself to be soothed and reconciled to

the voyage before her; and the certainty that her mother knew how she had been entrapped in so unceremonious a departure, went far towards consoling her. The brighter side of the picture arose before her youthful imagination, and she began to think how charming it was, after all, to visit the land of the orange and the myrtle in such attractive companionship. Some consideration was due to Mrs. Pierre, too, for she was soon to stand in a near and dear relationship to her; and Clara wiped away her tears, and half smiled, as she said:

"I will try and not be ungrateful, uncle, for I am sure you thought only of affording me pleasure; though I must confess that I should have preferred accompanying you in a more legitimate manner. I will do my best to enjoy the voyage you have secured for me. Good night; I will seek my state-room, and try and arrange my thoughts."

"No, darling—rest, repose, are what you need," said the caressing voice of Mrs. Pierre. "Lose your own regrets, my Clara, in the certainty that nothing could have afforded me more sincere satisfaction than to have you with me on my return to my own home. Good night, love. May guardian angels watch over your slumbers."

She kissed her tenderly, and her uncle also did the same. He affectionately said:

"Be comforted, Clara, for I would have you do nothing that can affect your future disadvantageously. Are you not my brother's child? and am I not bound by every feeling of honor to guard you from injury as carefully as if you were my own? Good night, and slumbers light, my love. Don't be too hard on poor Kate, for she only obeyed my orders in getting your things away from the house."

Clara found her maid in a state of considerable trepidation at the view she might take of the part she had played; but the girl had been her attendant several years, and her young lady was too much attached to her to be very severe

on her for the deception she had practised. In fact, the sudden freshening of the wind, and the increased motion of the ship, made her rather anxious to get safely in her berth, where she wept herself to sleep with a vague feeling of forlornness and insecurity, in spite of the presence of her uncle, and the honeyed assurances of Mrs. Pierre.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A STORM AT SEA, FOLLOWED BY A SUDDEN MARRIAGE.

TOWARD morning Clara was aroused from her slumbers by a violent crash, and she started from her berth with a feeling of bewilderment at the strange place in which she found herself. The recollection of the events of the few past hours flashed suddenly upon her mind, and she felt the certainty that a collision must have occurred between their ship and some other vessel.

Throwing on a heavy dressing robe, Clara prepared to go out and inquire what had happened; but Kate clung to her, and frantically entreated her to remain where she was until some one came to their assistance. She unclosed her door, and by the light of the cabin lamp saw Mrs. Pierre, pale and evidently much alarmed, slowly making her way toward her; for the ship pitched so violently from side to side, that it was difficult to keep one's equilibrium. She exclaimed:

"Oh, Clara! this is dreadful! We have not been able to outrun the storm; it is upon us in all its fury. Hark! do you not hear the roaring of the wind and waves? and that crash just now was the shivering of the mast, I am certain. Where can your uncle be, that he does not come to us?"



Her room was so near to that occupied by Clara, that she soon succeeded in reaching her, in spite of the rolling of the ship. The two crouched down clasping each other, and endeavoring to steady themselves against the wall that seemed to heave and quiver with every swell of the tremendous seas that momentarily broke over the decks above.

"I was warned not to take a sea voyage," said Clara, "and I suppose we must all go down to the halls of the mermaids to dwell in coral caves, and associate with sea-monsters. Do you think the ship can stand this strain much longer?"

"This is only the beginning, Clara. I have been at sea in as bad a storm as this, which lasted four days, and every moment we expected to go down; but we came to land safe, and I have the conviction in my mind that we shall do so now. Cheer up, my dear, for I am not frightened—only a little uncomfortable. I wish Mr. Euston would come, and tell us what has really happened."

As if in response to her wish, the gentleman referred to appeared at the cabin door, and by a series of clever gymnastics, at last succeeded in coming near enough to render his voice audible above the uproar of wind and waves.

"I hope you are not frightened. There is a pretty stiff breeze blowing, and some of the rigging has been torn away, but the captain is not uneasy. I thought it best to come down and reassure you. How is it with you, Clara?"

"Dear uncle, I am very much frightened; and I begin to feel dreadfully dizzy with this constant motion. I wish more earnestly than ever that we had never left dry land."

"Clara, love, only think if you had not come with me I should have been alone, with no one to care for me but old Toinette, who needs help herself at such a time as this, even more than I do. I did not believe you were selfish, Clara, nor can I think so now," said Mrs. Pierre, complainingly.

"If it is selfish to wish myself safely back with Ma Nelly, whose protecting arms I should never have left, I am afraid I must be pronounced so," replied Clara, honestly. "I have no taste for adventures either by land or sea, especially the latter. Oh, dear! there goes another crash!"

The ship reeled and quivered in every timber from the violence of this second shock; she keeled to one side, and a confused sound of voices and quick blows were heard. There was a heavy plunge—a surging sound, as if the enraged waters seized upon the prey offered them with eager avidity, and with a violent effort the ship righted herself, and again went bounding on her headlong course.

The force of this concussion extinguished the lights, and they found themselves plunged in darkness as profound as that of Erebus. Clara was not sea-sick, but a death-like faintness oppressed her, and she felt as if dissolution itself could scarcely be more appalling than the circumstances in which she now found herself placed. Her uncle sat down beside her, and endeavored to reassure her by words of encouragement, but she was too much prostrated in mind and body to give much heed to them.

Mr. Euston soon turned his attention entirely to his betrothed, who never suffered from sickness on the ocean, and was not too much frightened to listen to his platitudes; for she knew the ship to be new and faultless in her model, and she felt assured that she could weather many a harder storm than this one, before her hour of destruction came.

At intervals the wailings of poor Kate were heard from the state-room, but she was too ill, and too much overcome with remorse at the possible result of her own share in bringing her young lady into such imminent danger, to be able to move from the position in which she had entrenched herself beneath a sofa that was securely fastened to the floor.

The hours crept slowly on, and at length day dawned,

pale and leaden in its aspect, revealing only the heaving ocean, lashed into seething waves by the wild winds that still swept over it. Toward nine o'clock there was a partial lull, and an attempt was made to relight the cabins, and provide something for the passengers in the shape of breakfast.

The very thought of food was loathsome to Clara, and when the light shone upon her features, she looked so pallid and worn-out by this long and painful vigil, that her companions were alarmed. With the assistance of the stewardess, Mr. Euston placed her in her berth, and insisted on her taking some wine and water as a restorative. She was then left to her own wretchedness for hours, while the storm slowly subsided.

Mrs. Pierre sat just outside of her state-room door, half supported by Mr. Euston, and thus they talked over their future plans, and arranged them as calmly as if none of the dangers foretold to those who "go down to the sea in ships" could have been meant for them. The future destiny of the helpless girl they had decoyed from her home was definitely settled, and Mr. Euston gave a positive pledge that within one month from his union with his betrothed, Clara should bestow her hand on Lumley. She gaily said:

"You offer me a tempting bribe to hasten our union, *mon ami*, for I will confess that my heart is so strongly set on the completion of the other match, that I would do much to secure it."

The infatuated lover eagerly caught at the hint so adroitly thrown out. He quickly said:

"Are you really in earnest, Lonore? Would you give me your hand to-day—to-morrow, if I should ask it?"

"Why not?" was the smiling reply. "What signify a few days to us, when so much is to be gained to others by our speedy union? I answer yes to your query, but that does not benefit you much, for we cannot find a priest to

unite us before we reach Havana, and when that near my own home, I shall prefer to wait till we reach it."

"I have your promise, though, if I can claim you at once as my own?"

"Assuredly; I do not retract a pledge I have once given."

"Then in my case the old proverb is literally fulfilled—'It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good,' for the captain will be compelled to put into some port to refit before completing our voyage. We shall probably make for Baltimore, as that is the nearest available place. We can be united there, and my squeamish sister-in-law will have no pretext for withdrawing my niece from our protection."

After a few artful scruples, only intended to increase the ardor of her lover, the fair widow was prevailed on to consent to this arrangement; and the hours spent in the dim twilight of the imperfectly lighted cabin, amid the lessening wails of the dying storm, were to the enamored middle-aged gentleman a period of most exquisite happiness. The fascinating Circe he believed he had won to love him for himself alone, suffered him to clasp her waist, while her head rested upon his breast, and her fragrant lips breathed such delicious flattery into his ears, as made him believe himself more to be envied than Jove upon his throne, with the imperial Juno beside him.

Toward evening the wind preceptibly lulled, and at length the ship only moved with the heavy undulating ground swell which follows a tempest. The saloons were again brilliantly lighted, and the tables spread for a luxurious dinner, and the captain came down to see how his passengers had fared during the storm. Like poor Clara, the most of them were still confined in their state-rooms, too ill to move; but Mrs. Pierre had already made a fresh toilette, and appeared as serene and handsome as if nothing unusual had happened.

With the bluff frankness of a sailor, the captain offered her his hand, and said:

"You're fit for a seaman's wife, ma'am, and deserve to sail with him every voyage. Why, you look as fresh and bright as if we hadn't been within a hair's breadth of going to Davy Jones's locker. Excuse me, ma'am, but that's a sea phrase that means going down among the fishes."

"I understand its meaning," she replied with a smile, "for I am a sailor's daughter, and it would be a shame to me to disgrace my parentage. Was the storm really so severe? I have been in one so much worse, that I had little fear of this."

"Worse in your estimation because it lasted longer, maybe, and was your *first* one; that makes a deal of difference. This was the hardest blow I have been in for many a year, and once I began to fear the ship would never weather it; but she's a beauty. She held her own bravely, and with a little fitting up, will be as good as ever."

"You do not mean that we must refit before we reach Havana?"

"Exactly, ma'am; you've hit the nail on the head. I shall be forced to put into Baltimore to get my rigging spliced; it was dreadfully cut up by the wind."

A rapid glance was exchanged between Mr. Euston and the lady. He looked triumphant; but in spite of the success of her plans, she grew pale, and shivered as if seized with a sudden chill. Her lover drew near, and anxiously inquired:

"Are you ill, Lonore? or are you terrified at the recollection of the storm, whose danger has passed away?"

"Oh, no—it is only a foolish dread of those *to come* that moved me. It is the penalty of a vivid imagination to see looming in the future evils, that may never arrive."

Mr. Euston did not understand this reply, and he said:

"I was not aware that you are addicted to the anticipation of evil."

"Nor am I ordinarily; but there is a dread upon me now that is natural to one in my position. After all, I may not be able to render you happy."

"Have no such fear, my adored. I am the proudest, the most fortunate of men. Only become mine, and I will surround you with such tender care that you will be happy yourself—therefore I must be so; for a happy woman does not make him who is devoted to her uncomfortable. Is it not so, my angel?"

All that was good in the nature of this woman was appealed too by his words. She looked into his eyes; her own grew luminous and tender as they responded to the feeling he had expressed. She placed her hand in his, and tremulously said:

"I will repay your devotion with such happiness as it is mine to bestow. Care for me in spite of all that may happen in the future, and I will be a true wife to you. I will be gentle, trustful, tender as my nature leads me to be; but you must promise to love me—*love me*, through evil and good report."

"I freely promise it—nay, I swear it to you, my Lonore; though there is not a creature living who shall be hardy enough to breathe a syllable of *evil* against the bright lady of my love."

"Thanks, thanks, for that assurance. Defend me—stand between me and the cold, cold world—and I will indeed be yours in heart and soul."

She arose abruptly and went into her state-room. There she found old Toinette just creeping out of her berth, a miserable spectacle of exhaustion and terror. Her mistress administered a restorative cordial, and then went to look after Clara, whom she had not entirely neglected during those tedious hours of suffering and uncertainty. At intervals she had administered wine to her, and spoken such tender and soothing words as were calculated to reassure her.

As the excessive rolling of the ship subsided, Clara recovered from the death-like faintness that had oppressed her; and she was now able to sit up and speak with her friend. Mrs. Pierre placed herself beside her, and taking her hand, said:

"Our ship has been so seriously dismantled, Clara, that the captain is steering for the port of Baltimore, which place we shall probably reach to-night."

Clara's face brightened, and she quickly said:

"Then I can return to New York by railroad; and the storm, after all, will prove a fortunate thing for me."

"But, my darling girl, your uncle and myself have determined on a new arrangement, which will obviate all your mother's objections to your continuance with us. I am so anxious to keep my own Clara with me—to afford her the pleasure I know this trip will give her—that I have yielded to the solicitations of Mr. Euston to become his wife before we proceed on our voyage."

Clara regarded her with extreme surprise; but she found nothing to say. Mrs. Pierre went on:

"It is solely on *your* account, Clara, that I consented to so unusual a proceeding. I am afraid your mother may insist on your return to her, unless, as the wife of your uncle, I have a claim upon you. To satisfy Mrs. Euston's scruples, your uncle and myself have concluded that it will be best to hurry our marriage a few days. We shall be united in an Episcopal church in Baltimore as soon after our arrival there as possible. Then we will write to your mother, and claim you as our guest until our return to New York. What do you say to this arrangement, my love?"

"I really scarcely know what to say. Uncle George should best know what will promote his happiness. I have no right to set up my judgment in opposition to his; but the charm of the voyage is over to me. I now only wish to get safely on shore once more, and return to mamma."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Clara, for your uncle will be deeply hurt if you refuse to go on with us. After risking Mrs. Euston's displeasure to take you with us, it is right that you shall at least prove to him that you are grateful. I warn you that he will never consent that you shall return to New York before carrying out our plans of a visit to Cuba. If you refuse to accompany us further, there is an end to the proposed marriage till we reach Mirandola; for I only consented to Mr. Euston's wish, to enable me to retain you with me."

Too much exhausted to contend with the strong will with which she had to cope, Clara sunk back upon her pillow, and faintly said:

"I suppose my uncle will do with me as he chooses, and I cannot defy his authority. If he insists that I shall embark with you, I have no alternative but to consent though I dread the continuation of this voyage inexpressibly. I look forward to no pleasure at its termination, for that which seemed so charming in anticipation now fills me with a vague dread that I cannot throw off. I have an intuitive feeling that evil will come to me through my separation from my mother."

"That's because you have never been so far away from her before. All these fancies are but the offspring of debility and discouragement. To-morrow, you will view our plans with different feelings; only wait till the vital principle rallies from the severe shock your system has received, and see what your inclinations will be when you feel quite well again. I am sure I would not have you do anything that would render you unhappy. It will be no gratification to me to force you to become the companion of my bridal trip, if your own inclinations are so violently opposed to it. If you insist on returning to your mother, I will induce your uncle to take you back himself, and leave me to go on under the care of the captain. It will change all our

plans, and render him very unhappy, but anything is better than to incur your mother's displeasure by compelling you to make a visit which is distasteful to you. I am hurt that it should be so, Clara, but I see that the wish to sever yourself from me just as I am about to stand in so near a relation to you, is paramount to every other. Why have you ceased to love me? Why should you fear to go with me? Do you mistrust me, Clara?"

Poor Clara thus harangued, could only reply:

"Oh no, you misunderstand me—you mistake my feelings. It is only the yearning desire to see mamma; to feel that I am beside her, which makes me so apprehensive. I will not be selfish, dear Mrs. Pierre; I will struggle against these idle fears, and accompany you to Mirandola. I shall be better to-morrow; pray tell my uncle that I acquiesce in his arrangements, and will seek to give you both as little trouble as possible."

"Now you are again my own Clara," said the wily syren, and she tenderly kissed the pale cheek on which the brilliant damask had so lately glowed.

Clara was too young to feel that she had the right of remonstrance. Accustomed to implicit obedience to her uncle, reared by her mother with the greatest respect for him, she naturally thought what he desired must be proper for her, and she resigned herself to the necessity of going forward on the path he had marked out for her.

By the time the steamer reached Baltimore, the effects of the storm had in a measure worn away, and her interest in what was passing around her began to revive. They removed to one of the principal hotels while the ship was refitting, and took possession of an elegant suite of apartments.

Mr. Euston lost not a moment in making arrangements for his marriage. A license was procured within a few hours after their arrival, and taking the two ladies in a

carriage with himself, they were driven to the residence of an Episcopal clergyman, where the ceremony which mated the two was performed.

The suddenness of the whole thing bewildered Clara; she had expected the marriage to take place before they returned to the ship, but not in quite so precipitate a manner. When they again entered the carriage, her uncle kissed her, and said:

"I have now a claim on you, Clara; and I insist that you shall accompany my bride to her own home. I will telegraph to your mother, and inform her of what has occurred: I will ask her formal consent for you to go on with us, if that will be any satisfaction to you."

"Do, if you please, Uncle. If Ma Nelly is contented that I shall go with you, I think I can enjoy the visit. Dear uncle, accept my sincere wishes for your happiness, and that of your lovely bride. I gladly greet her as my aunt, and promise her all the affection due to the relationship."

"Many thanks, my darling Clara," replied the bride, stooping forward to receive her kiss. Clara was surprised to feel that her lips were cold and tremulous, and in her dark lustrous eyes was the glitter of unshed tears. These tokens of emotion filled her young heart with sympathy, and she wondered if this brilliant, glowing beauty could indeed be attached to her plain, uninteresting uncle with that deep and true affection which, in her opinion, could alone hallow the marriage tie. She turned with a shudder from the doubt that assailed her, for it was too late now to indulge it. Love, honor, faith had been pledged to him, and for happiness or wo, these two fates had become one.

Little time for reflection was left to her; for the remainder of the day was consumed in visiting the most interesting portions of the city, and in the evening they attended the theatre. On the following morning the announcement

of the marriage appeared in the daily papers, and immediately after breakfast, Mr. Euston came into their parlor with a despatch in his hand which he said came from New York. It only contained the words: "Clara can go on with you and your bride if she wishes it. I trust you may be happy. E. Euston."

"You see, my dear, here is your passport; now be as happy as I wish my little girl to be; as happy as I am. I tell you, Clara, that to-day I would not exchange places with a crowned king. I have won a queen to walk with me upon my path of life, and I am contented to be only her consort. I have now but one wish near my heart, and that is to see my pretty niece brilliantly married."

Clara was scarcely heeding his words; she was reading again and again the brief telegram sent by her mother, and feeling hurt that no particular message was sent to herself. She abstractedly said:

"You need not trouble yourself about my marriage, for I am in no hurry to give myself away; besides, I know I shall never make what you will consider a brilliant match. Ma Nelly's ideas and yours do not agree on this subject; and I consider myself bound to abide by hers, rather than yours."

"We shall change all that, Clara; and a year hence you will be thankful that it is so," said her new aunt with a bright smile. "But we will not discuss that now. If 'the dead past can bury its dead,' the living future must bring forth its fruits. There is no need to force them; they will blossom and mature in due time. Give me a portion of your loving heart, Clara, and do not permit your mother to monopolize your affections to the exclusion of other friends who feel the deepest interest in your welfare."

"Indeed, you should not utter that reproach, for I love you dearly; and mamma has always taught me that to my uncle I owe the affection and obedience of a daughter."

"'Tis well that you understand your duty so well, and I

hope you will remember its obligations, should anything arise to demand its use," said Mr. Euston.

Clara quickly answered:

"Of course I shall, uncle," but she felt uncomfortable, and did not quite understand the drift of these remarks. She knew that Mr. Euston was opposed to her union with Ashton, but as that possibility had not yet been discussed in her family, she would not think that he had betrayed her unacknowledged preference of the rising young lawyer to his newly wedded wife, with the purpose of arraying her too against her own secret wishes and those of her mother. She arose and said:

"I will write a long letter to mamma, and give her an account of all that has happened since our departure. Have you any message to send, uncle?"

"Nothing, except my thanks for her congratulations. Yes—you may tell her that I am as happy as she wishes me to be, and proud of the beautiful wife I shall bring back with me to eclipse the fairest in Gotham."

Clara nodded, smiled, and vanished.

Lonore raised her bright eyes to his face, and languidly said:

"I do not desire to return to New York for some time yet. We will spend two months in Cuba, and then, if my wishes have any weight with you, we will go——"

She paused, and he said:

"Where, my angel? Only express your wishes, and they shall be gratified."

"Ah, you are too good! Take me to Europe. I have an earnest desire to visit Paris again; to see Italy. And, besides, if we carry out our plans with regard to Clara, some such bribe will be necessary to reconcile her to the necessity of giving up Ashton, and accepting his rival."

"Exactly—your forethought is charming. Yes—we will go to Europe in the spring, and spend a year in travel—



ling. My affairs at home will not demand my presence, and when Clara is safely married to Lumley, Mr. Spring can easily arrange all that will be necessary about their estate."

The bride half smiled at the facility with which she could induce him to adopt her views, and act upon them as if they were his own; yet a cold doubt suggested itself as to how long that influence would last, and what it could accomplish when her husband became aware of facts which the next few weeks must develop. She felt the need of some one to sustain her through the approaching ordeal, and she found means to dispatch a few lines to Lumley without the knowledge of Mr. Euston.

"The die is cast, Alfred, and I am the wife of Mr. Euston. I thought I should feel secure when the tie was once cemented by the marriage ceremony, but I do not. For the first time I begin to dread what may ensue when he learns all my deceptions. He loves me blindly, but should the veil be too suddenly rent, I fear he may recoil from me, and be willing to cast me off. Yes, I *fear it*, for I wish to be loyal to him, to live respectably with him, if I am permitted to do so.

"I have secured Clara. Come to us before the ship leaves Baltimore, as we shall be detained several days making repairs; you doubtless saw the account of the storm we encountered; it really seems as if Fate played into our hands, as this detention will afford you the opportunity of joining us.

"Mr. Euston has given me a positive pledge that in one month from our union, he will give you his niece in marriage. He is so strongly opposed to her union with Charles Ashton, that I have only to hint the possibility of such an occurrence to hasten him into extreme measures. Come, but do not let Clara see you till after the ship is fairly under way. Your affectionate LONORE."

## CHAPTER XXX.

## VILLA MIRANDOLA, AND WHAT CLARA MET THERE.

THE weather was delightful, and the steamer left Baltimore under the happiest auspices. Clara, with the elastic hopefulness of youth, had entirely recovered her spirits, and looked forward to the next few weeks of her life as promising unalloyed enjoyment. She had despatched a long and affectionate letter to her mother, and received a few lines in reply, giving Mrs. Euston's unreserved consent to her continuance with her uncle, till she could follow her to Cuba and reclaim her in person.

Not a suspicion of the true object in removing her from the protection of her mother, entered the mind of Clara till the morning after their departure from Baltimore. She was sitting in the saloon with her uncle and his wife, when Lumley entered, and approached them with cordial greetings and warm congratulations on the recent marriage. Clara was too much surprised and annoyed to conceal her feelings, and her reception was so chilling that he bluntly said:

"Really, Miss Euston, after sacrificing so much to overtake you, I scarcely expected such a reception as this. I broke every tie that bound me to your city so soon as I heard that I could reach Baltimore in time to come on with you. What's that the poet fellow says about the chain that lengthens as we go? I found out after you left, that the chain would drag me after you in spite of myself, so here I am, you see."

"I am only sorry that you permitted it to drag you on so fruitless an errand. Mr. Lumley, I thought we understood each other perfectly before I left New York, and if I had suspected that you were to become the companion of our

voyage, nothing should have tempted me to accompany my uncle and his wife."

She withheld the hand he would have taken, and looked so much displeased that Mr. Euston said, in a tone of annoyance:

"Clara, I scarcely expected such conduct from you to one of Mrs. Euston's best friends, one, too, whose interests are so intimately bound up with your own, that policy, at least, should induce you to treat him with more consideration."

"Excuse me, uncle, but I understand my position toward Mr. Lumley better than you do. I am not willing to be guilty of the meanness of encouraging hopes that must ultimately be disappointed, because my interests are balanced against his. Let the decision of the law be what it will, my hand is not the price at which the estate may be secured to either party."

"There you may be mistaken, Clara: for in my opinion it is the price, and will be given for it yet. But this discussion is premature; Mr. Lumley is *our* friend, and as such, I insist that you shall treat him with the courtesy he has a right to claim. I knew that he would join our party and that should be a sufficient warrant to you for its propriety. He has claims on the estate of my wife, which are to be settled on our arrival in Cuba, and we thought it best for him to join us without delay. As to Lumley's manner of talking, it is all nonsense, and should not be seriously taken by you."

Clara listened to this long tirade with glowing cheeks, and a resentful heart. She began to see the meshes of the net so skilfully woven around her, and she possessed sufficient spirit to resist the authority which she felt was exerted in an unrighteous cause. She calmly replied:

"I am more than willing to regard it as nonsense, but if Mr. Lumley means nothing by them, I beg that he will spare me the utterance of professions which are deeply dis-

tasteful to me. I am willing to treat him politely, but beyond civility he must not go."

"Pooh! nonsense! you will change your mind about this before many days have passed. Retire with your aunt and leave me to converse on business with Mr. Lumley. Lodore, I beg that you will bring that headstrong child to reason. *You* know how to persuade; use your powers now, and save me the necessity of using harsh means with one whose interests I have so deeply at heart."

Mrs. Euston bowed, smiled graciously, and twining her arm around the shrinking form of the young girl, she led her into her state-room. When there, she used all the eloquence of which she was mistress to reconcile her to the sudden appearance of Lumley: she explained so plausibly the necessity of his presence in Cuba when her own property was finally settled, that Clara was half persuaded that she had been hasty and unjust. She felt that she must endure his presence for a season, but she was resolute to be circumspect in her conduct toward him, and not permit those around her to gather any hope from her manner that she could ever be wrought on to accept him. Deception was odious to her, but Clara began to feel that craft must be met by craft, and on the events of the next few weeks, in all probability, her earthly happiness depended.

How to escape from the snare into which she had fallen was her next thought; and when she was left alone, she tried to form a plan of action which would promise some hope of deliverance from the fate she now clearly perceived was designed for her by her uncle and his wife. She knew how deeply interested Mrs. Euston was in accomplishing a union between herself and Lumley, and she began to comprehend the manœuvres which had placed her in her present position. To bring this about, Mrs. Pierre had given her own hand to her uncle, and with a sickening sense of desolation, she felt that only as the wife of Lumley would she be permitted to leave his protection.

Death, she believed, would be preferable to such a fate, but how should she evade it? She was on her way to a foreign land, completely in the power of those who had already settled her future destiny; and she felt the certainty that after having dared so much to get her in their power, they would never stop short of the end to be attained. In the seclusion of Mirandola she would be forced to give her hand to this unscrupulous man, and her weak uncle, under the influence of his wife, would be her most powerful oppressor.

Thus Clara clearly saw the evils that menaced her, without seeing any hope of release; she could only maintain outward calmness for the present, and resolve to watch passing events, that she might avail herself of any chance of escape that should present itself. After the appearance of Lumley on board, the few passengers with whom any acquaintance had been formed were kept at a distance by the reserve of Mr. Euston and his wife; and over Clara so strict a surveillance was kept up, that she found it impossible to communicate with them with any degree of freedom.

After a pleasant voyage, brightened by charming weather, the ship entered the port of Havana. Mr. Euston, accompanied by Lumley, landed at once to see about getting their baggage through the custom house, leaving the two ladies still on board. Mirandola was thirty miles in the interior, and when they at last went on shore, they found carriages awaiting them. Supposing that they were going to a hotel, as Clara had expected to remain in the city a few days, she unsuspectingly took her place in a calèche by the side of her uncle, while Lumley occupied another with Mrs. Euston.

To her surprise and chagrin, they only passed through the town, and soon reached the open country beyond it. Clara expressed her disappointment, and her uncle decisively said:

"It does not suit my views, Miss Euston, to take you to

a public hotel, in the present rebellious state of your mind. If I should do so, you would probably disgrace yourself and me, by repudiating the authority I can see you are ready to defy. It is not my intention to allow you any opportunity of doing so; for I have now the power to secure your future prosperity in spite of any opposition you may be inclined to make."

"Uncle, what am I to understand from this?" asked the trembling girl. "I think your present treatment to me is more disgraceful to you as a gentleman, than anything I could possibly do."

Mr. Euston looked unmoved; in the same peremptory manner he replied:

"You are to understand that my mind is irrevocably made up to bestow your hand on the only man who can secure to you the enjoyment of the fine fortune bequeathed to you. I have such information as convinces me that Lumley must win the suit; and I am resolute that you shall never throw yourself away on a penniless pettifogger, while so splendid an offer as this courts your acceptance. I have pledged my word to Mr. Lumley, and you may consider yourself as bound to redeem it. Understand me, Clara. I will not be trifled with, and I am taking you where you will have no appeal from my authority."

"And it was for this I was lured from my home," she indignantly replied. "Uncle George, have you, who have just made a match for love, no feeling for me? I cannot endure this man to whom you would bind me through a miserable life."

"Child, you are too young, and too full of fancies, to know what is for your good. I only follow the European plan of making a good match for you, without consulting what you call your affections. It is much wiser than the silly liberty allowed Young America in a matter of such importance. As to my own marriage, I have arrived at years of discretion, and know what suits me."

"And I, too, am quite old enough to understand what is best for myself," replied Clara, with spirit: "and I declare to you that no force shall make me so untrue to myself as to become the wife of Mr. Lumley."

"We shall see," was the only reply vouchsafed by Mr. Euston, and they drove on in silence.

At any other time, or under different circumstances, Clara would have been delighted with the rapid transition from the bleakness of a northern winter to the luxuriant verdure of the tropics; but now the beautiful scenery, the vernal bloom, had no power to charm her sad and foreboding mind.

A courier had been sent forward to procure relays of horses, and at the first stopping place her uncle, in spite of her remonstrances, changed places with Lumley, and from that time till they reached Mirandola, she was forced to sit beside him; to listen to protestations of undying love, and his self-gratulations on the happiness that awaited him in their speedy union.

Clara deigned no reply. She had already expressed her sentiments toward him, and she felt that with such a man remonstrance would be useless. She mentally prayed for help, and she had faith to believe that she would not be left utterly in the power of those who were ruthless in their determination to accomplish the destruction of her happiness. Earnest petitions to the All-seeing One could yet deliver her from the snare into which her confiding affection for a false woman had lured her.

Late in the evening the party reached Mirandola. A wide avenue of stately palms led toward the house, which was completely embowered in shrubbery. The carriages were driven around an extensive lawn ornamented with statues and fountains, over which a bright tropical moon shed its silvery radiance.

The house was brilliantly lighted, and preparations for their reception had evidently been made. They passed

through a gallery and hall paved with marble into a lofty saloon, the walls of which were nearly lined with mirrors. The furniture was such as a woman of elegant taste, who was regardless of expense, would be likely to choose; and something attractive courted the attention in whatever direction the eyes turned.

With her most charming manner, Mrs. Euston welcomed her guests to her home, and poor Clara wondered how a creature could be so captivating and yet so false. She would have caressed her, but the young girl shrank back, and for the first time refused to receive her tender blandishments; she now understood too well what they meant.

Mrs. Euston looked hurt, and sweetly said:

"The time will come, Clara, when you will judge me less harshly. It pains me deeply now to see that you are estranged from me, much as I have labored for your ultimate benefit."

Clara disdained to make a reply, and her uncle said:

"Never mind her caprices, Lonore. She is only tired and sulky at being forced to ride all day with Lumley. She will be in a better humor to-morrow."

Supper was soon served in very elegant style. Mr. Euston was perfectly charmed with his surroundings, and more determined than ever to bend his niece to his own stubborn will.

That night Clara slept, in spite of her unhappiness; for she was much fatigued, and the body demanded repose in defiance of the unrest of the mind. On the following morning her uncle delivered his ultimatum to her. In one week from that day she was to bestow her hand on Alfred Lumley, and they were to accompany himself and his wife on a contemplated tour to Europe.

The marriage was hastened at the instigation of Lumley, who insisted that the delay of a month would afford time for some of Clara's friends to reach Mirandola, and snatch

from him his hardly won bride. Mr. Euston acknowledged the danger of this, and regardless of the unhappy girl's reluctance to the proposed sacrifice, he at once named the earliest day on which it would be possible to have the previous arrangements completed; for a contract must be written, and a portion of the fortune she so dearly paid for secured to his niece.

From day to day Clara saw the preparations for her marriage going on. She endured the persecutions of Lumley in passive silence; seeing no light, no hope of release, yet trusting in her aching heart that she would not be left to the wretched fate that menaced her.

Mrs. Euston had ceased to make any advances to her; Clara saw from day to day that her uncle fell more completely under her influence, until he only seemed to live in her presence, and the lightest word that fell from her lips was as a law to him. He closed his ears, his heart, to the poor girl's despairing appeals for release, and inflexibly assured her that he only consulted her own good in compelling her to become the wife of an honorable and true man, who was desperately attached to her.

Was there no help? Where was her mother, her lover, her friends, while this iniquity was permitted to be carried into effect against one so helpless as herself? Was there not one to rush to her rescue on the wings of affection? Her mother had promised to come, what delayed her so long? was the feverish inquiry that arose in her agitated and wretched mind. Was the letter which gave so ready a consent to this trip, genuine? With the doubt came the fear that it was not, and Clara hastened to examine it again and again, each time with the deepening conviction that it was a clever forgery, and in her heart she suspected it to be the work of her new aunt. She began to fear that her mother was left in doubt as to where she was, or whither she had gone, and amid her own sorrow, the thought of the

uncertainty and anguish of her beloved mother at the fate of her heart's darling was one of the keenest pangs she endured.

Clara's personal liberty was not restricted, but she soon became aware that every step she made was watched, and any attempt on her part to pass the boundary of the grounds around the villa was rendered of no avail, by finding either Lumley or her uncle following immediately in her steps.

To avoid the annoyance of Lumley's society, she soon confined herself almost entirely to her own room, only leaving it to sit in silence at table when meals were served. Many efforts were made to draw her from this reserve; her uncle flattered her, her aunt regarded her with sweet and imploring glances, often accompanied by caressing words, and Lumley devoted himself to her in a manner a little less offensive than his former blustering style of wooing. But to all, Clara was listless and indifferent. Her approaching marriage and the European tour were discussed before her without reserve, but they drew from her no comment; there was no indication that any impression was made on her weary and pre-occupied mind. The shock of finding herself in so unforeseen a position seemed to have paralyzed her powers of thought and action, and the wretched girl often sat for hours looking out on vacancy, and praying in a dreamy kind of way for deliverance from the evils that threatened her.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HELPLESS VICTIM TO A SYREN'S PLOT. AN UNEXPECTED DENOUEMENT.

THE days passed on, and it wanted but two more to the one appointed for the completion of the sacrifice. The un-

happy bride-elect sat beside her window in the gathering twilight, and watched the deepening shadows without, in her own mind comparing them to the darkness which was so rapidly settling over her earthly hopes.

Clara had declined going down to supper, but her maid was sent up with a waiter of refreshments, which were at once rejected, and the command given to take them away, together with the light she had brought with them. Kate obeyed her; she placed them on a table outside of the door, and re-entering, rapidly approached Miss Euston, and threw herself upon her knees before her. She said, in a voice of deep emotion:

"Forgive me, Miss Clara, and let me help you out of this trouble. Oh! if I had thought things could have come to this pass, I would have killed myself before I would have helped your uncle to get you away from New York. Only trust me, darling Miss Clara, and I can get you out of his clutches yet."

She listened vaguely, and wearily replied:

"Go away, Kate. The evil is done; and you have not now the power to remedy it. You can never circumvent the plans of my uncle and his unprincipled confederate. Go away—I am tired, and ill."

"But if I can't do it, Miss Clara, somebody else can," replied Kate, energetically. "I saw a friend of yours to-day, and he is ready to risk his life to rescue you."

"He? who?" asked Clara, in a more hopeful manner. "Oh! Kate, I am afraid you are deceiving me again."

"Upon my life, my honor, I am not! I have here a note from Mr. Ashton, who is watching for a chance to see you. Shall I bring the light back that you may read it?"

Clara sank back almost fainting from the sudden revulsion of feeling. Kate hastened to bring back the rejected supper, and while she held the light, her young lady read a few hurried lines, written certainly by the hand of Charles

Ashton. They seemed like a revelation from heaven, for they afforded a hope of deliverance from the miserable fate that lay before her.

Her pale cheek flushed to the hue of the rose as she read one portion of his note, and her eyes rested upon it several moments before she spoke. At length she raised her eyes searchingly to the face of the girl, and impressively asked:

"You are not playing me false again, Kate?"

"No, no. Trust to me, Miss Clara, to get you out of this, and I will be true to you as steel."

"I *must* do so, Kate; for that is my only hope now. The means of writing to my friends have been removed from me, and you must be the bearer of a message to Mr. Ashton. Tell him I will implicitly follow his directions and accept his advice; that I trust to him to remove me from my uncle's power; and I will consent to any measures he may think necessary to effect my rescue from the thralldom in which I am held. You will remember exactly what I say, Kate?"

"I will, Miss Clara. I shall see him to-night in the summer-house on the lawn, and I will bring you news that will brighten you up, I'll warrant."

A few more words were exchanged between them, and then the girl hurried away, fearful that if she remained too long with her young lady, suspicion would be aroused against her, and she herself watched in such a manner as to baffle her efforts to serve her.

On the following morning Clara appeared at breakfast, looking more cheerful and composed than she had lately been; and in reply to some allusion to her approaching marriage, to the great delight of Mr. Euston, she said:

"I think it right, uncle, to inform you of the change in my views on this subject. I have made up my mind to the necessity of being married immediately; but I ask as a favor that I may be permitted to be alone as much as pos-



sible until Thursday evening arrives. Let Kate come to me; you are not afraid to trust her, I suppose?"

"No; I have no fears about Kate's fidelity to me. She is a true, good girl, and strongly attached to you, as her eagerness to advance your best interests has proved. I cannot express my gratification, Clara, at this wise resolution on your part. Lumley will be the happiest of men. He has overslept himself this morning, but when I carry him this news, I am sure it will effectually arouse him."

Clara repressed the inward shudder that thrilled her frame at his name, and said:

"I stipulate that Mr. Lumley shall not approach me till we meet before the clergyman; after that, if he chooses, he can express his raptures at my acquiescence in your views."

Mrs. Euston would have expressed her delight, but Clara shrank away from her, and abruptly left the room. That lady was, however, too astute not to suspect some *ruse* hidden beneath this sudden submission, and Clara found that a stricter watch than before was kept upon her movements.

The day was passed in alternations of hope and fear, that kept her in a state of agitation which was most distressing. It seemed to her that the hours were lengthened out indefinitely; and when the sun at last sank beneath the horizon, she felt as if a weight was lifted from her soul, but only to return with crushing power as the fear now assailed her that her preserver might find it impossible to carry out the plan he had resolved on as the surest means of withdrawing her from the protection of her uncle.

The windows of Clara's room opened upon a balcony, supported by an iron net-work, which offered a secure footing to an active person. At midnight the watch upon her was relaxed, and Kate only remained in her room as a guard, while the rest of the household was buried in sleep. The waning moon glittered above the dark tree-tops, and faintly lighted two figures that glided across the lawn, and after

reconnoitering the house, advanced with swift steps towards the balcony. To gain the floor above was the work of a moment to these light and agile forms, and, in a brief space, the two stood within Clara's chamber. The moonlight fell through the open window, and a white figure that stood beside it, half fainting with emotion, was clasped within a pair of strong arms, and words of love, hope, and reassurance were uttered in low, passionate tones, to which the overwrought girl could only reply by a violent burst of tears.

"Forgive me," she at length found voice to say; "I was childish and silly, but I loved you through all. I do not give myself to you as the only means of escaping a more odious doom. My heart goes with my hand."

"Thanks, darling, for the assurance, but it was not needed. Rivers, we may be interrupted, you had better perform your part in the agreement at once."

The companion of Ashton, who had stood in the shadow of the window, came forward, and Kate stood near her mistress while a few important sentences were uttered: a ring was placed upon Clara's finger, a kiss pressed fervently upon her lips, and she felt that she need no longer fear the pretensions of the detested Lumley.

The two intruders swung themselves down as they had come up, and Clara watched their receding figures until they were lost beneath the shadows of the trees. She threw herself upon her bed, weeping as if her heart would break. Kate endeavored to comfort her with assurances that they would get off in safety; but even while she was speaking the deep-mouthed bay of a watch-dog was heard—there was a rush below upon the lawn, and fire-arms were discharged.

Voices were heard talking in loud and excited tones, and presently steps hurriedly approached Miss Euston's room. Almost beside herself with apprehension, Kate threw a coverlet over her young lady, to make it appear as if she had retired to bed, while she said:

"Stop crying, Miss Clara, for the sake of the holy saints, and pretend that you've just waked up. Oh, Lord! what shall we do now?"

"Do nothing; say I am ill, and you are waiting upon me, it will be true enough; and find out who is hurt. I shall die if anything has happened to *him* or his companion."

"A knock came to her door, and Mr. Euston entered, while several negroes stood looking into the room. He called to Clara, who faintly answered, and coming to her bedside, he looked down on her, and said:

"You are safe in bed, I see, my dear. I only came up to reassure you about the noise below. Old Felix saw two men prowling in the shrubbery, and he fired at them; that is all."

"And was any one hurt, sir?" asked Kate, with seeming simplicity.

"I do not think any one was hurt, for there is no appearance of blood anywhere, though that might easily be concealed by the long grass. But I am of the opinion that Felix was dreaming. Good night, Clara; go to sleep, and look handsome to-morrow as you should upon your bridal day."

He left the room, and Kate crept to the window and looked out; a sentinel was placed beneath it, who kept a watch upon the balcony the remainder of the night.

Many fears for the safety of those who had left her assailed poor Clara's mind; but toward morning, in spite of her uncertainty, she fell into a light slumber, from which she awoke refreshed, and nerved for the events that lay folded in the next twelve hours of her life. She trembled at the possibility of what might occur, but she had sufficient faith in him she trusted to believe that he would remove her safely and honorably from her intolerable captivity.

At breakfast she managed to retain an appearance of calmness and self-possession, and on her return to her own

apartment Mrs. Euston came in, followed by her maid, bearing a splendid lace dress looped with pearls, and a magnificent *parure* of the same jewels to complete her adornment as a bride.

They were so beautiful that Clara examined them with interest, and something of her old girlish vivacity shone forth as she listened with complacency to the flatteries and praises lavished upon her by her former friend.

Every suspicion in the mind of Mrs. Euston was completely set at rest. She concluded that when Clara found the match forced upon her was unavoidable, she had made up her mind to accept cheerfully the fate which she could not avert. She listened to the loving messages of Lumley with a half smile, the expression of which was inscrutable to the astute woman of the world; she, however, thought that a few more hours would make all safe, so what did it signify what that smile might mean?

The day wore away scarcely less tediously than its predecessor, and as the shadows of evening fell, Kate busied herself in arraying her young lady in her bridal robes. The fitful color came and went upon the delicate cheek, but in the sweet eyes was a light which surely never shone there as a greeting to Alfred Lumley as her future husband. The misty lace fell like foam wreaths around her light form, orange flowers bound her hair, and the filmy veil could not conceal the rapid changes in her complexion as every noise sent the blood in vivid carnation to her cheeks, or caused it to recede, leaving her fair as a snow-drift, and nearly as cold. Hope and fear contended in her bosom for the mastery, for she knew that on the events of the next hour all the happiness of her life depended.

Mr. Euston came to conduct her to the drawing-room, where a marriage contract was to be read in both Spanish and English, and then signed, before the ceremony could take place.

There had been some slight difficulty in finding a Protestant clergyman; but at length the services of a young Englishman, who had recently settled in the neighborhood, were secured, and Clara started as her eyes fell on him; an intelligent glance passed between them, and she passed on to the upper end of the room.

Lumley, most elaborately dressed, and looking quite radiant in his self-complacency, advanced to meet her, and she submitted to be led by him to the seat beside Mrs. Euston, who, brilliant in smiles and beauty, sat triumphant.

The notary who had drawn up the contract drawled through it, and Clara listened with a painful tension of the nerves for the sounds which would herald her deliverance from the unreal mockery proceeding before her.

No sound of an arrival came, and she felt at intervals as if she would faint; but the necessity for self-control forced her to regain calmness; to maintain it, even when Lumley took her hand, drew her forward, and motioned to the clergyman to commence the marriage ceremony.

But he seemed suffering from painful indecision, and stood with his eyes rivetted with intense solicitude upon the door. Impatient at his delay, Mr. Euston at last spoke:

"Come, sir; we are waiting on you. The bridal couple are quite ready for you to proceed with your duty."

Thus admonished, he slowly advanced—unclosed his prayer book, and looked into the face of the half-sinking bride. She met his glance with one of mute questioning, and he abruptly closed the book, and said, in a clear, sonorous voice:

"I cannot unite this woman in the bonds of marriage with him who stands beside her, for I have already given her to be the wife of another man within the last twenty-four hours. Ah! here he comes at last to claim her."

Before a word could be uttered by the half-paralyzed

group to whom this sudden announcement was made, Ashton advanced into the room, drew Clara's arm from that of Lumley, and encircling her form with his protecting arm, said:

"It is too late to perform the marriage rites between this lady and another person, for she is already my wife, as my friend Mr. Rivers can testify. Mr. Euston, I would gladly have been saved from the necessity of this chandestine course, but your tyranny toward your niece left me no alternative. Only as my *wife* could I assert a claim to Clara superior to yours, and I penetrated to her room last night in company with Mr. Rivers, who united us in the presence of Kate Kelly."

Mr. Euston was dumb with rage, and Lumley thrust his hand into his bosom for a concealed weapon he always carried there. Ashton saw the movement, and caught his wrist with a grasp of iron as he said:

"I would advise you, Alfred Lumley, to be very careful what you do. I have a warrant for your apprehension sent from New York, and I have only to raise my hand to have it executed. You are accused of conspiring against the life of your cousin, and claiming his inheritance; falsely asserting yourself to be the son of Thomas Lumley, when I have ample proof that you are only his nephew."

"'Tis false—who dares accuse me of such double dealing? 'Tis *he* who is the pretender, and I am the rightful heir."

"Come forward, Mr. Atkins, and show this man how useless such bravado is."

The ex-police officer, whom Lumley thought entirely devoted to his interests, appeared in the doorway, and the detected sharper grew white as death.

"You here, Atkins? What does this conspiracy against me mean?" he huskily asked.

"It only means that you have been tracked by me through every step you've taken for months past, and you

only avoided being nabbed before you left New York by going off so suddenly. I soon found the clue again, and followed you up; old Spring knows all your dodges, so you needn't hold out any false light."

At length Mr. Euston found voice to ask:

"What does this mean?"

"That you've been regularly bamboozled by a pretty woman, as many an old chap has been before you, sir; and that you have come mighty nigh giving your niece to a good-for-nothing scamp," said Atkins.

Ashton made a sign to him to be silent, and placing Clara on a seat, he took Mr. Euston aside, and said to him:

"This man is not the son of Thomas Lumley—he is a swindler and an adventurer; but you have married his sister, and for the sake of that connection, and the name he bears, I will permit him to escape the penalty due to his conduct."

"His sister! you speak in riddles, sir; I cannot understand you," gasped the bewildered dupe, with an expression of doubt and anguish upon his face which was pitiable to behold. "I—I am quite in the dark as to the meaning of all this."

A soft voice spoke beside him, and a light touch that could lead him through the world, fell upon his arm.

"Mr. Euston—dear husband, let me explain in private. I have much to unfold to you; much to be forgiven; but I feel assured that you will not be inexorable towards your own Lonore. You have defeated me, Mr. Ashton—take your bride and go—this house is no longer a shelter for you."

She led the trembling old man away, who seemed either unable or unwilling to resist the subtle power that guided him whithersoever she willed. They paused a brief moment before Clara; Mrs. Euston mournfully regarded her, and then said:

"Adieu, Clara; be happy, and forget how deeply I would have injured you. I loved you, too, though you will probably not believe it."

Clara impulsively grasped her hand.

"I forgive you—indeed I do."

Lonore stooped forward, lightly kissed her brow, and taking a spray of flowers from her hair, passed on with a firm and proud step. Lumley had already disappeared.

A carriage was at the door, into which Clara stepped, followed by her two friends. A second one came after it, occupied by Kate and the trunks which she had prepared for this escapade.

During the drive to the cottage occupied by the family of Mr. Rivers, Ashton explained how he came so opportunely to the rescue of his bride. He had been sent to Cuba to discover all that could be learned of the antecedents of Lumley and Mrs. Pierre. He gained such evidence of Lumley's parentage, as must have quashed his claims to the estate. He was on the eve of setting out for New York, when a letter from Mrs. Euston, enclosed in one from Mr. Spring, reached him. The existence of the true heir had been made known to them, and they were filled with apprehensions on account of the abduction of Clara. That her uncle's purpose was to force her into a union with Lumley, there could be no doubt, and Ashton was abjured to find her, save her from such a fate at all hazards, and bring her back to her friends.

The only feasible plan to accomplish this, was the one adopted. Only as his wife could Ashton wrest her from the guardianship of her uncle, and in the silence of midnight, the murmured words which gave her irrevocably to him who had loved her from boyhood, were uttered. While prosecuting his investigations, Ashton made the acquaintance of Mr. Rivers, and accepted his invitation to remain at the parsonage while in that neighborhood, and

he, when he understood the position in which she was placed, readily consented to lend his aid to defeat the iniquity intended to be practiced against the helpless Clara.

The result of the interview between Mr. Euston and his wife was such as might have been anticipated. She told her own story; dwelt on the fact that after the death of Gayoso, which might reasonably be expected to occur within a few months, she and her brother were the heirs at law to the property they were so anxious to secure; that their claims were really of more weight than those of Clara. Mr. Euston soon discovered that her own title to the property on which she resided was as fallacious as that she set forth to the inheritance of his niece. The plantation and slaves were mortgaged for much more than their actual value, and in a few months must pass into the possession of others.

But his blind devotion did not waver; his adored Lonore still fooled him as sweetly as ever, and made him perform her will with the conviction in his own mind that he was doing exactly as he pleased. They went to Europe at the time appointed, and Mr. Euston even found sympathy for poor Alfred who accompanied them, and thought it unjust that he could claim no portion of the magnificent fortune he had tried so hard to secure.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

THE QUESTION SO OFTEN ASKED "WHY DID HE MARRY HER!" IS AT LAST ANSWERED.

MRS. EUSTON was filled with alarm when she learned that Clara had actually left on the steamer with her uncle. The letter left by Mr. Euston explaining the small share

her daughter had in the deception practiced towards her, relieved her mind of its keenest uneasiness; yet she was still far from reconciled to the departure of Clara in such questionable companionship.

Her first resolution was to follow her without delay, and had she known of the detention of the ship at Baltimore, she would certainly have overtaken them, and reclaimed her child. But no intimation was sent to her, and the telegram which purported to give her consent to the prosecution of the voyage, was written by Mr. Euston himself, and the letter subsequently received by Clara, was as she supposed the production of her uncle's wife. Her mother did write a long and affectionate epistle to her, but it was not permitted to reach its destination.

On the very day it was despatched, new and terrible fears assailed Mrs. Euston for the safety of her beloved daughter. Madame Latude had by this time sufficiently recovered to leave the asylum in which she had been placed, and before returning to Grove cottage, she called on Mrs. Euston and informed her of the frauds practised by Lumley, of which the reader is already aware. Mr. Spring was summoned to take a part in the interview, and he brought Atkins with him to confirm the truth of Madame Latude's statements.

Such developments were made in the ensuing conversation as completely set at rest any claim that Alfred Lumley might bring forward to the disputed inheritance, and Atkins produced the original promise from Gayoso to compromise by dividing the estate with Clara, a skillful copy of which he had given to Lumley.

Mr. Spring had only that morning received a letter informing him of the actual relationship existing between the two chief actors in this drama of fraud. The plot so skillfully woven by the brother and sister was now clear, and it was too evident that Clara was intended to become the victim of their conspiracy.

One hope of rescue was still left. Ashton had not yet left Cuba; a telegram was despatched to New Orleans, to be forwarded immediately, in which he was informed of Clara's presence at Mirandola, and the probability that unfair means would be used to force her into a marriage with Lumley.

The despatch found Ashton in Havana, on the eve of embarking for the United States. No time was lost by him in retracing his steps to the scene of his late inquiries, and he ascertained that the party had arrived at Mirandola several days before his return. Accident enabled him to gain an interview with Kate Kelly on the very day of his arrival, and Ashton appealed to her feelings in such a manner as to induce her to become an active agent in effecting her young lady's escape, while his friend Rivers entered heartily into the cause of the lovers. Assured that Atkins was on his way from New York with full proof of all Lumley's delinquencies in his possession, the friends thought it best to defer the final *coup de main* till after his arrival; the result has been seen.

While these events were progressing in Cuba, events of not less vital importance to the personages of our story were transpiring in New York. Mrs. Euston's preparations for departure on the next steamer for Havana, were interrupted by a peremptory summons to the house of Mr. Linden, where some terrible catastrophe had occurred, the nature of which she could not gather from the frightened and bewildered messenger.

But before we accompany her thither, we must follow Madame Latude on her return to Grove Cottage. On arriving at the railroad depot, she found that a collision had occurred very near the city, and many persons on the down train had been killed, and others severely injured. She ordered the driver to proceed at once to the cottage; it was ten miles, and two hours elapsed before she arrived at her place of destination.

Madame Latude had communicated with her niece several times during her detention in the city, and had heard from home on the previous afternoon. No misgiving that all was not right entered her mind. She paid the hackman his fare, dismissed him, and entered the house. No one came to meet her, and wondering where her niece could be, she knocked at the door of Gayoso's room. No answer came, and after knocking again, she opened it and looked in.

Her heart almost ceased to beat as she beheld the scene the apartment presented. Every receptacle for papers was open, and their contents had evidently been tossed over. A faint odor of chloroform filled the atmosphere, and an empty bottle was thrown upon a napkin which had evidently been lately saturated with it.

Opposite a decaying fire sat Gayoso in his large chair, stone dead, with an expression of horror and helplessness stamped ineffaceably upon his features. His hand was resting upon a sheet of paper, upon which the pen it still grasped had been in the act of writing when the grim conqueror arrested it forever. On the bared wrist was a small purple puncture, which looked as if it had been made by a sudden blow from some sharp instrument.

His form was cold and rigid, and it was evident that hours must have elapsed since death surprised him. Luella was not in the house, and it was subsequently ascertained that a letter purporting to be written by her aunt had summoned her to New York to join her there. She left the invalid in his usual health, and went thither to find that Madame Latude had herself set out on her return to the cottage.

So soon as she regained sufficient composure, Madame Latude proceeded to examine the scattered papers, with the faint hope of finding among them the confession which Gayoso had promised her. She knew that it had been



written, for she had seen the package which contained it addressed to herself, and she also knew where it had been deposited. The secret drawer was rifled, and her intuition told her by whom. She thrilled with horror at the thought that a woman's hand could have inflicted the fatal blow which sent a sinful soul into the shadowy land, but she felt the conviction that but one could have committed this crime, and she wrote a few hurried lines to Ernest Linden, entreating him to come to her as soon as possible, as she had a revelation of importance to make to him.

Madame Latude felt it to be right to communicate with Linden before the death of Gayoso became known, as it was probably of the last importance to him that the fatal event of that day should never come before the public in its true aspect. The health of Gayoso was known to be so extremely shattered, that he might have died any day, and she was unwilling to have her house become the scene of an examination for the clue to a supposed murder, if it could possibly be avoided.

The letter was received by Linden, but he had neither time nor heart to reply to it. Mrs. Euston had been summoned to a scene of suffering and horror that almost paralyzed her. On a couch, half crushed, lay the form of Mrs. Linden, and from the disconnected account she was able to gather, she learned that early in the day Mrs. Linden had left home on one of her mysterious expeditions. Four hours afterwards she was brought from the railroad depot in the condition in which she then lay. A collision had occurred, in which she had been so fatally injured as to leave no hope that she could survive many hours.

The best surgical assistance was immediately summoned, but after examining her condition, the physicians declared that nothing could be done to save her. Narcotics were left to be administered whenever her condition demanded them, and the medical men departed.

Appalled by the suddenness and the awful nature of the accident, Mrs. Euston sat beside the dying woman, and ministered to her wants. For several hours she seemed to be unconscious of what was passing near her, but suddenly she awoke from a fitful slumber and looked wildly around her. She lifted her right hand, which was uninjured, and made an effort to feel in the pocket of her dress for something she missed.

"What is it, Amelia?" asked Mrs. Gaston, who also watched beside her. "What are you seeking?"

"The package," she muttered. "Where is it? Give it to me. After risking so much, daring so much to gain it, I will not lose my reward. What has become of it, I say? Oh, more than life depends on that paper."

Mrs. Gaston turned to her brother.

"Was there anything in the pocket of the dress she had on when the accident happened?"

"I do not know; I did not examine it. The dress is somewhere in the room, I suppose."

Mrs. Euston looked around, saw a black silk robe, torn and soiled, thrown over the back of a chair. She lifted it, felt something hard beneath its folds, and from the pocket drew a small square package of paper, stained with blood.

"This must be what she is in search of, yet it is addressed to——" She paused, grew very pale, and looked at Linden. He was reading a note which had been brought him a few moments before, and the expression of his face as he glanced toward his wife, revealed to her that a new phase of suffering had been added to the burden he already bore. He mechanically stretched forth his hand, and said:

"Give it to me, Ellinor. I will take it to her myself."

He read the address—"To Madame Annie Latude for Ernest Linden,"—faltering, and would have fallen, had he not clung to a chair for support. That same name was signed to the note he had just read, and he recoiled before the shock and this sudden confirmation of his darkest fears.

As his hand was reached forth to grasp the package, complete consciousness was restored to his wife, and she uttered a cry so wild, so piercing, as to thrill the three with sudden terror.

"Not to him! Not to him! never!—give it to me; let me grasp it; let me carry it to Hades itself with me. Ha! ha! I can rule him through that torture yet; he will be half mine, even in death."

In her eagerness to grasp the papers, she attempted to lift her mangled form from the couch, and faint with horror, Linden motioned to Mrs. Euston to give them to her. She reluctantly obeyed him, for she began to comprehend how important they must be to Ernest himself, but she could not withhold them against his wish.

Mrs. Linden seized the package, glared wildly upon the unbroken seal, and pressed it firmly to her bosom. She muttered:

"If you loosen my death grasp from this, it must be by cutting off my fingers. Yet no—I must do better even than that. I must destroy this evidence of—no—no—he *never* shall learn that well kept secret. What! have I dared crime to be baffled thus? to bring to his very hand the knowledge I risked everything to keep from him? I—yes I will burn them; then all will be safe, and he shall go down to his grave, tortured with remorse—remorse that never dies."

Mrs. Euston felt that a dire secret rested between Linden and his wife, but she possessed too much delicacy to endeavor to fathom it at such a crisis as this, and she gave place to Mrs. Gaston, that the broken murmurs of the dying woman might not betray to her what Linden wished concealed.

He silently beckoned her toward himself, and placed Madame Latude's note before her. She read it, shuddered, and covered her face with her hands. She faintly whispered:

"*Could* she have done so ruthless a deed? and what could the motive be?"

"I am at a loss for the motive, but she is certainly guilty of the crime, Ellinor. She has taken life to serve some dark purpose of her own, and almost in the same hour, awful retribution has overtaken her."

"Ernest, secure that paper. It deeply, vitally concerns yourself. It was probably the acquisition of *that* which prompted her to commit this fearful crime."

"I will endeavor to do so; but to make any attempt to take it from her now, would throw her into the agonies of death."

Mrs. Linden's eyes suddenly flashed upon them. She hoarsely asked:

"What are you two plotting against me there? I know well enough that when I am gone, you will seek each other; love each other, as in those days before I set my evil eyes upon you, Ernest Linden. But you shall not entirely escape me; you shall still wear the livery of death upon your heart. Take your pure hand away from his blood-stained one, Ellinor Graham, for there *is* blood guiltiness upon his conscience. Look upon him now; see how he shrinks, and grows pale! Do you not see the consciousness of guilt in his face? Oh! ho! Ernest, you do not rid yourself of *me*, even if the grave does open its arms to enfold me."

Mrs. Euston involuntarily glanced toward Linden, and beheld upon his face such an expression of utter woe that she feared these wild charges were not entirely the ravings of delirium. She unconsciously lifted the hand she had placed upon his arm, and a triumphant laugh broke from the lips of the dying woman.

"Ha! ha! see how quickly the prude shrinks away at the suspicion of a taint of crime upon you; while I clung to you through all—found in your crime a stronger bond to bind me to you! Yet you prize *her* love far—far above

mine. Love! no—I hate you—I wish I could drag you down to the flaming Tartarus clasped in my arms. Then the same flame would light us, but not of love—no—no—of deathless—endless despair!”

Her voice gradually arose to a piercing shriek, and then died away in a hoarse rattle in her throat. Linden stood pallid as death, with drops of agony bursting out upon his brow. Mrs. Euston thought his wife was about to breathe her last, and she glided to her side, resolute to draw the package from her hand before it stiffened into the rigidity of death. Mrs. Linden seemed to fathom her intention, for she buried it beneath the bed clothes, and half raising her crushed form she defiantly said:

“It is mine—*mine*, purchased at the price of my own life, and that of another, and you dare not dispute my right to dispose of it as I will. Bring hither a light: Ernest Linden draw near to me: hold the lamp steadily that I may burn this paper which concerns me alone. You hear me? it is *my* secret, and I possess the right to make sure that it perishes with me.”

The pallid, ghastly face, with its wild eyes, and beseeching expression, appealed to him even more powerfully than her words. With resolute purpose Linden lifted the lamp, and approached her. She motioned to him to take the seat Mrs. Gaston had just risen from, and he silently obeyed her.

With trembling fingers she broke the seal—glanced over the closely written pages, and with a cry of mingled wrath and defiance, crushed the whole together in a mass, and held them toward the flame.

Excited beyond forbearance, Mrs. Euston said with lips white with repressed emotion:

“Oh, Ernest! what is it you do? Wrest from her the mysterious power she wields over you. Let her not carry with her to the grave, that which must so deeply concern your future welfare.”

His deep toned voice responded:

“It is *her* secret, Ellinor, and I have no right to tear it from her because she is helpless, and cannot defend herself.”

An expression of exultation swept over the rapidly changing face of Mrs. Linden, and she said in failing tones though there was still bitter mockery in them:

“You were always an *honorable* man, Ernest; and you do not waver even in this crisis which binds you to me through all the years of remorse yet granted you on earth. Hold the light nearer, it flickers and fades before me. There—there, that will do.”

She held the papers in the flame which curled around them as if eager to devour them; but the hand that held them suddenly relaxed its grasp, and they fell to the floor.

Quick as lightning, Ellinor sprang forward, and placed her foot upon them, and when the hand of the dying woman was again lifted, and the shrill voice shrieked:

“Give them to me! give them to me! I can feel if I can no longer see them,” with the intuitive quickness of her sex, she hastily snatched a sheet of wrapping paper which had been folded around a bottle of medicine, crushed it together, and placed it in the outstretched hand that nervously clutched at the empty air. Light was nearly gone; consciousness was rapidly failing, and her grasp closed at once upon the spurious paper. With a last effort she lighted it at the lamp, saw the flame spread upward, and sank back with an expression of triumph upon her features. With her last breath she muttered:

“It is finished! He will never know it now! Ernest, beloved!—detested!—injured!—adored! this last act makes you mine—*mine forever!*”

A few moments they stood in breathless awe around this awful death-bed—then Mrs. Gaston took the lamp from the hand of her brother, and Ellinor lifted the papers she had

so opportunely saved. She silently held them toward Linden, but he rejected them.

"No—not now, Ellinor. You have purchased the right to know all. Read them, and condemn or exonerate me as you may think I deserve."

"They may contain more than you are aware of. I have no wish to pry into your affairs, Ernest. You had better take these papers with you to your own apartment, and when you are calm enough, examine them at your leisure."

"No—no—take them from my sight. I know to what they relate. I cannot bear to look upon them. *She* is dead, and it can now be no injury to her to let you see why I was induced to marry her."

Thus commanded to read their contents, Ellinor put the papers in her pocket, and gave such assistance to Mrs. Gaston as was needed, before she retired to her own room.

With a beating heart she at length sat down, smoothed the scorched leaves, and commenced reading the confession of Gayoso. He seemed to have found some interest in relating the whole history of Amelia, for he went into such details as explained all that was mysterious in her position and history. It began:

"I, Albert Lumley, known as Fernando Gayoso, here make a formal statement of my connection with Amelia Waltham, now known as the wife of Ernest Linden of New York:

"The father of this woman was a broken down gambler, who kept an *écarte* saloon at a fashionable German spa. He was a man of good family, but was disowned by his relations on account of his disreputable habits. His daughter was not handsome, but she pleased me; she was the chief attraction to his saloon; for a spirit of frolic possessed her, and she was equal to the best actress of her day in mimicry and comic power.

"I had been a bad man, and my acquaintance with Amelia Waltham did not improve me. I did not love her; such men as I am do not love anything but their own coarse pleasures; but she amused me, she interested me, and I was filled with fury at the thought that she preferred another before me. I became a partner in the establishment, and lavished on her the ill-gotten gains I derived from that source. She led me to believe that she would bestow her hand on me, and I felt quite secure of the position I occupied in her regard, till a young countryman of my own came upon the scene.

"Ernest Linden was handsome, accomplished, and eminently fascinating to women. Enticed by the high play, for which he seemed to have a passion, and attracted by the gay *badinage* of Amelia, he came again and again to lose his money at the *écarte* tables, and enjoy her imitations of the most distinguished comic celebrities of the day. She became infatuated by him, and flattered him by a preference as openly expressed as it was offensive to me. She even induced her father to offer him a large dower, if he would accept her hand. Linden declined the *honor*, but Amelia was resolute not to be baffled, and chance afforded her an opportunity to fix her fangs upon her victim.

"I hated Linden because he had supplanted me, and I formed a diabolical plot for his ruin. He lost largely at play, and frequently gave checks upon his banker. For one of these a forged bill was substituted, to which the signature of the firm was cleverly imitated, together with the name of Linden upon its back. I hired a man, who was a habitual hanger-on at the saloon, to present this at the counter of the banking-house, and cause a warrant to be got out for Linden's arrest. This was left in my possession, for the police were in our pay, and such transactions were often arranged to suit our own interests. My object was not to ruin him, but to fleece him of still larger sums than

he had lost at our tables. We knew very well that the bankers would not willingly prosecute a foreigner of good position on such a charge as this, so we were safe so far as they were concerned.

"Linden was enticed into an unfair game, swindled of his property, and then the warrant for his arrest produced by the bully I had hired for the service. His fury was terrible, at the insult thus offered him; he struck blindly at the aggressor, and I—resolute to have him entirely at my mercy—plunged my knife to the hilt in the side of the wretch who had sold himself to my service. I struck again and again, resolute that the double crimes of forgery and murder should be fixed upon my victim.

"We were in a private room, and when the *mélée* began, I managed to extinguish the lights—I had provided myself with a long-bladed knife similar to one I knew Linden habitually wore, and when my purpose was accomplished, I threw it from me into the farthest corner of the room.

"Before I could summon assistance, the infuriated Linden rushed upon me, mistaking me in the darkness, for his antagonist, and struck a blow on my head, from the effects of which I have never recovered. I fell apparently dead, and when Waltham and his daughter rushed in at the sound of the struggle, they found Linden standing over two men, one dead, and the other so to all appearance.

"The fight had taken place without witnesses, and if the case came before the tribunals, the punishment must be death. At the instigation of his daughter, Waltham offered Linden the alternative of an immediate union with her, or arrest for the crime he had committed.

"Bewildered—maddened, with no time for thought allowed him; wishing to save his family from disgrace through his means, the unhappy young man gave his hand to Amelia Waltham before day dawned.

"The supposed dead bodies were removed to a cellar be-

neath the house, and consigned to the care of an old crone, until they could be disposed of without suspicion. My victim was buried in a hole dug in the floor for that purpose; but the old woman found signs of life about me, which induced her to use every effort to restore me to consciousness. I had reasons of my own for suspecting that Waltham would gladly rid himself of me, if he could do so without suspicion; and I caused my old nurse to have me removed to a neighboring lodging, where I could be properly attended to until my wound was healed.

"On my recovery, I found that the saloon was sold out, the establishment dispersed, and I did not know where to find any of those who had inhabited it. I was weary of life on shore, and I again commenced my wanderings by sea. Years after the occurrence of these events, I came back to my native city. Linden was there with his wife. Her services were necessary to me, and I demanded them as my right.

"To her consternation, Mrs. Linden learned that I lived; that I could release her husband from the thrall she held over him by the threat of betraying the murders he believed he had committed. To retain Linden in this slavery was her resolution; for she rendered his life so miserable that she knew this to be the only tie she held upon him.

"My enmity to Linden is now dead; his odious and unprincipled wife is disgusting to me; and at the solicitations of a woman who has proved herself a true Christian and a good Samaritan, I write this statement of facts. I cannot live much longer, and the bequest I make to Ernest Linden is my entire forgiveness, with freedom from remorse for crimes he never committed."

"FERNANDO GAYOSO—née ALBERT LUMLEY."

Many tears were wept over this revelation before the reader could gain sufficient calmness to seek Linden. She

knew that he was in the library with his father, and with a light tread, Ellinor once more stood outside the door. She had once entered that room to find despair; she now came to it as the messenger of hope and release to a heart which had sinned, suffered, and repented, with an earnestness and truth in keeping with a nature originally noble, though, for a season, fallen from its high estate.

Mr. Linden raised his venerable head as she entered, caught the expression of her face, and asked:

"What is it, Nelly? You look as if a rainbow was actually spanning the cloud in which we have so long lived."

"You are right, sir. The cloud has lifted itself, and the sun shines through at last. Read this confession, Ernest; confide the whole story of your life to your father, and once more walk in the light of a clear conscience."

Scarcely comprehending her words of hope, Linden ran his eyes over the paper, his breast heaved, his face glowed with excitement as he exclaimed:

"And this is what Amelia would have taken to the tomb with her! Oh life! hope! ye come to me once more in the guise of innocence! I am not a Cain! The blood of my fellow man, shed by my hand, does not cry to Heaven for atonement! Lord, I thank thee! Oh, Ellinor! I bless thee, as the messenger of peace to my heart!"

Mrs. Euston glided from the apartment, and we draw a veil over the scene that ensued between the father and son.

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### CONCLUSION.

ALL IS WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

MRS. LINDEN was quietly consigned to her grave in Greenwood. The murder of Gayoso was a mystery which

was never unravelled, and such measures were taken as led the world to believe that he died of disease of the heart. But in the pocket of the dress worn by Mrs. Linden on that day, was found a curiously fashioned instrument resembling a tiny cimeter, made of gold, which on examination proved to be a more deadly and certain weapon of destruction than a battle axe wielded by the strongest arm.

A few days after the funeral, Clara reached New York with her happy and triumphant husband. The estate was now hers beyond dispute, but on learning the true history of the cousins, she settled on Madame Latude a handsome sum, and her sense of justice could not be satisfied without providing for Lumley in a liberal manner. An annuity sufficient to supply every rational want was secured to him for life.

Mrs. Seyton and her daughter had already established a flourishing business, but Madeline had fallen into a state of melancholy madness which rendered it necessary to place her where she could be properly taken care of. When Linden became aware of this, he would not consent that she should be placed in an asylum; he caused a room in his father's house to be fitted up for her accommodation, and performed the penance he considered due to his wrongs against her, by watching over the vagaries of her wandering mind with a patience and tenderness which proved how noble was the nature which had so long strayed from the path of rectitude; and is there not "more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just men?"

For the few remaining months of her life, all that the most devoted care could do to alleviate her settled melancholy was done by him. One bright day in early autumn, she was laid beside the little lad who had been the one joy of her broken life.

Three years rolled away, and the venerable father was summoned to join the caravan of death, which gathers its



passengers at every flitting moment of time. Serene and resigned, he had but one wish unfulfilled.

His son had recovered his health and spirits, he had taken a stand among men which promised a brilliant future, but the darling wish that lay nearest the father's heart was not yet realized.

Ellinor sat beside his couch, his son bent over him to catch his last words. He held their hands clasped in his own, and a bright smile irradiated his features as he joined them together.

Linden earnestly regarded the bowed head; he whispered:

"Shall it ever be, Ellinor? Can you trust me?"

A faint pressure of the hand replied, and the dying lips murmured:

"Thanks, my child—my daughter at last! I am happy; I am now ready to go. Oh, Father! Jehovah! receive thy erring son, and grant him forgiveness;" and the released spirit sped away to the mansions of light.

THE END.