

CHEAP EDITION OF POPULAR AUTHORS.

LOVE IN A MAZE;

OR,

THE DEBUTANTE'S DISENCHANTMENT.

BY MRS. E. F. ELLET.



New York:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

Price Twenty-five Cents.

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Full of Love

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LOVE IN A MAZE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE COQUETTE'S COUNSEL.

Two maidens, in the bloom of youth, were in a front chamber of a large and splendid mansion on Madison avenue, late one afternoon in December, 1865.

One was reclining on a sofa covered with amber-colored silk, looking at some papers lying on a table before her. Her form was exquisitely symmetrical, and rounded into slight embonpoint; her features were piquant and pretty, and her complexion a clear olive with a rich rose-tint in the cheeks. Her eyes were long, almond-shaped, dark hazel, and shaded by black lashes, corresponding with the penciled line of eyebrows, and the jetty rings clustering on her forehead. From this low forehead the masses of raven hair were brushed back and laid in a massive coil on the top of her head. Every lock that could escape from this confinement curled in willful defiance of order, adding a picturesque grace of its own to the dusky framing of the face.

Her companion sat in a cushioned easy-chair, holding a small hand-mirror, in which she was contemplating the coiffure she had just finished. It was a simple one; her hair waved, without clustering in rings, and was brown, with a tinge of chestnut. It was brushed back, and the light ringlets hung on either side to her neck. Her face was interesting from the depth of character it revealed. The features were strongly outlined, but classic in regularity, and were marked by a pensive expression in repose; though they lighted up into beauty when she smiled. Her complexion was fair and clear, without color, except when it was called up by some transient excitement.

The habitual air was thoughtful and earnest, in contrast to the changeful spirit of her friend, whose mirth would burst forth as suddenly and brightly as the flash of April sunshine, while joy danced in her dusky eyes, and her clear, ringing laugh infected all in her presence.

Miss Ruhama Seaforth laughed a great deal, and too often at what others thought grave matters. She could be angry, too, and curl her lip scornfully, and look as haughty as any

queen who ever walked the stage; but she more frequently found subjects for merriment than indignation.

In short, Ruhama might be called a butterfly or a fairy, or anything that suited a poet's fancy, expressive of her habit of roving from one attractive scene to another in search of amusement.

Olive Weston more aptly represented a peri, or a wood-nymph, of the floating, contemplative, meditative order.

These two girls had formed a close friendship at school, and promised each other, when the time for parting came, to maintain it through life. Their studies had been the same, and their social position—in different circles—was equal, though fortune had been diverse in her gifts.

Ruhama Seaforth was the daughter of a wealthy banker, and the party to come off that evening was to be given in her own drawing-rooms. She had sent for Olive to spend two or three days with her, that together they might superintend the making of their ball dresses, and the decorative arrangements generally. The girl's mother had died when she was a child, and a spinster aunt superintended the household.

Miss Weston's father was a lawyer, in good practice, but having no fortune. His residence was a handsome country-seat some ten miles up the Hudson, and looking on the river from the summit of a green slope sprinkled with shade-trees.

Olive's mother was an invalid, and on her account the family made frequent visits to the city in cold weather, stopping at one of the hotels for several days at a time.

Both the young girls had been introduced into society, and had mingled in the gayeties of a metropolitan winter since they had left school.

When her mother was not well enough to chaperone her, Olive went out with some friend; often with Mrs. Blount and her daughter Emily, neighbors of her parents, who spent all the winter months in town.

It would be hard to say whether Ruhama or Olive had been most admired. Their style of beauty was so very different.

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In point of mental cultivation Miss Weston was superior, for she inherited her father's literary tastes, and spent much of her time in judicious reading. She was accustomed also to read to her mother, who loved poetry and the drama; and, possessing a native dramatic faculty, had become artistic in her elocution.

Both girls had fine musical culture, though neither had extraordinary talent for the art.

"Now, child," said Olive, after an unusual silence, "it is time for you to try on your dress."

"I will send for lights," answered Ruhama. "The silk must be seen by gaslight, you know. Have you tried yours?"

"Yes; and the alterations are made."

"Then ring the bell, please, and let Ada bring my dress."

The gas was lighted, the shutters were closed, and the amber silk curtains lowered. Their sweeping folds corresponded with the delicate rich groundwork of the carpet, which was set off by large bouquets of roses, tulips, and other bright flowers, with leaves of vivid green.

The wardrobe, bureau, and large pieces of furniture were of polished rosewood; the Psyche glass reflected the full length figure; and the rest of the furniture corresponded in splendor.

The surroundings well matched the beauty of the two fair creatures, who had both made their entrance into life with such promise of success.

After the dresses were fitted and pronounced perfect, they were taken off, and the two sat to dinner, served in their room on this occasion. There was half an hour yet for lounging before the momentous business of dressing need be commenced. The talk they fell into will help to show the character of each.

"You say you never cared to be a belle, Olive," observed Ruhama. "Now, don't play sentimental to-night. Suppose we change characters? I will be gentle and dignified, and you shall sport coquetry."

"I am quite ignorant of the art."

"Oh, it is easy enough! It is the perfume to the rose; the color to the violet; the music to the strings of an instrument. You can keep a score of admirers in suspense at the same time."

"You are not so heartless, Ruhama, as to think that a triumph!"

"Ah, you need not look so demure! Come, I am resolved you shall begin this evening to taste the joy of flirtation! I will play into your hands. There is Tom Wyatt, for one—But why do you color so? Olive—naughty girl, you have been keeping a secret from me. You dare not say you are engaged to Tom!"

"No, Ruhama, for it would not be true!"

"Then why do you blush like a milkmaid, I should like to know?"

"Not because I care for him," returned Olive, with a little laugh of embarrassment. "But—"

"But what? Come, you will have to confess. You cannot hide anything from me that I will not dig out. Ah! I remember now; Tom's messenger brought something to you yesterday afternoon; what was it? You did not tell me of anything, and I forgot to ask."

"It was not worth your being curious about, Ruhama!"

"It was, if you make a mystery of it; and you look as guilty as possible, this very minute. Come, what was it?"

"Only—a letter."

"Only a letter! And what had Mr. Tom to write to you about? You may as well tell me, Olive for if you don't I shall ask him."

She had taken Olive by the shoulders, and peered into her face with a comical expression of determined authority.

Miss Weston drew a note from her pocket. "Here it is," she said. "Read it, and be discreet, I beg of you, for once in your life, Ruhama."

The girl took the dainty little missive, and looked suddenly serious.

"A declaration of love! Drawn up in regular form. Good in love and law!"

"Give it back to me!"

And taking it from her friend's hand, Olive twisted the note up, lighted it at the gas-jet, and when it was in a blaze threw it on the hearth under the polished grate.

"Did I ever see such coolness!" exclaimed Ruhama. "Burn a love-letter in that style! You must be a heartless girl!"

"An avowal of love ought to be put out of sight and out of mind, too, unless—"

"Unless the love is returned! And what answer did you send to this? Or have you sent any?"

"Certainly; I sent a prompt refusal."

"A refusal! Poor Tom! Well, I never dreamed of this! I never thought Tom's wings were clipped."

"It was a great surprise to me, I assure you. If I had ever flirted with him, I should blame myself severely."

"No; I have done all the flirting. And to think he should propose to you, and not to me!"

"Do you care for him, Ruhama?"

"Not the toss of a glove! But I own to a little mortification. Tom is a dead flirt himself, and, considering the sport we have had, it does astonish me that he should go and send you such a matter-of-fact, hearty, passionate declaration! The words seemed to burn! I did not give him credit for such depth of nature. He was always light and frivolous with me. To think you should have been the one to bring such a rich heart to the surface and the light!"

"If you could not love him, Ruhama, you surely cannot wish for the opportunity of refusing him!"

"Oh, no! I never had the least desire to hurt his feelings; not the least in the world! I did not know he had any to speak of; and I

confess to a little disappointment. He was such an excellent subject for coquetry."

"Ruhama, you wrong yourself by pretending to be such a coquette."

"A coquette!" cried the girl, resuming her vivacity. "Oh, a coquette is like a butterfly, roving from flower to flower and sipping the sweets of all, while his own wings are unfettered. Variety prevents the taste from being cloyed or wearied; and the dread of losing the airy, dancing phantom stimulates to a perpetual chase. Only try it, Olive, for once!"

"What would be the worth of success?"

"It is the most potent love-charm in the world. You have heard of such things?"

"I read of one in a French novel."

"And I found a pretty story of one in my Italian lesson. One of Count Montagno's daughters, Giulia, had a gold bodkin of a witch, and wore it in her hair. The spell caused a Marchese to transfer his affections from his betrothed bride to Giulia, and he would have married her, but, somehow, she offended the witch the night before her wedding; the bodkin fell out of her hair and the charm was broken. So the Marchese returned to his first love."

"The moral of your story proves the evil of such arts."

"Oh, no! The power of the charm was indisputable!"

Olive shook her head.

"I am determined, my dear, that you shall carry the spell to-night. If no other consideration will move you, let me tell you, you are too lovely to be spared by the shafts of envy; and we shall have some wallflowers in the party. I know all about a certain person's attentions to you; and I do not want to be noticed as the friend of the poor girl who is in love with a man who cares so little about her. That would be a variation of 'the house that Jack built' not at all to my mind."

"Ruhama!" exclaimed Olive, with a look of surprise and reproach.

"There, don't be angry! It doesn't become your style at all! It suits mine better. I will do all the resentment for you. Come; it is time for us to dress; and here comes the maid to help us."

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO SISTERS.

A LONELY district of sterile land stretches for miles along a part of the coast overlooking the wild and stormy Atlantic.

It is a broad bluff; the face of the cliff being for the most part sheer, precipitous, and piled with broken rocks. The ground is only cultivated in spots here and there; the rest is a dreary waste, with only a sparse growth of trees, half denuded of their leaves even in summer by the fierce blasts that sweep the common.

At barren intervals were seen detached dwellings of logs or stone, inhabited by

wreckers, a disreputable class, always ready to reap their harvest from the woes of the unfortunate, though boastful that on many occasions they had saved the lives of the drowning, while seeking to rob them of the plunder the waves had spared.

A remote and gloomy-looking house of large size, and sheltered by a few old trees, with a spacious garden in the rear, stood half a mile back from the bluff, looking seaward.

This house had been for years the residence of a retired merchant, a little past middle age. His name was Rashleigh. He had come from the city, it was rumored, in disgust at the ways of the world; for he indulged his misanthropical tastes by secluding himself from the society of his fellow-men. The neighbors said he had accumulated enough to live on without labor; for his supplies were brought regularly from the city to the nearest railway station, and fetched thence in his wagon, which he drove with a single horse. He lived with his wife, and a colored woman who did the work of the household. Silas, the man servant, who usually went to market, and occasionally of errands, had shortly before left the house.

The habits of Bennet Rashleigh being so unsocial, he never welcomed a guest. It was the opinion of many who knew him that he had been guilty of some fraudulent transaction, by which he had acquired, if not wealth, at least competence, and that the consciousness of ill-desert had given him this misanthropical tendency.

His wife seemed even a more extraordinary person. It was known that the pair did not live in harmony; but all were ready to aver that disagreement could not be the woman's fault. She had never been known to return answers to the jibes or reproofs hurled at her by her husband, nor to show resentment at ill usage. His naturally sullen and churlish temper was aggravated by intemperate habits, and scenes often occurred which severely tried the wife's patience. But she bore all meekly, fulfilling all her household duties with care and exactness.

With her own hands she prepared the dainties often required by the master at his meals, and even his bowl of toddy at night. If it were not hot and ready for him when he returned from a walk, he would growl and storm at the uncomplaining creature; and she would bear in silence what would have roused her negro assistant to a sharp retort.

Some incidents that had occurred ten years before had given her strengthened motives for self-control and reticence. They were then living in the same dwelling; but the dame's habits were more active, and she was in the practice of making excursions to the city, though at rare intervals.

On one of these, she was detained later in the afternoon than usual. It was near dark when she left a shop where she had purchased various materials for clothing. Carrying her parcels, she turned the next corner on her way

to the ferry, when she saw a slender form leaning against a pile of boxes, apparently faint with exhaustion. Something in the air of the young stranger—for she was evidently youthful—showed her superiority to the common vagrant.

Mrs. Rashleigh went to her assistance.

"Lean on me, madam; you are ill! Shall I help you into the shop?"

The wan face turned slowly toward her.

A cry burst from the pale lips.

"Letty!" exclaimed the stranger.

At the same instant Letty had recognized the forlorn one.

"Albertine!" she exclaimed. "Can this be you?"

She clasped the drooping form in her arms and placed it upon one of the boxes, which she arranged as a seat. With tears, embraces, and endearing words, she gathered to her heart the sister she had not seen for five long years.

"And he who enticed you to fly with him from your home left you to perish thus!" Mrs. Rashleigh moaned, in her sympathetic distress.

"He—my husband? Oh, Letty, how you wrong him!" murmured her sister. "I am too weak to tell you now; I have not tasted food to-day; let me go home to my child!"

"I will go with you, Albertine, dear. Only wait a moment."

She hurried into the grocery close by, and returned with a bottle of wine and some biscuits. She persuaded her sister to taste them, and motioned for an empty carriage that was passing, to which her parcels were transferred.

They drove to a poor tenement house near the river, which was now the home of the unhappy Albertine.

As they ascended the rickety stairs to her room, she stopped at one of the landings, where a kind neighbor had kept her little daughter. The child was asleep on the bed. The mother took her in her arms, and Letty helped to carry her up-stairs.

There, in the scantily-furnished room, with the fair child still asleep on the pallet of straw, Albertine told her story. Her antecedents were these:

She had lived with Letty after the marriage of the elder sister; but Rashleigh's tyranny made his home utterly distasteful to the girl; and she yielded to the persuasions of a lover whom the churlish brother-in-law had forbidden the house, and eloped with him.

"See, I have our marriage certificate, with that of my child's birth and baptism," she said, showing some papers she took out of a yellow box. "Charlie was kind—oh, how kind to me! and I was happy, though we were so very poor!"

"Why did you not write to me?" asked the elder sister, through her fast-falling tears.

"I did; I wrote several times. Is it possible you did not get my letters?"

"Rashleigh must have destroyed them. He was so angry at your marriage. He had made

another match for you, with one of his rich friends.

"I thought, Letty, after that, you did not care to hear of me, and so I wrote no more. But we wanted nothing while dear Charlie lived."

"He is dead, then

"My husband? do you think we should be here—in this den—if Charlie was alive? He cared for me to the last. And, a fortnight before he died, the news came that he was rich—that a fortune had been left to him!"

"A fortune?"

"Yes; it was all in the banker's hands. His uncle had willed it. And Charley had to employ an agent; for he was too ill to go out or leave his room; and I could not leave him. The agent promised to attend to everything, and he did, while Charlie lived."

"My poor Albertine!"

"I was delirious for weeks after he died. The nurse gave me the papers when I recovered my senses. There they all were, and a memorandum in Charlie's writing, and under seal and witnessed, leaving all he had to me—his wife—to use and keep for his child—our little Elodie."

The pale mother glanced toward the sleeping innocent.

"But how is it, then—" began Letty.

"Let me tell you as briefly as I can; for my strength is failing. The agent would not give me the papers about the funds. He pretended he had been appointed a trustee, and said he would bring me an allowance every month. I was forced to be content with this. The allowance was enough to keep us, and I laid by a little, in hopes after awhile to be able to get legal help and compel the dishonest man to give me control of what rightfully belonged to me. So I signed the orders he brought me from time to time, so that he could draw the money from the banker's. Whenever I asked him about it he would tell me my husband had wished it so and so. I was weak and ailing most of the time."

"Oh, if you had only come back to me!" wailed the sister.

"I was afraid—afraid of Rashleigh—Letty. You know how grasping he always was. I was afraid he might get hold of the property, and wrong my child in some way."

Letty only answered by tears.

"So we lived—I and Elodie—for two years. At last the agent cut short the allowance one-half, and then more still. He told me the money was running short; but I knew it could not be so."

"You should have had advice."

"Then I lost sight of the man altogether. He came no more to see me, and I could not find him at his office. I did not know the banker's name. I was helpless. Then we had to give up our lodgings and move here. I have lived by getting small jobs of work while I was strong enough; and all my dresses were pawned."

"Oh, Albertine!" cried her sister, weeping bitterly, "it was cruel not to come to me!"

"I thought you would not be allowed to help me. And, then, I was so weakened by sickness! Just this morning I went out to inquire along Wall street for the banker who held my husband's property. I have walked miles and learned nothing. You know the rest."

The sister roused herself.

"Now, Albertine," she said, "my home is yours again. I will never, never part with you. You shall come with me—this very night."

"Not to-night, Letty. I am too weak!"

"You must eat heartily first, to get strength. Is the fire burning? I can soon prepare supper."

She laid some sticks, and heaped coke on them in the grate. In a few moments there was a cheerful blaze.

"Now, I will be gone but a moment."

Taking up a basket, she went rapidly down-stairs. She returned shortly with a delicate bird, some fresh eggs, tea and coffee, bread and butter and other elements of a comfortable repast. There was a pitcher of milk for the child.

The little girl roused herself from slumber while these preparations were going on. Presently she slid from the bed, and came close to the fire.

She was about five years old, apparently. Fair as a lily, there was a tint of the wild rose in either cheek, and her curls of pale-gold clustered around her head and neck. Her eyes were blue and brilliant.

She laughed as she seated herself before the alluring blaze, and asked if Santa Claus had sent them a good supper, and a nice old lady to cook it.

"This is your aunt Letty, my love," said the mother. "You have heard of this dear aunt. She loves mamma and Elodie!"

The child rose, came to Mrs. Rashleigh and put her little arms around her neck, kissing her familiarly.

"I have heard of my good aunt Letty," she lisped. "Mamma and I say prayers for her every night; don't we, mamma?"

"Then you did not forget me, Albertine, since you taught your child to pray for me!"

Supper was placed on the table. The little girl ate her bread and milk and a piece of omelet, with keen appetite; but the mother could scarcely be persuaded to take the broiled bird. She drank two cups of tea with feverish eagerness.

"Now, Letty, you must go," she said. "Mr. Rashleigh will be angry."

"I shall not leave you to-night, my sister. I could not get home after eight o'clock. I will stay all night, and to-morrow I will take you with me."

"I have no bed to offer you."

"I will sit up and sleep. If I could only see you eat something more!"

"It is so long since mamma had a good supper," said the child, "she forgets how it tastes."

"Let me make you a bit of toast."

Albertine could not eat, though she tried, for Letty's sake.

"I will have a doctor see you before we go away to-morrow," said the elder sister.

Mrs. Rashleigh was accommodated with a bed, by one of the poor lodgers on the same floor; and Albertine slept the deep sleep of utter exhaustion.

Elodie was playing about the floor, laughing and dancing, when Letty went in to the room in the morning. She lighted the fire and prepared a tempting breakfast, of which the child partook with relish; but the mother could eat nothing. Then her anxious sister went out for a doctor, and was fortunate enough to find one who came without delay.

"Mrs. Sterns," he said—calling the invalid by her married name—"is suffering under mere debility induced by overwork and poor food. There is no reason why she should not regain strength, with change of scene."

He refused the fee proffered by Mrs. Rashleigh, and went out.

Letty busied herself with preparations for removal; dressed the child warmly, and wrapped her sister in a shawl folded over her serge dress. Beyond the box that held Albertine's papers and a few relics, there was nothing worth taking away.

When the rent had been paid, there was just enough left in Letty's purse for the carriage to the ferry, and the journey home. She had listened to no remonstrance from her sister.

Thus they traveled till the train set them down, and another carriage conveyed them to the house by the seacoast.

CHAPTER III.

THE COQUETRY OF AN HOUR.

The ball-room gayety was at its height. In the spacious and magnificent drawing-rooms the brilliant lights, and music, and flowers, and merry voices, and graceful floating forms contributed to the gorgeous confusion always reigning where the gay and young meet to enjoy the passing hour.

The rich profusion of bouquets and fragrant pyramids of bloom, wherever there was room for a vase to stand, symbolized the overflowing happiness of many innocent hearts.

There was the usual quantity of eager hopes and disappointed expectations; of heart-yearnings and heart-burnings; of raptures and rivalries; of jealousy and generosity; of mirth and melancholy; of joy and grief.

Among the brightest in the throng was Olive Weston. She wore a pale-blue silk with a cloud-like over-dress of white tulle, looped up on one side with a delicate spray of flowers, and confined with a blue sash. A single rose was in her bosom, a rose she had taken out of a glass in her room, having cherished it sev-

eral days with special care. There was an unusual color in her cheeks, and her lips were resolutely compressed; her eyes were often downcast, but lifted now and then with a flash of something like scorn, as her glance swept the circle round her.

In her disturbed bosom lurked the sting Ruhama's words had implanted; and whenever she felt it most acutely, her manner took an additional haughtiness, or she bent her head more eagerly to listen to her companion's remarks.

She could not help thinking it unaccountably singular, considering what had passed, that the most pertinaciously devoted among all her admirers was Tom Wyatt. He lingered ever at her side.

He was a gay, dashing young fellow, full of wit and humor and fancy, and an experienced critic in all matters of taste. With all his vivacity, she had always thought he possessed an excellent heart; and Olive was utterly at a loss to account for his undiminished spirit.

Had he not received her reply to his letter—her rejection of his suit? Or was he striving to heal the wound to his vanity by showing himself heart-whole?

She could not solve the mystery. Perhaps it was because one more interesting to her was absorbing her faculties of observation and reflection.

A gentleman of distinguished aspect had entered the room. Though young, his form was broad as well as tall, promising a future development of great muscular strength. "What a noble figure," would have been the passing remark of any stranger; and his face matched it in nobleness. A high and broad forehead, shaded by curling brown hair; eyes of dark-gray, piercing, bright, with depth of meaning; a healthy but pale complexion, and features cast in manly mold; an expression frank, honest and candid, but dashed often with something like hauteur; all about him won admiration, while undue familiarity was checked.

Claude Hamilton had never been what is called a beau, or a general gallant; he rather avoided the society of ladies in general, and altogether despised flirtation. But he had often sought Miss Weston's society.

She felt her cheeks tingle with the sudden flush as she caught sight of him. The next instant, in humiliating consciousness, she turned her face away, affected to be excessively entertained by something her companion was saying to her, and nervously toyed with her fan. Tom Wyatt took it from her hand, and stood fanning her at intervals, bending over her with the devoted air of a gallant knight.

Claude Hamilton approached, and for her life Olive could not help looking up. Their eyes met for an instant; he passed her with a cold bow, and went on to join a group at the other end of the room.

What could this strange greeting mean? thought the girl. He had always seemed so happy to see her, and how eagerly hitherto he

had sought her in the most crowded assemblage.

She stole another glance, for he was not out of sight. He was not talking with any one; his air was abstracted and melancholy; he seemed to keep aloof from her sedulously.

What could have brought about the change? Surely she had done nothing to offend him!

She forgot the compliments Tom Wyatt was pouring into her ear, the murmur of admiration around her, while she tried to solve this enigma.

Then the recollection of what Ruhama had hinted at flashed upon her mind, and summoned back her woman's pride. She had forgotten that evil tongues—women's tongues, of course—had commented on her evident enjoyment of Claude Hamilton's society. He, perhaps, had heard the ill-natured rumors or remarks, and, more tender of her good name than herself, or alarmed for his own, had resolved on this avoidance.

The idea stung Olive to the very soul. Had she, indeed, fallen so low? She fancied all eyes turned on her to read her heart, and see how much of it had gone out of her own keeping. How many envious rivals were exulting in the shame and pain they saw betrayed in her looks!

This must be hidden from all eyes; not one of them must even surmise the load of mortification and anguish that had so nearly crushed her. He, of all others, must not know it. The crimson of indignation and defiance rushed to her cheeks; the fire of self-assertion flashed from her eyes. She assumed a gayety she did not feel, and entered volubly into conversation.

Her friend, Ruhama, might well have fancied she was practicing, to the best of her power, the lessons in coquetry she had taught her.

Ere long Ruhama came up to Olive, touched her arm, and begged her to play and sing.

The lovely brunette was bewitching in amber silk, profusely trimmed with white point lace; flounces, bertha, and lace undersleeves. Rubies glowed on her neck and arms. Natural japonicas looked like snow in her dark hair. She was laughing, and her parted lips disclosed the whitest little teeth in the world.

Miss Weston took her seat at the piano, and played an air from Don Giovanni. The depth of her violet eyes grew more brilliant, and the rose-tint on her cheek brighter than ever, while no one dreamed of the mingled pain and pleasure at her heart, that gave the unwonted bloom and fire.

Ruhama, with her eyes full of mirthful mischief, stood listening to the music, beating time with her fan, and noticed that young Hamilton had drawn near and was earnestly regarding the fair musician.

Olive's voice trembled in spite of herself as she sung the words, "*mi tremo un poco il cor.*" Suddenly lifting her eyes she met Claude's fixed gaze.

When the song was ended, Hamilton had left the room.

Tom Wyatt stood close by, and offered his arm to the singer. He remarked carelessly:

"Our friend Hamilton is out of sorts tonight; but he will soon get over it. I heard him say just now he is to leave the city for Europe almost immediately."

Olive felt the blood recede swiftly from her cheek. It needed all her self-control to hide the pain inflicted by the words of the young man. With a desperate effort, she managed to clothe her expression of surprise and regret in language cold and measured enough for the occasion.

Going away! Would she ever see him again? Going—and without an adieu; without one word to her!

These thoughts rung dolefully in her heart. How many

"Gentle wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherished long,"

were laid prostrate by those cruel words!

Ruhama saw her grow pale; saw her features work with the pain she could not conceal, and ran to her.

"You are faint with the heat!" she cried. "Come with me! No—Mr. Wyatt! I know best how to doctor her," and she drew her friend through the French window out into the conservatory.

Swiftly along the flower-bordered path she led her, till she stopped beside the largest fountain; and there she placed the girl on a rustic seat.

"Now, tell me all!" she said.

Olive could no longer restrain her tears.

She managed to falter a half confession, blaming herself for conduct so foreign to her nature and her judgment.

"For what can you blame yourself?" asked Ruhama, while she stifled a little twinge of self-reproach.

"For being influenced by the silly fear of being thought to value Mr. Hamilton's attentions—into playing a part so foreign to my character. What must he have thought of me?"

"Had he any claim on you that gave him a right to find fault with your coquetry?"

"No; but I am not the less humiliated."

"Then, in the name of woman's pride, do get up spirit enough to think no more of a man who can serve you so! I would have pledged my life that Hamilton really loved you! And to set people talking by avoiding you, and then depart so suddenly! To go away and leave the country—as we hear he means to do—without explanation!"

"Hush, Ruhama!"

"I would have my revenge! And you can! Did not Tom Wyatt send you a sincere, impassioned love-letter? Why not accept him?"

"You know, Ruhama, I sent him my answer yesterday."

"But you can recall it. Tom is, in my opinion, worth half a dozen of such timid, ca-

pricious admirers as Mr. Hamilton. Tell Tom you have reconsidered the matter."

"Ruhama, you are incorrigible. How can you jest on such a subject!"

"Tom has been your shadow all the evening. You can easily do it. Bless me! Here is the gentleman himself, come to look after us both! He shall bring you back."

And the lively girl, pressing her friend's hand significantly, hurried away, just as Wyatt's honest face of concern came into view.

He took the seat near Olive, who had recovered her self-possession, and was able to answer with something like sprightliness to his inquiries after her health. Anything rather than let him know the cause of her indisposition.

The young lady rose to return to the drawing-room. But Wyatt detained her.

He looked unusually grave.

"The letter my boy took you yesterday"—he began, in a faltering tone.

"It was answered immediately," replied Olive. "Surely you received the answer. It was by post within an hour."

Tom essayed to speak, but seemed strangely embarrassed. His voice failed entirely. He covered his face with his handkerchief.

Olive could never endure the sight of suffering; and this was of her own inflicting! Another fruit of her coquetry of an hour!

She felt herself responsible for the delusive hopes she had reawakened; the bitter disappointment! In self-reproach she also covered her eyes to conceal the fast-flowing tears.

"Mr. Wyatt," she said, at last, "believe me, this causes me as much pain as yourself. You took me so by surprise! It grieves me more than I can express, that a temporary misunderstanding—"

The young gentleman removed his handkerchief from his face; from "eyes unconscious of a tear." A peal of laughter, the more impressive from having evidently been violently struggled against, burst on the young lady's astonished ears.

"Mr. Wyatt!" she exclaimed, recoiling in amazement.

"Pardon me, but I cannot—by George! I cannot help it!" stammered the pseudo lover, indulging in a second burst of merriment.

"This conduct is inexplicable!" said Miss Weston, indignantly, as she turned away.

"Stay—one moment, I beg—I can explain it," cried Tom. "You were deceived, Miss Weston, by the fact that the letter was taken to your house by the boy in my office. I only discovered the mistake an hour before I came this evening, and I have been watching for an opportunity to tell you all about it. That letter was *not* written by me!"

"Not written by you!" exclaimed the girl.

"No, Miss Weston; and you may remember if my boy left word who was with me when he was sent."

"He left no message. It was an anonymous joke then?"

"Anonymous?"

"The letter—the declaration—had no signature."

"Is it possible! Could he have been such a dolt?"

"It was not signed at all. From the fact that your messenger brought it, I inferred that it was from you."

"Oh, no! I have the honor to be the humblest among your friends; but—what a deuced scurvy trick that—to serve a man! I owe him a dozen grudges for it!"

"Who, if you please, sir?" demanded Olive, her eyes flashing resentment. "Who wrote the letter?"

"The blundering idiot was Claude Hamilton!"

The girl's lips moved to repeat the name, but they uttered no sound. She grew pale for a moment; then the color rushed back in torrents to her face. She turned away, and covered her face with her hands.

"I have much to pardon, as well as yourself, Miss Weston, to Hamilton's silly bashfulness, for having procured me your indignation. Monstrous impudent you must have thought me, too, in chatting with you so carelessly to-night after you had rejected me."

"He—does he not know of the mistake?" faltered Olive.

"No, not yet; but he shall pay me out for it—the blundering blockhead! He came into my office, asked for paper to write a note, and tore up half a quire before he could suit himself. Then he asked me to send it to the address. And this morning I got your rejection of my suit, which astonished me not a little. I did not understand it at all, till I questioned my boy to-day, and learned where he had taken Hamilton's note."

Olive listened like one in a dream. Then that was the cause of Claude's avoidance! He had declared his love for her; but had received no answer to his avowal. To this apparent contempt she had added the coquettish gayety which he must have thought assumed in mockery of his feelings! He had acted foolishly in his timidity and distrust; but what must he think of her?

She sighed deeply.

"Never mind!" said Tom, as he offered his arm to lead her back to the rooms. "I will see Hamilton to-morrow, and rate him well for his stupidity!"

The girl did not speak. Her heart was full. Hardly yet she dared give admission to the hope that came like a sunbeam across the gloom that had oppressed her.

There was some confusion as they entered the parlors, still thronged with the gayly-attired guests. The dance had been suddenly interrupted. Persons were moving to and fro hurriedly.

"There she is!" cried one or two voices.

Then Olive saw Ruhama coming quickly toward her, followed by Mr. Seaforth.

The girl took Olive's arm from Wyatt, drew

it within her own, and led her swiftly through the company toward the door. Olive was terrified by her grave face.

"What is the matter, Ruhama?" she asked. Mr. Seaforth began to speak; but his daughter stopped him.

"Don't tell her here, father," she implored.

"Tell me—what?" exclaimed the startled girl. "For pity's sake, do not keep it from me! My mother!"

"Your mother is well, darling!" cried Ruhama. "Here we are in the hall, and Ada has brought your cloak. You must go, my dear friend. An accident has happened—and your father is hurt. We hope it is nothing serious."

Her face was streaming with tears as she embraced her friend. Mr. Seaforth handed Olive into the carriage, and she sunk on the seat, fainting, as he followed her.

CHAPTER IV.

SAD CHANGES.

OLIVE was driven from the ball quickly, to the hotel where the Westons were staying. Mr. Seaforth took the young lady into the drawing-room; but she would not wait for him to make inquiries.

She ran, breathless, up the stairs. In the corridor she was met by her mother, who clasped her in her arms.

"Papa! papa!" faltered the weeping girl.

"Be quiet, my child; we hope he is not hurt much. He was thrown out of the carriage. No, you must not go in just yet; the doctors are with him."

Olive pressed for all the details of the accident. Mr. Weston had been sensible throughout, and no limbs were broken. Only the shock to his system had been very severe.

Presently the door of the suite of rooms occupied by the Westons was opened, and two gentlemen came out. One of them came to the wife.

"My dear madam, you must not be alarmed."

"Doctor Searles, is there not cause for it?"

"Mr. Weston has met with a serious accident; but no bones are broken, and we are doing our best. He is helping us by bearing the pain cheerfully; and *you* must help us by not giving way, and by keeping up his spirits. It will not do for him to see you suffer on his account."

The other physician stepped up. "I will send the nurse immediately," he said, and bowing to the ladies he went downstairs.

"A nurse!" repeated Olive, lifting up her head, and wiping away the tears. "Cannot I nurse papa? Oh, mamma, let me; I am strong and well."

She looked radiant as she stood there in her ball-room dress, from which the cloak had fallen, her face glowing with painful excitement. The doctor did homage involuntarily to her beauty. But he would not favor her petition.

"I cannot allow it, my dear young lady," he replied. "You may be strong, but you feel too much. You may take care of your mother; and I assure you, she needs looking after."

"And I may not see papa?" wailed Olive, with a fresh burst of tears.

"You may for a moment; I will take you in; but I warn you that excitement is the very worst thing for a patient whose nerves are in such a state."

Both Olive and her mother followed him into the room, Mr. Seaforth having bid them good-night.

The doctor made a gesture enjoining silence as they went toward the bed. The daughter knelt down, drawing her father's head to her, and kissing it again and again. Mrs. Weston sat in the easy-chair, where she could look into her husband's face.

"My dear child!" the sufferer murmured. Olive threw one arm around his neck, and kissed the dear face. But she could not repress her sobs.

"This will not do!" interposed the physician.

"My good sir, I have indulged these ladies with permission to see you, but you are too weak to bear any conversation; and I cannot permit them to remain. You will be able soon, I trust, to say everything you wish to them, and they to you. Now, you must excuse me."

He took Olive's arm, lifted her up and led both her and her mother to the door.

"You will not leave him?" faltered Mrs. Weston.

"I will stay till Dr. Clark sends the nurse. He can be relied on implicitly. Now let me recommend you, madam, to retire. I do not want two patients on my hands at once."

Smiling, but imperative, he sent them off to their own rooms; then returned to those of the hurt man.

The next day, and the next, it was nearly the same. Mr. Weston, sanguine in hope and cheerful in spirits, could not understand why he did not get better much more rapidly. His physician knew, but did not state the reason; he had received a severe internal injury; and it was yet doubtful if nature and a good constitution would triumph over it.

But the doctor's language was encouraging, as it was necessary to keep the patient in a hopeful mood; and the anxious family, who hung on his words as upon those of an oracle, were surely not to know there was any ground for despondency. So the mother and daughter seemed cheerful when they paid their stated visits to the sick room, and counted the hours when they might take the place of the nurse, and minister with their own loving hands to the one they loved best on earth.

Ruhama came early the morning after the accident, and spent hours with her friend. Mr. Seaforth called twice every day.

Ruhama soon passed from the doleful topics of illness and sorrow to gossip about her ball and her beaux, as she and Olive sat in the par-

lor alcove together. While there, Tom Wyatt's card was brought up; but the ladies could not see him.

The card brought back the subject of Tom's strange behavior at the ball, and his lightness of spirits after the rejection of his suit.

"Oh, you did not know, then!" exclaimed Olive. "I forgot all about it, of course, with papa's illness, and all our distress on his account."

"I did not know what, Olive? Did you recall your refusal, then? Was that the reason Tom was so merry?"

"Dear Ruhama, how absurd! No—Tom never proposed to me; never cared for me at all."

"And he denied it, after his written declaration?"

"That was not from Mr. Wyatt," said Olive, drooping her head.

"Not from—Olive, you do not know what you are talking about."

"Oh, yes; he explained it all while we were in the conservatory. A gentleman came into his office and asked for paper: wrote—the letter, and sent Mr. Wyatt's boy with it. I supposed it came from Tom, as his messenger brought it."

"Supposed it came from Tom? Was it not his own writing, signed with his own name?"

"No; the letter had no signature."

"Olive, what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say; there was no name attached to the letter."

"And Tom lent himself to such a cruel joke. To send you an anonymous declaration of love!"

"Don't judge him too severely, Ruhama. Mr. Wyatt did not know till I told him, that the letter was unsigned. He was angry enough about it, and said he should seek an explanation."

"The letter was written in Tom's office, and sent by his messenger. Then of course he must know who wrote it."

"He—said—he did."

"Who was it?"

Olive hesitated, and her color went and came. She had an insuperable repugnance to having the matter commented on by her lively friend. Ruhama was quick and imprudent of speech; no, she could not tell her, lest she should betray herself.

Ruhama repeated the question.

"I—he gave the name of his friend—but—Ruhama, you must excuse me; I cannot tell you. It would not be delicate in me to talk of the matter—to discuss it at present."

"You have a secret, and will keep it from me!"

"Pardon me, Ruhama; this is not my own secret."

"Not your own? whose, then, I should like to know? The man who wrote the letter sent it without his name, and by the messenger of his friend, leading him into a scrape thereby—that man must be either a blundering dolt or

a cowardly trifle! And you shield him from blame! Olive, I am ashamed of you!"

The girl hung her head; then lifted it in a sort of desperation.

"I do not believe he is either the one or the other. There was a mistake; but it would not be seemly for me to go about trying to clear it up. That is for him to do."

"Could he have meant it for a pitiful joke?"

"I am sure he did not."

"Then I return to my first alternative. No man in his senses could so treat a lady, without deserving a thrashing. If you had a brother, Olive, he should do it. I could find it in my heart to do it myself. You need not tell me who it was; I am sure it was Claude Hamilton. No one else could have been such a fool."

Olive put out her hand to check her too impulsive friend; and at the same moment the door opened.

It was the servant with two cards on a tray.

One was that of Emily Blount; the other her brother Wyndham's.

"I think, dear Olive, you might see Emily," said her mother. "Not Wyndham; we have seen scarcely any of our friends. My compliments and thanks to the gentleman, and say, we hope Mr. Weston is improving. Show the lady up."

The man departed, and in a few minutes Emily Blount came in. She was a graceful, beautiful blonde, with rich auburn hair and violet eyes. She and Olive had been intimate before their schooldays; in fact, they had almost grown up together. She was less impetuous than Ruhama; and altogether more suited to Olive's disposition and character.

She came full of sympathy and offers of service; not valued the less because the offers could not be accepted. But when Mr. Weston was well enough to be removed to his country home, Olive said Emily should go with them, and share their labors and consolations.

Mrs. Weston retired, leaving the three girls in animated conversation.

The subject was music, in which Ruhama professed to be an enthusiast. She was always reproaching Miss Blount with despising that sweetest of the embellishments of life.

"I do not despise the ornamental," returned Emily. "I honor musicians, too, in their vocation," and she stopped to take a flower from a vase that stood on the table. "But girls are susceptible, my dear; and I do not like to see precious hearts surrendered to the first foreign artist who can play an opera air."

"And why," said Ruhama, "with my intense love of music, if I choose, should I not marry one of that profession?"

"Because artists are almost always poor, and poverty would suit you no better than myself."

"Not always; genius is a mine of wealth. For example—Liszt—"

"A poor illustration! He squandered as

fast as he made; gave his jewels in charity, and got a fortune at last by marriage."

"He did not value riches."

"The greater folly in him."

"You are calculating, Emily."

"Not more so than is simply prudent; and I maintain that the arts in this country, more especially, are but a frail dependence. Among the great masters, how many, like Bach and Beethoven, have died deserted and in poverty? How many, like Tartini and Mara, have wasted their gifts? With those of inferior powers the chance of happiness is still more doubtful."

"You surely do not think wealth absolutely necessary to happiness?"

"No; but with young ladies brought up like you and I, Ruhama, a certain portion of the substantial as well as the ornamental, is absolutely indispensable. That proportion is more than the arts, in this country, at least, can always furnish. Besides, though music is called 'the food of love,' and may calm and soothe the passions at times, I cannot see that its cultivation, as the chief pursuit of life, has any of that allaying quality. Moderate your enthusiasm, my friend, and give up your visions of living on the renown of the chosen of your heart, if he be an artist. Otherwise, I give you leave to love music as devotedly as you choose."

"Ah, Emily!" sighed Ruhama, "I fear my cousin, Herbert St. Clare, has as little chance as ever of subduing your wayward heart! He had such a profound love of music! Heigh-ho! It is well he has left the country!"

Miss Blount did not reply; nor did her friend notice that her cheek suddenly grew pale.

There was indeed a pang at her heart, as she thought of the time when, seven years before, Herbert St. Clare had given her the love of an ardent and trusting heart, and received her assurance of affection in return.

He was then so full of the enthusiasm of buoyant youth—rich, burning, overflowing—and it found vent in his absorbing passion for music. His very soul was wrapped up in the art to which he had determined to devote his future life. And to Emily Blount's cultivated mind and graceful taste he looked for the influence that should chasten and model his own exuberance of imagination. With a narrow income, but boundless hopes, he had resolved to visit Europe for the purpose of educating his musical talents; he wished his beloved Emily to become his bride at once and the companion of his travels.

But Emily, though she loved Herbert, refused to share with him the uncertainties of such a fortune. Without an overweening desire for wealth, she took a matter-of-fact view of things, and was convinced that her lover could neither be fortunate nor happy in the exclusive indulgence of his favorite tastes. In her eagerness to show him the superior advantages of a more lucrative business, she perhaps underrated, somewhat contemptuously, those

of the profession he was anxious to embrace. The lovers parted in mutual dissatisfaction.

It was not long, however, before Herbert perceived the common sense of her views; and though in his heart he accused her of coldness he felt himself constrained to sacrifice his idol. He went abroad as the agent of a mercantile house.

Emily's father had required that the engagement between them should not continue during a separation that might last many years. It was understood, however, by each, that their union would take place on Herbert's return, if both remained of the same mind.

The implied bond had been held sacred on the lady's part. Her beauty and rare qualities had attracted suitors of wealth and distinction; but she listened to none. She was in her twenty-fourth year, and had heard nothing of Herbert for years, except from distant acquaintances that he appeared devoted to his business pursuits.

Emily now looked on life with different eyes in spite of her theory; and though prudent in her counsels and cold in her demeanor, had learned to value affection beyond all the possessions of earth.

Deeply, in her heart of hearts, did she regret her refusal of St. Clare. Had she not given him a right to think her cold and sordid? Was she not justly punished by losing his love forever? These painful musings were stirring in her breast, even while the preceding discussion was going forward, in which is exhibited the hard part of her nature.

Olive listened, but took no part in the conversation. A deep gloom overspread her face; she leaned listlessly over the arm of the sofa, abstracted in painful thoughts.

Ruhama rose to take leave, and, in her rattling way, again rallied her friend upon her sadness, and told the story of the misunderstanding between her and young Hamilton.

"He has sailed for Europe," Emily remarked. "Wyndham went with him to the ship."

"Well, he deserved his ill-fortune," snapped Miss Seaforth. "To send a proposal without a signature, involving all sorts of blunders, and then go away in a huff, because people are misled by his stupidity!"

"Ruhama!" exclaimed Olive, in earnest entreaty.

"There—don't look so distressed, my dear! We are all friends, you know!"

And while the volatile girl kissed the pale cheek and ran out of the room, Emily Blount took a seat by her, and passed her arm round Olive's waist.

Some moments of silence passed, in which Olive wept quietly.

"Why was not this misunderstanding cleared up?" asked Miss Blount, in a low tone. "Surely Mr. Wyatt was bound to set matters right."

"He said he would do so at once."

"Oh, I know now! Mr. Hamilton was

absent from the city. He left home the very morning after the ball; and only returned just before he sailed. They missed each other."

"Emily," implored Olive, "do not speak further of this!"

"I am only anxious, my love, that your happiness, and his, should not be thrown away for a trivial misapprehension."

"He *must* know the truth; he may have changed his mind! For the world, I would not have him called back to me!"

"Olive, beware of tampering with the flower of the heart! Be warned by my sad experience!"

"Yours?"

"Did I not despoil Herbert of his glorious gifts, so rich in power to confer happiness? Did I not fetter him with my limited notions of utility?"

"But you said, truly, the arts were a poor dependence, for those seeking the means of subsistence."

"So they are; and in strict prudence, my ideas are all correct. But, oh, what a margin there is to love, and I never allowed it! What a fairy world stretches beyond, full of prizes the angels might strive for! Be prudent, guarded, and careful as you will; but remember, *love outweighs the world!*"

"What can I do?" faltered the trembling girl.

"Write to Claude, if you know his address, and tell him of the mistake."

"I do not know his address, and if I did, I would not write! How could I explain my conduct that evening—so nearly verging on flirtation?"

"Confess the truth to him."

"Confess what?"

"That you were piqued by remarks you had heard; that you supposed he avoided you for the same reason; that the blundering of his letter had led to a mistake on your part—"

"Oh, Emily! and what would he infer?"

"He might infer what it would please him beyond all things to discover."

"And you would have me thus humiliate myself?"

"What humiliation would there be, if you cared for his esteem and affection, in letting him know it?"

"Never! I will never do it! You cannot wish me to do such a thing!"

"I wish you to be happy, Olive."

"Had he really loved me, he would have made sure of his letter having been received. He might have known common courtesy would not permit me to leave it unanswered. He would have given me an opportunity of explanation."

"He is diffident to a fault, you know; and self-distrust may have prevented him."

"And am I to pursue him half over the globe, and make good the shortcomings of his self-distrust?"

"He has been precipitate in throwing away his chance of happiness!"

"How do I know that? He may have sent the proposal under an impulse he regretted afterward."

"I do not believe that."

"Is it for me to hold him to his offer, and follow him up? Emily, I cannot degrade myself. He may find out the consequences of his blunder."

"I hope, indeed, he may."

"If he does not, I shall take no steps to reclaim him."

"You may be right, Olive, to be swayed by pride in this matter; but—"

"Not pride; only maidenly delicacy."

"But I would sacrifice something to put an end to misunderstanding."

"Let us talk no more of it, dear Emily. I am unhappy enough about dear papa."

Her tears burst forth afresh, and her friend strove to soothe her.

Claude Hamilton had indeed sailed for the Old World without giving poor Tom Wyatt a chance to elucidate matters. And he left no address; so that the letter Tom sent to him was never received.

Devotedly as he loved Miss Weston, the idea that she had received his proposal with contempt was fixed in his mind. The memory of her face as he had last seen it, glowing and beaming with pleasure at the frivolous compliments offered by a male butterfly, haunted him. Should he break his heart for one who had shown herself so regardless of his feelings? No; that he would not.

Among the gay young men of Paris, not one was gayer than Claude Hamilton, while he bore a wound in his bosom which time was almost powerless to heal.

Thus by a small piece of blundering and the failure of efforts to set matters right, the happiness of two loving hearts was wrecked.

How much further misunderstanding, bitterness and heart-burning were to be gone through before the mistake was discovered!

A farthing rushlight, at the right moment, would have opened the full stream of sunshine, warmth and love.

While Hamilton sought relief in foreign adventure, trying to efface the image of the girl he loved from his heart, she bore her suffering added to the weight of the deepest misfortune that can afflict one cherished as she had been. Neither knew or suspected the anguish endured by the other.

Months passed of harassing doubt and anxiety; months of gloom, scarcely relieved by a ray of hope. The Weston family returned to their home with the invalid, but he never recovered his health.

No need to linger on that mournful time. The wife and daughter were left alone in the world, and the declining health of Mrs. Weston rendered her entirely dependent upon Olive's care.

Very little property was left. The able lawyer had lived up to his income, hoping for many years of usefulness, in which he might

make provision for the dear ones he loved so well. He had no debts, but many due to him could not be collected.

Olive bravely faced the difficulties. When the villa was rented, and the furniture disposed of, she found herself able to take a retired little cottage in Harlem, and to furnish it very plainly.

She had one pretty room for her mother. This had many articles from their old home, and was luxurious as Mrs. Weston's had been before her change of fortune. The invalid found no difference in the accommodations required by her daily wants. Her daughter's own hands prepared the delicacies she would not spare from her mother's table.

Olive went in search of music pupils, and turned to account her delicate taste for painting, in all the work she could get from publishers and photographers. One holiday folio of flowers, which she had to color, gave her pleasant employment for months, and proved a lucrative occupation.

It was a gorgeous thing—that book of natural flowers, grouped so exquisitely, and painted with such truth to nature! But such works are not to be found often; the public does not encourage them.

The girl was sitting beside her mother one afternoon in early autumn.

She had been disappointed in her hope of obtaining some new scholars, and had come home weary and sad. But she spoke always cheerfully to the invalid.

A carriage stopped before the little gate, and two ladies alighted. They were Ruhama and Miss Blount.

"I am so glad to have found you at home darling!" cried Emily. "I have something strange, oh, how strange, to tell you!"

CHAPTER V.

A RUFIAN'S PLAN.

RASHLEIGH was not at home when the travelers drew up before the door, and his wife rejoiced at it, for it enabled her to make her sister comfortable in her spare room, and give instructions to the colored woman to do everything she required.

She made Albertine lie down after taking a cup of tea; darkened the windows, and gave the child something to play with in the kitchen.

The negress willingly took charge of the little one; and Elodie was delighted with the new things she saw. Her aunt then walked toward the village, to meet the storm she knew would break on her head, when the churlish master became aware of what she had done in her desperation.

She met him sauntering from the tavern, his pipe in his mouth in full blast. He paid no heed to her "good morning," nor to her excuse for her stay over night in the city. It was the first time she had ever done such a thing; and she trusted, she said, it would never happen again.

"And, now, I have something strange to tell you, Bennet," she added; "I have found Albertine at last!"

"Who?"

"Albertine, my sister. You know we have not seen her in five years."

"The ne'er-do-well hussy! I hope she has suffered for the caper she cut!" was the encouraging response.

"Oh, Bennet! pray don't bear malice against her!"

"She rid my house of a pest, when she ran away with a villain! I don't want to hear any more of her."

"The man who married her was not a villain."

"Married her! Do you expect me to believe in any such bosh as that?"

"Albertine was married; I have now the proofs?"

"What of it, if she was! It's nothing to me. Was it that kept you out all night, and no supper fit to eat for me?"

A sudden thought struck Letty—a light to direct her course! She would appeal to the cupidity of the man she knew had no mercy in him.

"Her husband—Albertine's—was good to her as long as he lived. And he came into a fortune before he died!"

"Eh! What's that?"

"Mr. Sterne left money to his wife, to Albertine, and she ought now to be well off. But the agent, who pretended to be a trustee, tried to swindle her."

"Will you talk sense!" exclaimed the brute, removing his pipe, and gazing at his wife with some appearance of interest. "Tell a straight story if you can."

Letty went over the whole matter, as briefly and as clearly as she could. "I thought," she added, deprecatingly, "you might find out where her money is invested, as you understand business!"

"Humph! The fellow she calls her agent has run away with the funds, I suppose!"

"That could not be; for he could only draw any amount by having Albertine's order."

"Has she got any one to see to her affairs?"

"Oh, no! She has been very ill; she is too weak to go to any one! But she would pay you well, Bennet, if you would attend to it for her; she would give any commission you choose."

"Humph! Where is she?"

"Will you see her?"

"Perhaps, if the job is worth it. She ought to have some one to take care of her money, if she has it."

"Oh, thanks!"

"But I must talk to her about it."

Now came the hardest part of poor Letty's task.

"I hope you will forgive me, Bennet; but—I wanted you to see her; and—and she was ill and hardly able to sit up; and so—I brought her with me."

"Where? What do you mean? Can't you speak, woman?"

"I have brought her home; she is in the house."

"In my house?" with a burst of profanity.

"There was nowhere else I could take her. Oh, Bennet! she is my sister."

"Curse your sister!" exclaimed her husband, with a burst of ferocious execrations.

"She sha'n't stay in my house! I'll see if I'm to be put upon by every beggar you happen to meet!"

"Oh, Bennet, she is no beggar! She will pay you well! And she may not live long!"

"Begone, woman; stand out of my way!"

"Where are you going?"

"Home! I'll see who's master in my own house!"

The poor woman wrung her hands helplessly as her husband strode on to the house.

For a moment her spirit rose against this cruel injustice, and she resolved that if Albertine were driven out to perish, she would go with her, and would never return to the dwelling of her tyrant. But the habit of abject submission resumed its sway, and then she could only think how his wrath could be averted. There was but one point vulnerable in his nature—his love of money.

That had done its work before Rashleigh reached home. He demanded to see Albertine; and his wife found them in quiet conversation when she returned. She felt greatly relieved; and went into the kitchen hoping for the best.

Rashleigh happened to be perfectly sober, and soon mastered all the difficulties of the case. The next day he went to New York, and by diligent inquiries soon found where the money—some twenty-five thousand dollars—was deposited. It was invested in ample securities. None of it could be drawn without the order of Albertine Sterne.

The man returned home, and consented to the stay of his sister-in-law and her child, on condition of the payment of a high board, and such sums as he thought proper to demand from time to time under the pretext of "extras." These covered medicines, delicacies in food, sending for a city doctor occasionally, etc.

For Albertine did not mend. It was not long before the symptoms of the malady, that had taken off her mother—consumption—were developed.

Letty was the most devoted nurse in the world; and the invalid had every comfort.

The sisters sat for hours every evening, hand in hand, and talked of the future of the little girl, so soon to be left to the sole care of her aunt. Albertine had no fears for her under such guardianship. She empowered Letty to draw for her needs whenever money was required, and, in an informal way, made her the trustee and guardian of her child.

The little one grew apace, and gave promise of robust health, invigorated by the sea air.

It was in the spring after the widowed mother had come to sojourn by the coast, that her faithful sister watched the ebbing of the tide of life. With Albertine's last breath, she commended her child to Letty's care.

"He does not believe I was ever married," she whispered, referring to her brother-in-law. "Keep the papers safe, and do not let him know where they are. He might destroy them, and then wrong my Elodie."

The sister promised to protect the girl's rights.

"The church register will show it," faltered the dying, "if you should be robbed. That and my darling's birth. The will Charley made said I was to have everything, and my child comes after me; it is all hers. You will see that she has it, Letty. Give the papers to some lawyer you can trust. God bless you both, my sister, and my little daughter!"

They were almost her last words.

When the funeral was over, Rashleigh demanded access to the effects and papers of the deceased.

Letty secreted those of importance, and the letters which he discovered were of little consequence.

He was confirmed in his opinion that the story of a marriage was a fable. Was it likely a man who had expectations of a fortune would marry the girl he had induced to run away with him? The child could inherit nothing; the sister—his wife—was the real heir to all that Albertine had possessed.

So he told Letty, with maudlin congratulations, in his tipsy hours, on her access of fortune. His wife dared not dispute the matter; and suffered it to pass. She could give the child all she needed—drawing the installments of interest by her own order; and she would purchase peace by silence as long as possible. She held some degree of power in her hands so long as her signature alone sufficed at the banker's.

So time passed on. Elodie was sent to the country school, and for two years to a boarding-school in the city. Books were provided, which she devoured at home. Her life was made as pleasant as it could be made; and with her love of nature, and her buoyant spirits, the girl was as happy as a bird.

She never had a sorrow till her aunt became an invalid. Then her tenderness and affection were brought out. Her little hands were active in household tasks, and no nurse was more assiduous in the care of the sick. She read and sung to the sufferer; she prepared dainties to tempt her to eat; she gathered wild flowers and fragrant boughs, and decorated the rooms to please her. She would wander for hours gathering seaweed to arrange in moss pictures and put them on the walls. She refused to be sent to school again while her beloved aunt was ill; and the sunshine she made in the house was the invalid's greatest comfort.

There seemed a mutual repulsion between the girl and her uncle. He had always dis-

liked the child. He wished her out of his way; and had from the first meditated the confiscation of her property—or that called hers—to his own use.

To provide for the fulfillment of his wishes, he had compelled his sick wife to sign a conveyance to himself of all she possessed. This, he was certain, would cover all her late younger sister had left; to which she was the undoubted heir, for Albertine had left no will, and he insisted that the child should be allowed to inherit nothing from her father.

CHAPTER VI.

ELODIE AND HER GUARDIAN.

MRS. RASHLEIGH lay very ill. A low fever had wasted her strength for months, and now had prostrated her so that she could not leave her bed.

Rashleigh bore the privation of his comforts with surly impatience; and vented his anger often on his suffering wife, when his servants would not bear it. Silas, the man, had finally been dismissed in a quarrel.

The man made his way to the little village not far from the highest bluff, and sauntered to the low-roofed tavern. There he saw a phaeton turn into the yard, and learned that it belonged to a young gentleman from the city, who had more than once visited the locality on business with his master.

The young man's name was Wyndham Blount. He was taking his dinner in the parlour of the inn.

He recognized Silas, and asked after the family.

A very sad account of it had the discharged servant to give. The mistress ailing; as good as dying, one might say; the master that cross, there was no bearing his tempers, and drunk half his time at that; how could a decent workman abide it? and poor Mrs. Rashleigh to have no doctor in all her sufferings!

"I am going there directly," said the young man. "You know your master has often consulted me about his investments, and I have come over to-day on the business. I shall talk to him about a doctor for his wife."

"And indeed, sir, you'll be doing a Christian charity!"

"Is there a medical man in the village?"

"There is, sir, a tolerable one for practice. He is excellent with horses."

"But we don't want a horse-doctor! I had best send one down."

"It's a chance if the master will let him come in."

"I will see to that."

When he had finished his dinner, Wyndham walked to Rashleigh's house.

The master was not at home. He walked in, and inquired for the lady.

The negress looked surprised, but went to take the visitor's name to her mistress. Presently she returned, and asked him to walk into her chamber.

A pale, emaciated woman lay on the bed.

She was evidently in the last stage of weakness. She smiled as Wyndham entered, and held out her wan, wasted hand. He was affected almost beyond the power to speak.

"I am very glad to see you," said the invalid. "Pray sit down."

"I cannot tell you, Mrs. Rashleigh, how shocked I am to find you in this condition. You should have the best advice. Let me send Dr. Orme to see you."

"No, no, Mr. Wyndham; he can do nothing for me; nor can any one. My days are numbered."

"You must not be discouraged. I shall insist upon sending a better doctor than you can get in this village."

"It will be of no use. And I do not care to recover. But—but you can do something for me. You can do what will give me peace—oh, such peace!—in dying."

She whispered to the colored woman, who nodded her head, and left the room.

"My dear madam," said the young man, with deep emotion, "you may rely on me for any service in my power."

"Thanks! I will—trust you!" The husky utterance failed.

The sufferer reached her hand for a glass half full of a mixture, that stood on a table by the bed. She sipped a few drops, and they seemed to strengthen her. She fixed her eyes on Wyndham with intense eagerness, and her lips murmured:

"Elodie!"

"Your little girl?"

"Yes; all I have in the world; and most precious. It is the hardest of all to bear—the thought of leaving her unprotected."

"She is not Mr. Rashleigh's child?"

"No, nor mine; I thought you knew that."

"I understood she was your niece."

"She is; the daughter of my dead sister Albertine. There is a sad story; I have partly written it out; I have not strength to tell it; nor time; for he may come back! But one thing I want you to know—"

Her voice faltered again. Wyndham handed her the cordial, which she took with trembling hand. Her anxiety to relieve her mind of its pressure was telling on her slender stock of force. Presently she went on:

"Elodie is not poor; she is not a dependent on the bounty of Mr. Rashleigh. She is entitled to a large property, if she could prove her claim."

"Indeed?"

"It is true; and when I am gone, I want some able lawyer, some one who will feel an interest to see justice done, to take up her cause."

"If I can render service—" began Wyndham. "You can, you can!" eagerly interrupted the dying woman. "I know your legal ability; I should like to place her cause in your hands."

"This homestead and land—does it belong to you, Mrs. Rashleigh?"

"No; this is Rashleigh's, and he has enough besides; more than he will need. Elodie's fortune is in those investments of stock; you know something about them; it is a good property."

"I thought you had assigned all those to your husband."

The invalid raised herself upon her elbow in bed, and the covering fell from her thin shoulders, while her eyes, wild with vivid expression, were fixed on Wyndham's face.

"Could my signature convey to him property that did not belong to me?" she asked.

"Certainly not."

"Then it is safe!" and she fell back, exhausted, on the pillow.

"But, madam—excuse me—when you executed that conveyance, did you know—"

"I did—yes—I did know—that it was all Elodie's!" answered the woman, with a gleam of exultation in her pallid face.

"He forced me to sign the paper! If I had said, the property was not mine, but my child's, he would have laughed me to scorn, and perhaps have done her a harm. So I let him deceive himself. I only told him the paper he compelled me to sign was worth nothing, and I told him truth: it was not!"

"The child's claim, then, was never recognized by her uncle?"

"No; he always called her a child of shame; but that was false! I had the proofs, but I did not know how to use them, and there was no need of a stir while Elodie was so little! But I am going to leave her, and she must be righted. You have promised to see to it, Mr. Wyndham?"

"I will do what I can; but I must have the proofs you speak of in my own hands."

The sick woman touched a small bell on the table.

"Nelly," she said, when the negress entered, "fetch me that yellow box I gave you to take care of. I am glad, sir, you reminded me: I have not an hour I can count upon. You will see that Elodie is the legal heir of her father."

She unlocked the box with a key she wore, suspended by a ribbon round her neck, and took out a bundle of papers, which she gave to Wyndham.

"I shall never be able to finish what I have begun to write," she said, wearily.

"But Elodie can tell you what she remembers, and—here are the proofs; you will find the certificate of her birth and baptism with the rest. She inherits her father's property, and all that was her mother's: the last would have come to me, if Elodie were not living; and for that reason I was afraid to tell Rashleigh again, that the child was not—what he called her."

Wyndham took the papers. They were safe with him, he said. He put them in a pocket in the breast of his coat.

"You may rely, madam, on my care and fidelity in this matter. Elodie's interests are quite safe with me."

"Oh, thanks, sir! you have taken a load of

distress from my mind," murmured the invalid.

"But you *must* permit me to send Dr. Orme?"

The dame shook her head. The colored attendant, who had now come in, said her strength was worn out, and she would do well to sleep.

The young man saw he could render her no better service than leaving her for the present. With a farewell pressure of the hand, he quitted the room.

"Where is your master?" he said to the servant, who had followed him out.

"I think, sir, on de bluff somewhar!"

"And Miss Elodie?"

"She done went out with her basket to gather sea-weed. It's 'mazin' what a fondness de chil' has for sea-weeds and such trash."

"I will look for them. I must speak to Mr. Rashleigh," said Wyndham. "I think he can not know how ill your mistress is."

He went out, and walked along the cliffs.

The frowning headlands were faced with masses of sharp rocks, piled in broken precipices. The wind had risen, and the moaning sea dashed heavily upon the bowlders strewn along the beach. A vessel, staggering under an unusual, and, as it seemed, dangerous quantity of sail, was making for one of the narrow inlets that ran in between the bluffs.

Wyndham watched her course with some interest, as he walked along the brow of the precipice.

Suddenly he caught sight of a muslin scarf fluttering, as it seemed, half-way to the beach, and, as a furious gust tore it away, it was carried and lodged in a leafless tree on the inaccessible face of the rocky wall.

There was a faint cry; and the next moment, to the young man's horror, he saw a slender girl standing on a platform ledge, under the brow of a crag, two-thirds of the way down!

Surely, he thought, she would not be so mad as to attempt to recover the scarf! No; he heard her laugh: she had abandoned it. Then he shouted to her, warning her not to stir until he came for her.

The girl heard him: she looked up, and answered; but he could not hear what she said. He sought a place where he could descend the rocks.

The gorge on the right led down to the shore; and if he could cross that, his path was easy enough. But the crag, more than a hundred feet above the ledge where the girl stood, projected so that a plummet would have fallen several feet from her.

The wind was freshening. If she would only not attempt to move till he reached her side! else the savage gust would blow her down. He could see her scarf twisted in the dead branches, and blown about like a flag in a storm at sea. The vessel he had watched had rounded the point, and disappeared.

He shouted again, and made signs that he was going down. The young girl seemed to

understand him; she pointed to the gorge and then traced a path along the ledge. Then she crouched down close to the rock, and passed her arm through a tough root that hung from a tree above, and was fastened below.

Wyndham hurried down, stepping from one granite mass to another, and clinging to the trees as he descended. It was a rough descent and full of risk; but he soon reached the ledge, and crept along to the spot where the girl sat. She laughed in her joy at seeing him.

"You were wrong to come here, Elodie," he said, gravely.

"Oh, I know it, Mr. Wyndham; but I came up on that side; see, and I thought I could get back the same way. So I could, but the great stone that was poised there fell, after I had crossed it."

The young man shuddered as he looked.

The bowlder had been dislodged, even by the girl's light touch, and had left a sheer descent only a bird could pass over.

"We can go the way you came," the girl said.

"Impossible! I could scarcely keep my footing, holding by the saplings with both hands. You could not go alone, especially in this wind; and the steps are too narrow for me to help you."

"Then can we get down to the beach?"

"Not unless a miracle should interpose to help us."

"What are we to do, then?"

The girl laughed a little as she asked the question, looking frankly into Wyndham's face.

She was very young; certainly not more than fifteen, if so much. Her hair, like a fluff of pale gold, in the wildest disorder, framed an oval face, fresh and bright as a rose. The eyes were blue, open and fearless in their confiding expression; the mouth was small and pouting; the pink chin was daintily rounded. It was a sweet, childish face, and Wyndham thought he had never seen anything so lovely.

In answer to her question he took off his coat and put it on her. She made some resistance, on account of the danger of his feeling the cold; but he paid no heed to her.

"You have lost your scarf," he said. "You must wear this. What are we to do? wait for a boat from the vessel out there? The men can fling up a rope."

"But they cannot see us. The vessel is anchored behind that point."

"Can she get in there?"

"Certainly; there is quite a bay; sheltered, too, by the rocks on each side."

"Then some of them will go up; and we must call to them."

"The wind blows so fiercely I am afraid they cannot hear!"

Wyndham shouted with all his might, but only the shrieking blast answered.

"And the storm is coming on worse!" he wailed. "Tell me, does the tide rise as high as this?"

Elodie burst into a ripple of musical merriment.

"You might know it does not," she replied. "Look at those weeds strewn like ropes below there. That is high-water mark."

But, even as she spoke, a mountainous billow, hurled against the cliff with terrible force, covered the platform and them with spray!

The young man shivered as he tried to screen Elodie; but she did not seem to heed the drenching.

"This is bad enough," she said; "and it will be worse presently, for the daylight is leaving us! Would it not be wise to attempt an escape, even if we risk something? If it gets dark we cannot move!"

"I will not peril your life! If you can stay here alone, Elodie, while I try to scramble up—"

"Don't leave me, please!" cried the poor girl. "Let me go with you!"

"You could not pass where I did to come here! I could manage to get over it, though the return is more difficult."

"Then you must not go. If we could let ourselves down."

"With a rope, tied round this rock above us, we might venture, and it would be safe. But nothing can be done without a rope."

"Then must we stay here?"

"Till help comes. I see no other way. If we cannot get off to-night, I will watch you, Elodie, while you sleep."

"My poor aunt! how she will fret after me!" murmured the girl, weeping softly. "How foolish I was to come here!"

It was rapidly growing dusk. The masses of clouds driven up into the sky obscured the sunlight, and the roar of the seething waters below seemed more terrible than ever. The young man tried to soothe the girl's self-reproachful grief.

He shouted for help at intervals; and at last the welcome gleam of a lantern was seen moving far above. Their cry for help was answered by a cheer.

Two or three men could be seen. In a short time they lowered a rope; but it fell so far out it could not be grasped.

Lowered on the other side it fell beyond the bowlder that had slipped down.

"Let it down entirely, on the other side!" shouted Wyndham, and in a few moments he was obeyed.

The rope had been made fast above. He called to them to loosen it, and send the boat to meet them at the beach.

Presently the rope, which he firmly grasped, was let down, and he caught it. He made it fast around the imbedded rock, and prepared to descend. The waves were breaking furiously at their feet, and at intervals covering them with spray.

"No boat can live in such a sea!" he groaned. "They cannot rescue us. But there must be a path along the beach. Can you find it, Elodie, in this twilight?"

"Oh, yes," the girl answered. "Not by the point; we cannot get round that; the tide has risen too high."

"The boatmen are there; and I can swim with you, child, to the inlet."

"If a boat could not live in the sea, you cannot!" cried the brave girl. "You would be dashed against the rocks, and we should both perish!"

"True; what can we do?"

"There is a safe path on the opposite side."

"Are you sure you know it?"

"I have been over it a hundred times."

"And it is not too late?"

"Oh, no! See, the tide has only just turned."

"Then come; trust yourself to me."

He wound his arm around the girl's slender waist; having previously lashed the rope about his own. There was a loud cheer from the men above as he commenced the descent. He bade the girl cling to him firmly, steadying himself by the rocks, now by one hand, now by both, as they passed.

There was good foothold part of the way; and only a few feet here and there where he had to depend on the rope.

But the heavy waves hurled themselves upon the pair more and more furiously as they went down. Wyndham kept his arm clasped about Elodie, telling her not to loosen her hold for an instant.

They stood on the shore, but they had not a moment to lose. They fled swiftly along the way pointed out by the girl, who caught her breath convulsively as the greedy waters dashed over her.

At last they were out of danger, in the path that led upward through a ravine partly cleared. The men, with torches, had come to meet them.

"You had best carry her in your arms," said Wyndham, releasing Elodie, whose strength was indeed nearly spent. "I will follow you as fast as you can walk."

This was done, and the girl was borne by two of the neighbors toward her home.

"Is Mr. Rashleigh here?" asked Wyndham.

"No," answered one of the men. "He was not in a fit state to come with us."

The young lawyer muttered an exclamation.

"And I heard that his wife was took for worse," observed another of the men.

Sobs came from the poor girl they were carrying, and she bade them let her down and she would walk. They could get on faster. She wept all the way.

They came to the house. There was light in all the rooms. A dark form stood in the doorway.

"Oh, Miss Elodie! Miss Elodie! where has you been all dis time?"

The girl clutched the black woman's arm.

"Is she alive? Or have I killed her with my folly?" she gasped, white as death.

"Oh, honey! don't take on so! She's alibe!"

An' she hain't fretted none for you; she was past frettin'."

Poor Elodie, wet as she was, tore off the coat she had worn till now, flung it down, and rushed past the rest, into the chamber of her dying relative.

There lay the form on the bed, so motionless it might have been taken for a corpse. The girl sunk on her knees, clasped the hand that hung passively over the coverlet, and covered it with passionate kisses.

"Oh, my aunt, my darling! Mamma! look at me! Speak to your poor Elodie! Say you forgive her! Mamma! Darling!"

The eyes unclosed; the pale lips moved; there seemed a power in the voice of affection to bring back the prey of death, even after his grasp was secure. The woman recognized her niece, and tried to smile.

Wyndham had passed into the room, while the other men stood back. The dying woman glanced toward him, and he walked to the bedside.

Mrs. Rashleigh's feeble fingers closed over his hand, as he laid it on hers. She drew it toward Elodie's, and made an effort to put hers into the young man's. He saw what she meant, and firmly he grasped the girl's small hand.

"I promise—" he said, solemnly—"I swear—to be faithful to the charge you gave me."

The dying woman understood him, and smiled.

She strove to lift up her head, and to articulate a word; but her strength failed. She fell back on the pillow, and her gasping breath grew fainter, till they could hear it no longer.

"Come 'way, honey!" implored the faithful nurse. "Come with me, and let me put on your dry clothes! You saw her again; dat was all she wanted. Sho's happy now."

Wyndham quickly walked out of the room. The dead silence that prevailed told all present what had happened.

The door leading up-stairs was then slowly opened, and a haggard, flushed face presented itself.

"What's all this? Men in my house! What's the meaning of it?" stammered a drunken voice, as the master of the house staggered in, and essayed to cross the room to the chamber that had been his wife's.

"Letty! Letty! I say! Have you got visitors?"

Wyndham strode after him, and seized his arm.

"You shall not go in there!" he said, sternly.

"What's to hinder me? Letty, I say! Why don't you speak?"

"Oh, master!" exclaimed the negress, "be silent now! She'll never hear you, nor speak to you no more! never, no more!"

"What d'ye mean?" he cried, turning upon her. She had Elodie in her arms, and was taking her into another room. At the sound of the inebriated man's voice the girl stood up,

faced her uncle, and dashed the tears from her eyes.

"She means, sir, that my darling aunt is free at last!" she cried, defiantly. "You cannot scold her any more. Turn on me, if you like; you cannot hurt me! I'm not afraid of you."

"And who are you, ye imp of Satan, and how dare you speak so to me, whose bread ye've been eating? I'll have you here no longer! Tramp—out of my house!"

"She shall leave your house to-night," interposed Wyndham, angrily. "Elodie, change your dress, and let me take you to the inn. The nurse shall go with you!"

"Oh, we cannot leave my darling aunt! We must watch with her, and dress her for the funeral. When she is buried I will leave your house, Mr. Rashleigh, and you shall never see me again. Come, Nelly, help me to get ready."

She passed out of the room with the colored woman. Rashleigh, whose drunken perceptions had now taken in the fact that his wife was dead, looked after her sullenly and bewildered.

"Where is the hussy going?" he asked.

"I shall take her to my mother's house," replied Wyndham. "Her aunt gave her into my charge with her last breath, and I accepted the trust."

But Elodie refused to leave the house while her aunt lay dead within it; and Wyndham persuaded one of the female neighbors to take charge of her.

He returned to attend the funeral, and as soon as that was over, bade the young girl prepare to accompany him to the city.

Rashleigh made no opposition to the departure of Elodie. He only required to be informed of her address. Convinced that she had no legal rights, he cared not what became of her, and was just as well pleased to be rid of the expense of her support.

Wyndham took his fair young ward to the home of his mother and sister.

They received the orphan with cordial kindness, and made her one of the family at once. She found a thousand things in the novelties of city life to make her forget her sorrows. Before long, Elodie was again happy; for her buoyant nature could not long be held down by the pressure of calamity.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW PUPIL.

"I HAVE a new pupil for you; and she is such an odd little thing!"

This was Miss Blount's introduction to a graphic and detailed account of her brother Wyndham's adventure, and the result, an addition to the members of her mother's family.

"Only think of Wynd's having a ward!" she added, when her narration was finished.

"And an heiress, too!" put in Ruhama. "Who knows but it will end in the usual man-

ner of romances, with ward and guardian falling in love with each other!"

"I thought you said Miss Sterns was a child!" remarked Olive.

"Only fifteen; but wonderfully precocious! And so fond of her own way! She always manages to get it, too, somehow!"

"Has she taste for music?"

"A perfect passion! Is always playing and singing, but lacks cultivation, of course. My brother says he wants her to have all the culture necessary, to develop what talent she may possess."

"You know, Emily, I am not capable of being a scientific teacher; that is, of the highest grade."

"Hardly any private teacher can be expected to do that. But you will try her, Olive?"

"I will do my best, and thank you for the addition to my list."

"Thanks for nothing, Olive, dear!" cried Ruhama. "Who should we think of, but you, and be happy that we can contribute a little to your success?"

"Not a little, dear friend; I owe my best pupils to your kindness!"

"Now, have done with such talk! Kindness, forsooth! If I had a fortune of my own, who should share it but my dearest Olive?"

Miss Weston turned away her face to hide the tears that sprang to her eyes.

"But we have a favor to ask," said Emily.

"We are going to have a drawing-room concert at Mrs. Moore's splendid rooms, in aid of the Orphan's Home. There is to be music and recitations. Will you help us?"

"I?" repeated Olive, looking up in surprise.

"Why not, dear?" answered Miss Blount.

"It is not a party. You have such an exquisite taste; and we want you to lead the chorus in the music that is to accompany the readings. The chorus will be in the third parlor."

"I cannot possibly come."

"It will oblige us immensely, and do good. You were always willing to lend a helping hand, dear friend."

"But I cannot leave my mother. No—not even for one evening."

"She is not worse, I hope?"

"She is failing from day to day."

The girl's voice was lost in the sob she strove to repress.

"Then you shall not be urged," cried Ruhama, going to her and kissing her cheeks.

"We shall have the aid of the new musical lion, you know, Emily," she said, looking archly at Miss Blount. "You shall not distress Olive. The foreign gentleman, you know. Was he introduced to you last evening at Mrs. Bogart's?"

"No; I did not see him except at a distance; I did not even hear his name."

"The Count del Raggio, or something like that. He is very handsome, and they say, is of a distinguished family in Italy. Dear Italy! how I love all who are born in that charming country!"

"There I cannot agree with you, Ruhama. I do not admire old Antonio, for instance."

"Oh, the hideous juggler! No, no; I meant such Italians as the count."

"Or any sunburned individual with plenty of whiskers, and stiletto-looking eyes, who can look lofty, and talk gibberish when he is in a rage."

"You could not help calling the count handsome, if you had noticed him, Emily. And, as to his gibberish, you should have heard him sing that Italian bravura after you were gone. It was exquisite; and they say he composed it himself."

"He is a musician, too?"

"Of course. Olive, dear, I shall bring him to see you one of these days, on purpose to let you hear him. You will receive him in a professional way."

And she went on to give an account of the stranger.

The handsome stranger, with his Italian name and his acknowledged genius, had already become the admiration of all the ladies in the most fashionable circles of the metropolis.

He was so reserved and stately, yet so willing to oblige by playing the airs he had composed, and accompanying the piano or guitar with his magnificent voice!

Then there was something of mystery about him. He seemed melancholy and abstracted at times, and frequently did not answer when addressed.

He had brought letters, Ruhama added, that were sufficient vouchers for his respectability; yet it was but seldom he could be induced to go into society. Whenever he did, he sought no introductions, often declining them; though with a graceful courtesy that could not possibly give offense. He had willingly consented, however, to lend his aid to a charity entertainment.

They were interrupted by a knock at the outside door.

Olive went and opened it. A slender, youthful form stood there, but the face was covered with a thick veil.

The young hostess hesitated. It was a stranger; and she did not like to ask in visitors she did not know.

The young girl inquired if Miss Blount was there. Before Olive could reply, Emily, who had heard and recognized the voice, ran out and confronted the new-comer.

"You naughty child!" she exclaimed, with laughter struggling in her reproving tone. "Did I not tell you you must not come with us! And how did you find the way?"

The girl had thrown back her veil, and Olive was struck with her singular face.

Her profusion of pale gold hair, rippling across her forehead, hung in masses, like floss silk, on either side her fresh, rose-tinted cheeks. She had the brightest violet eyes in the world, just now flashing with something like defiance.

"I know that you told me not to come, Miss Emily," she replied. "But I knew you were coming to see about my music lessons, and I wanted to see the teacher before you made any arrangement."

"And you followed us all the way, by yourself?"

"I did not follow you; I knew the address; and I came in the cars, part of the way."

"After you had been forbidden to go out alone?"

"You should not have forbidden me," retorted the girl. "I am not used to obeying orders."

"You will come in?" asked Olive.

"Oh, yes; you may as well," added Miss Blount, taking the girl's arm and leading her into the little parlor. "Olive, I am sorry the first introduction to you of your pupil should be in this wise; but you must excuse impatience in a wayward child."

"I am not a child," the girl murmured; but Olive kindly took her hand, and said:

"I am glad of the opportunity of knowing the young lady; and I trust we shall get along comfortably in our new relations, if it pleases her that we enter upon them."

These words soothed the ruffled self-esteem of the girl; she smiled brightly, and took the seat offered her.

Then, with the courteous kindness that always marked her manner, Olive asked questions about her previous lessons, and her tastes in the art.

"Perhaps you would like to hear her play a little?" asked Emily.

At the request of Miss Weston, Elodie took off her gloves, removed the shawl that covered her shoulders, and seated herself at the piano.

She struck the keys with a bold touch and played an air from Norma. It was a difficult one for a young performer, and she was inaccurate in several notes; but on the whole she had a brilliant execution.

Her passion for the art asserted itself. At the more startling turns, her face seemed to kindle. She looked up like an inspired creature; she seemed to forget the presence of those about her.

Emily was impatient at the blunders she made, and Ruhama laughed; but Olive listened attentively, smiled, and warmly applauded her at the close.

"You have manifest talent," she said.

"But sadly needing culture," observed the other two ladies.

"Where there is real genius," answered Olive, "it will not take long to triumph over obstacles caused by inexperience. I can see that she will outstrip me, and that before a great while."

Elodie started up, came hastily to her and impulsively threw her arms round her neck.

"I shall be glad," she said, "to have you for my teacher."

Ruhama gave another of her musical ripples of merriment.

"Nothing wins the heart like praise."

"We all know that appreciation is pleasant," was Olive's reply; and the young girl gave her a grateful look, while her color rose perceptibly.

"Would you like to hear me sing?" she asked.

"Very much indeed."

Again Elodie seated herself at the piano; and after a low prelude, dashed into a wild and stirring song. Like her playing, it was full of faults, but of spirit as well. She mastered the trills admirably.

Her gentle instructress was convinced she would have a powerful though erratic genius committed to her training.

She kept silence, buried in thought, when the song was ended. Elodie's eyes were riveted on her face.

"Emily," said Olive, at length, "this young lady would do credit to a better teacher than myself."

"She could not have one so patient with her faults. You see, she needs to go over the elementary studies, to learn to overcome her inaccuracies."

"She will soon conquer those; and then she will soar far above me," said Olive, with a smile.

"And I will have you, and nobody but you, to teach me!" cried Elodie.

"You really must undertake her," said Miss Blount. "Only do not spoil her; she is too conceited already."

"I think I can correct the faults she has; and when I have done all I can, she can be ready for a scientific professor."

"Keep her in leading-strings as long as you can," whispered Emily. "Your gentleness and general culture, if you can impart them, will do her good. My brother was wishing she were like you."

Olive's pale cheek colored slightly. She glanced at Ruhama.

"You would say," cried the lively brunette, "that Mr. Blount ought to prefer me for a model?"

It was Olive's thought, though she had not expressed it.

"Oh, no, my dear! Mr. Blount may admire me; but he wants his ward to be graver and more steady. He would not have her doing a bit of flirtation for the world!"

The tinkle of a small bell was heard.

"You will excuse me," said Olive. "I must go to my mother."

"And we must go home," said Miss Blount. "We shall bring Elodie to you three times a week, beginning to-morrow."

The adieux were made, and the three ladies went out to the carriage.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHARITY CONCERT.

THE charity concert was a social party as well; dancing being added to the attractions of the evening.

The house was a large double one on Park avenue, and was furnished with splendor.

In addition to the spacious parlors, a room was extended in the rear, of immense size, lofty, and lighted from above; the windows opening to the sky and richly colored. The ceiling was frescoed, the walls were covered with choice paintings, and the floor was inlaid with many-colored woods, and polished like a mirror.

It had always been used as a music-room, and a platform was raised and carpeted for the musicians at the further end. The whole effect of this magnificent suite of rooms, multiplied by mirrors from floor to ceiling, and filled with elegantly-dressed people, was like that of a palatial levee.

Elodie had heard of the brilliant affair, and was wild to be of the party. Why not? It was a charity concert, and she was ready to contribute by the purchase of tickets. If not old enough to be permitted to enter society, she could surely be present at the entertainment. She could have a new dress made; she could make one herself. She teased her guardian till she obtained his consent to her going.

"I am not in favor, Wyndham, of allowing that child to think she must go everywhere with us," observed the grave sister. "She is much too forward for her age."

"But this is an entertainment children will enjoy, as well as grown people. I know several who intend taking their families."

"I speak of general usage. You have indulged Elodie in going to theaters and operas and concerts, almost every evening."

"Not so often as that! not more than three evenings in a week."

"And how can she study, if she partakes of such amusements?"

"Do you find her backward?"

"I cannot say I do; she has more than ordinary powers, and learns rapidly. But it is not well to have her thoughts diverted. All her teachers will tell you so."

"I do not mean that they shall be. Let her understand that in future such indulgences must be rare. Though an evening now and then at the opera will help to cultivate her musical taste. She has rare talent for music."

"Certainly she has; but it needs strict training."

Elodie heard such conversations often enough to be aware that her protectors judged it expedient to restrain her passion for excitement.

She did not feel this need, and chafed at the restraint. She resolved to gratify her passion for dress on this occasion, and had actually purchased and begun to make up a rich white silk, embroidered with tiny sprigs of pink and gold—to be set off by a wreath of flowers to match crowning her head, and a fragrant bouquet at the bosom.

But Emily peremptorily interfered; laughed at the idea of so young a girl making her ap-

pearance in such a dress; and insisted on her wearing plain white muslin. She was supported by Mrs. Blount; and even Wyndham, when appealed to by his dissatisfied ward, urged on her the beauty of simplicity in her attire. Even ornament in her hair was forbidden.

If the poor child had been determined to set off her beauty to the best possible advantage, she could not have done it more effectually than by obeying the mandate of her seniors.

When she came into the parlor, ready to start, in her simple white dress with blue ribbon fastening the ruffle at her throat and blue ribbon confining her luxuriant hair—her wild-rose complexion as pure and fresh as the petal of a flower, her blue eyes dancing with excitement, Wyndham was sure he never had beheld so lovely a creature.

Mrs. Blount took charge of her, and the four filled the carriage.

Just before them as they entered, they saw Ruhama Seaforth, leaning on the arm of Tom Wyatt.

Beside the young lady walked a stately gentleman, whose air and gait seemed familiar, in some degree, to Emily. But, as he bowed to several persons in passing, she noticed a decidedly foreign manner; and that was not to her taste.

Ruhama, as usual, was superbly dressed, in a gold-brown silk tunic over a rich dark-brown lower skirt, both trimmed profusely. She always wore her hair rather loaded with ornament. She was in contrast to Emily Blount, who was almost nun-like in her grave costume, and preferred the dull colors.

Ruhama and her party took a seat near the platform, and were presently joined by her father, and a noble-looking elderly man, who was invited by the banker to occupy a chair next his daughter. Both addressed him frequently, and called him General Marsh.

Ruhama sent several messages by Tom to her friend Emily, who sat several rows of chairs behind her. On one slip of paper she had written:

"The Count del Raggio will sing the fourth song. He will not be on the platform."

Emily showed this to her brother. He shook his head; he had never met the celebrity.

The songs were alternated with dramatic recitations, and a scene between a lady and gentleman, in costume, with appropriate action.

When the fourth song was announced, as to be given by the celebrated artist, the Count del Raggio, there was a burst of kid-gloved applause from the fair portion of the crowded assemblage. Even many of the gentlemen added their hearty clapping.

But there was no response by the appearance of the lion upon the stage. He was to accompany himself, and he had taken his seat at the grand piano so far on the left side as to be out of the view of a large part of the audi-

ence. Among these was the Blount party; and several around them expressed their disappointment.

"Why doesn't he come out and show himself?" murmured one.

"You know he is not a professional," answered a lady just behind her.

"But he might have acknowledged the applause with a bow at least."

"The eccentricity of genius!"

"Pshaw! I don't believe he merits half what they boast of him!"

"Wait, and judge for yourself!"

When the performer touched the instrument, all recognized at once a master-hand. Nothing had been heard like it. Elodie started from her employment of watching the late comers, and a flush of sudden delight illumined her features.

Even Miss Blount, little given as she was to raptures, was startled into admiration when she heard the stranger sing and play. The perfection of artistic skill seemed united with the freshness of wild nature in his performances. It was the gush of soul itself.

He was encored; and when he sung to an air composed by himself, the words of Metastasio, beginning, "L'Ouda dal mar divisa," the touching melancholy of the simple melody, representing the restless longing of a soul unsatisfied with all this life can offer, and finding repose only in death, deeply affected Emily. She turned away her head, for she felt the tears stealing down her cheeks.

Ruhama, who was observing her, noticed her agitation, and smiled, as if she thought she had achieved a triumph.

Wyndham, though he had no cultivation in the art, shared the enthusiasm of the rest.

Elodie could not contain her ecstatic emotions.

When the song was ended, the applause was overwhelming. Then came an interval for social converse.

"Dear guardy!" exclaimed Elodie, "is that gentleman—the count—an Italian? Then I'll be bound he is a teacher of music. Will you let me take lessons of him?"

"Hush, child!" whispered Emily. "He is not a teacher."

"How do you know? I never heard you say you knew him. Will you bring him and introduce him after concert, guardy? I should like so much to know him."

"I am not acquainted with the gentleman, Elodie," replied Wyndham.

"But Miss Seaforth will introduce you! See, he has come out to speak to her; and now she is looking this way! She would present him to Miss Blount."

"Be silent, Elodie," said Emily. "I do not wish the stranger to be introduced to us. No, Wyndham," she added to her brother, who had risen, "I beg you will not go there."

"He is a genius in music!" cried Wyndham.

"Who can he be?"

"An Italian. I have heard Ruhama speak

of him. I think he brought letters to the banker. Don't look that way so persistently, Elodie. It is not well-bred to gaze at people."

Wyndham noticed a tremor in his sister's voice, and other signs of disturbance, that showed she had been deeply moved by some cause or other.

"They are all looking this way again!" cried the impetuous little girl, "and Miss Seaforth is laughing; can it be at any of us? Are you sure, Mr. Wyndham, that the count would not give me lessons, if you were to ask him? All Italians are poor, and want pupils, I have heard."

"I think he must be an exception, my child. If he were needy, his friends would have recommended him. He seems tolerably intimate with the Seaforths."

Tom Wyatt came sauntering toward them at that moment, and stopped to enter into conversation with Emily and her brother.

He told her the count was only an amateur, and had required considerable persuasion to induce him to sing before so large an audience. "He is always ready to oblige in a private drawing-room, but appears to shrink from publicity."

"Then he is not at all professional?" asked Mrs. Blount.

"Oh, dear, no; not in the least. He has never made music a profession."

"He does not give lessons," put in Elodie.

"Not at all, I believe. He has an independent fortune, made, too, by himself; but not by art."

"How then?"

"By—upon my word I don't know precisely; but I think some commercial business. He is traveling partner in some wealthy firm."

"Strange!" exclaimed Wyndham. "Those foreigners are so seldom engaged in mercantile pursuits! and with his wonderful talent for music, it is singular he did not put it to some lucrative use."

"That he has declined to do. He cultivates music as a pastime merely."

"I am so sorry for that," murmured Elodie. Emily pressed her arm to keep her silent.

In the second part of the concert the count sung twice, being warmly encored each time.

The effect of his marvelous performance was greatly increased. All agreed that no such glorious voice, in an amateur, had ever been heard.

When the entertainment was over, about half the company departed, and room was left for dancing and the promenade.

As soon as she could, Ruhama came to join the Blounts. She drew Emily apart, and they went together into a refreshment room, and stood in an obscure corner.

"What think you of our musical lion?" asked Ruhama, observing the unusual flush on the cheeks of her friend.

"I cannot wonder at your—at the enthusiasm he creates," was the reply. "He possesses exquisite taste with powers, I confess, be-

yond my appreciation. I do not know that I ever felt the true soul of music before."

"Can you believe, then, what I said, that he is one who would have been an ornament to any society?"

"Certainly; his mental cultivation and elevated breeding are perceptible in all he does. I noticed his grandeur of bearing, and grace of movement."

"I am glad you think so. He is most anxious to make your acquaintance."

"I do not wish to know him."

"Why not? I find him charming. He is quite domesticated at our house. His conversation is even more enchanting than his music."

"That may be; and, to be quite frank, I will henceforward give up my prejudice against his nation, and his art as a pursuit in life. But you must not introduce him to me. If you will have my reasons, I could not help thinking, when I heard him sing, all these glorious gifts, so rich in power to confer happiness, were Herbert's, and I have despoiled him of them! I bound him in chains, with my ideas of utility."

The fair speaker buried her face in her hands. Ruhama was amazed. She had not thought her cousin Herbert was remembered in this manner, and with such depth of feeling. She had never heard Emily speak thus.

She was silent, and looked grave for a few minutes.

At last Miss Blount looked up, restored to her composure.

"You do not know," remarked Ruhama, after some hesitation, "that Herbert returned some days since?"

"Returned! and he has not sought me! Well—I deserve it. But I shall never love another."

Emily again hid her face as she spoke; and, strangely enough, Ruhama made no attempt to console her.

"So—you are here!" cried the indefatigable Tom Wyatt, as he caught sight of the two girls. He was followed by the rest of the party, as well as a crowd in search of ices, punch and cake.

Emily declined any refreshment. She was only anxious to go home; but she could not take away her companions just then.

"So provoking," cried Tom, "that the hero of the night—the superb count—should have taken himself off so suddenly. I wanted to introduce Blount, but the Italian had left the house."

Amid the gay hubbub, Ruhama whispered to her friend:

"Come to me to-morrow; I have something particular to say. May I expect you?"

"I will come, at four o'clock," was the whispered reply.

Emily could imagine nothing "particular" to be communicated, unless it were the news of Ruhama's engagement with Wyndham.

She had long wished for it; she knew her

brother admired Miss Seaforth; she fancied the young lady was not indifferent to him. Only her passion for flirtation had kept them from a mutual understanding.

The inspiring music of the band called the dancers to their places. Elodie ran to her friend.

"Emily, dear, do find me a partner."

They had passed out of the refreshment room, facing the expectant assembly of young people, eager for their favorite amusement.

"Wyndham will dance with you, child," was the wearied answer to the girl's entreaty.

"Don't you see how busy he is, talking to Miss Seaforth! Oh, I shall die, if I lose this heavenly dance."

"Then, Tom, you must be obliging for once."

Tom was waiting to ask the favor of Emily's hand, but he accepted that of her protegee, and the two were presently whirling in the maze, to the spirit-stirring music.

"I wish I could go home," murmured Emily, as she sunk on a sofa beside her mother. "My head aches so terribly."

"I don't see how we can go without your brother and Elodie; and it is a pity to cut short their enjoyment. It is early yet."

Wyndham and Ruhama were certainly engaged very pleasantly in conversation; so earnestly, they had lost sight of every one else.

They stood in the recess of a French window, partly concealed from view by the ample folds of the damask curtains. The handsome brunette was brilliant; and the manly face that met her looks, beamed with joy too, as far as his sister could judge.

The two had evidently come to an understanding at last.

"They, at least, will be happy," Emily sighed to herself. "I have not the heart to disturb them!"

So on, and on went the dancing, and Tom, who could not induce Miss Blount to leave her seat, took young Miss Sterns out again and again; and the girl was radiant with her enjoyment.

And still Ruhama and Wyndham were together, either talking by themselves or promenading; and the general joy seemed unconfin'd; and Emily fell into a reverie, and thought of her past with its promise blighted by her own act; and resolved she would enter no more into any scene of gayety. For her, as for her friend Olive Weston, the bright morning of life was over.

Ah! how soon, to most hearts, comes the overcast sky and the portentous mutterings of the storm!

At last they were in the carriage and whirled homeward. They went into the dim parlor, and Emily seemed still in a painful dream.

Elodie broke into rapturous exclamations. She had never enjoyed an evening so much. She wished she could be so happy every night of her life.

Wyndham laughed at her enthusiasm; but he, too, seemed in extraordinary spirits.

"Am I to congratulate you, my dear brother?" whispered his sister, pausing as she passed close to him to go up to her chamber.

He flushed, for he could not fail to read her meaning, and hesitated a moment.

"Yes," he responded at length. "You may; for I am to make the acquaintance of the foreign count, under the best auspices. He will dine here to-morrow, with your friend Miss Seaforth."

CHAPTER IX.

ELODIE'S RESOLUTION.

ELODIE enjoyed her lessons at the humble home of Olive Weston, because she was always praised when her efforts deserved it, and so gently told of mistakes that she took the reproof almost as praise.

She had made rapid progress, and practiced so diligently that her teacher not only commended her, but expressed surprise at her ardor in the pursuit. It was so unlike the listless indifference of other young ladies.

"But they study music only as a parlor accomplishment," responded the girl, "while I mean to make it a life pursuit."

Olive did not quite understand her.

"A profession, you know."

"I did not know that! Do you intend being a professional singer?"

"Certainly."

"Your friends have no idea of it; have they?"

"Perhaps not; but I have always wanted to sing in public. The opera is my world."

"The opera! Do you mean to go on the stage?"

"I tell you in confidence, Miss Weston, I do. I love it; I pine for it! I have no relations to keep me from doing as I please."

"But there is no need. You will be independent in fortune, I am told."

"Then I can afford to indulge my tastes. I shall be miserable if I do not have my way."

"But, Elodie, you are very young, and hardly a judge yet of what is best for your future."

"If I am young, I can see what kind of life would make me wretched. Such a one as Miss Seaforth's for instance: nothing but a series of flirtations."

"You must not talk so, Elodie."

"I heard some one call her the most accomplished flirt in the city. And poor Mr. Wyndham, who worships her—"

"Hush; I will not hear any scandal!"

"I was only telling you how I should hate to be a society belle, with butterflies around me. I want the bright, intense life of an artist!"

"Ah, child, there is many a thorn in the artist's rose-wreath."

"I want to dress, and sing, and act some grand part! To feel myself in a new, glorious world; to thrill crowds with my voice; to have bouquets thrown to me, in the midst of tumultuous applause!"

"Poor Elodie! I can see that you dwell on the vain side of the dream! You must not indulge such fancies. You have a vast deal to learn, and many errors to unlearn, before you could even begin a professional life."

"I know all the difficulties; but I do not despair of conquering them. Have I not improved since I took lessons?"

"Very much, indeed!"

"I will go on improving. And when you turn me off as finished, so far as you can finish me, I will have masters—the very best; and if necessary, I shall go to Paris or Italy, and study there!"

"Again I say, do not indulge fancies that may never be realized."

"Why not, if I have the means to indulge them, and am determined on it?"

After more conversation of this kind, Olive rose and opened the folding doors connecting the two little parlors.

There was a bright little fire, and in its glow an easy-chair drawn up beside a stand covered with embroidered cloth, on which stood a vase full of fresh flowers.

An elderly lady sat reading the Holy Scriptures; the volume resting on the stand.

She wore a loose robe of silver-gray cashmere, tied in front with white ribbons, and a cap of soft mull, prettily embroidered, with a white rosette and bow at the side.

"Mamma, dearest," said the soft voice of her daughter, "you have often taken pleasure in hearing Elodie sing and play, and wondered at her marvelous progress. Hear now what she says about her own future, and give her your advice."

Elodie was not afraid of the sweet old lady, and did not hesitate at repeating what she had said.

"Ah, my child, you will think differently of all this when two or three years more have rolled over your head!"

The girl protested as before.

"People who cling to such dreams, in their inexperience, remind me of Sydney Brill's elopement," remarked Mrs. Weston, smiling.

"Tell me about that."

"Sydney was a romantic young gentleman, and fancied himself in love with a young lady whose father had refused his consent to the match. The daughter was an invalid, but an heiress, and Sydney had always seen her in an easy-chair, as you see me now, Elodie—or in a carriage, driving out with her father. He was charmed with her face as well as her fortune, and at length persuaded her to elope with him."

"I thought he would do that!"

"Her maid helped her into the carriage late one evening, and followed her. Sydney sat on the front seat. His attention was drawn to a curious knocking at regular intervals, on the bottom of the vehicle. He wondered several times if any part of it had given way. At last he put his head out to bid the driver stop, that he might see what was broken."

His lady-love clasped his arm, and begged him not to do it. By degrees she confessed the truth. She had lost a leg some years before by a fall from her horse, and it was her wooden member that kept up the knocking."

Elodie laughed.

"As the day dawned, and they drew near the station, the carriage gave a lurch in going over some obstacle in the road, and was over set. The lady was not injured, but the shock had displaced one of her eyes—a glass one—and before she could conceal her face by drawing her veil, Sydney saw that his bride-elect was minus an eye as well as a leg."

"Poor fellow! I pity him, indeed!"

"They had to stop at the nearest inn, as the carriage needed some repairs. The maid assisted her mistress into the parlor, and Sydney heard the latter say, as she stumped to the mirror:

"How hideous a night's travel makes one look!"

"How penitent he must have been for his rashness!"

"Just then a carriage drove up, and a gentleman entered the parlor of the inn. It was the young lady's father."

"Come to take her home?"

"By no means. He said to young Brill:

"A year since, I forbade your suit to my daughter—' Sydney answered, eagerly: 'I know it, sir; I beg your pardon; and sooner than offend you, I am now prepared to give her up.'"

"Oh, what did she say?"

"The young lady gave a little shriek, and went into hysterics. The father responded:

"No—Mr. Brill, I do not now demand such a sacrifice of you. I thought you sought my child for her expectations of fortune. She had indeed great expectations from her aunt, Mrs. Hylton; but these are brought to naught by the second marriage of her aunt and the birth of an heir to her property. My daughter has no prospects of wealth; nothing but her loveliness and her excellence of character. You love her faithfully; you have proved that love by tempting her to an act of disobedience which, under the circumstances, I freely pardon. My blessing rests upon your union; my house and heart are open to you!"

"Oh, Mrs. Weston! What did the young man do?"

"What could he do? The father so indulgent! yet Sydney knew he had only his pension as a retired colonel, that ceased at his death; and the young lady looking at him with tender eyes—one of which he knew to be false. He began muttering something about not being able to provide for her the luxuries to which she had been used; and not venturing to ask her to share his poverty, etc."

"But she protested, with tears in her one eye, that she would gladly live with him in a cottage, or a hovel; and limping across the room, she threw herself into his arms. The

father lifted his hands in benediction. So Sydney was compelled to marry her."

"To marry her! What a take in!"

"She led him a terrible life; for she had a temper, if she lacked a leg and an eye. At the end of two years they separated. She had involved poor Sydney deeply in debt by her extravagance; and he gave up to her all he had, and went to the Mexican war."

"To be killed there, I suppose?"

"I do not know; I never heard of him afterward. But to the moral of this true story, my dear child: In the blind pursuit of a phantasy, you are like the young man in love with a girl whose beauty was a deception. If you should succeed in grasping the object of your desires, you might find yourself disappointed, as he did, on the discovery of the truth."

It did not appear that the judicious advice of either mother or daughter had any effect in changing the bent of the pupil's determination.

CHAPTER X.

A DISCOVERY.

ON her return home, Elodie went into the library. She was accustomed to spend hours in the curtained recess at the end, reading her favorite romances, when she had finished her practicing.

She usually let down the lace or damask curtains, and ensconced herself in a large cushioned leathern chair. She was soon buried in the autobiography of a French vocalist, in whose career she was trying to trace a resemblance to her own.

It might have been an hour afterward, when Wyndham and his sister came in. They seemed to have been engaged in some light conversation; for the young man was laughing and Emily was pressing him to tell her something.

"There is a secret, I know," she said, "between you and Ruhama, that you have been hiding from me; and you are to play out some part of the drama this evening. Suppose I guess it?"

"Suppose you try?"

"I will, then. You are engaged to be married."

"Oh, you are far wide of the mark!"

"I made sure you were proposing to Ruhama at the ball. What else were you two talking about so long?"

"About you, sister mine."

"Me?"

"We were planning a queer surprise for you."

"Exactly; to present me with a sister in my friend."

"Don't let your thoughts stray that way. Nothing of the kind is likely to take place."

"Wyndham, I have long seen that you love Ruhama."

"Then you have seen what does not exist."

"No; you do surprise me."

"In time past, I really have thought of her as my future wife; I confess that much. But Miss Senforth is too great a flirt to make a grave man like me happy."

Elodie let the book slide from her lap as she listened, with parted lips and startled eyes.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Emily. "She has a true and noble heart."

"A heart never awakened, then. I once nearly made her a declaration."

"Ah!"

"And she laughed at me! She scorned my passion; she begged me not to make myself ridiculous for her sake, for she should certainly reject me. That was after she had kept me dangling for months, in a desperate flirtation."

"Oh, Wyndham! I am sure she likes you."

"I fancied, afterward, that she thought better of my pretensions, and wanted me to make love to her again. But the spell was broken!"

"You love her still?"

"I cannot say that I do. I admire her certainly."

"Everybody admires her."

"And she has a smile for every one. What a circle she gathers round her at every party!"

"It is a rare gift—that of enchanting people as she does."

"She is beautiful, a reputed heiress, and a coquette."

"Is the last character to be admired?"

"Don't you know that? Coquetry sets off a girl's charms, and makes her sparkle like a fountain in the sun. But it is a dangerous accomplishment."

"I should think so!"

"A slight dash of it is like *sauce piquante*, it flavors the delicacies offered. But when it makes light of a serious passion it goes too far. It disenchanting me, forever."

"Brother, I will wager that you go back to the brilliant girl yet."

"I should be very much surprised to see myself at her feet. But she is a charming friend. By the way, did she take Elodie to drive with her this afternoon?"

"No, the child went to Olive for her lesson, and stayed late. Do you want to see her?"

"Not now. I am in some trouble on her account."

"What?"

"One of the papers her aunt thought was in the yellow box, one of those she gave me, is missing."

"A paper—is it of importance?"

"It is her mother's marriage-certificate."

"That is of consequence, now!"

"So much, that without it, unless I can prove the marriage of her parents, she is likely to lose her property."

"That would be very hard; and as bad, or worse, to lose caste and be excluded from society, when she is fitted to enter it. You know she could not go out with us if people knew there was a shadow on her birth."

"People are very censorious," remarked young Blount, musingly.

"It is natural and proper. I should not like to have her story known to any one."

"Poor child! hers has been a sad experience; and to lose her rightful inheritance would be a cruel blow. I have been making diligent inquiries. I bribed Silas—Mr. Rashleigh's former servant—to search the house for the missing paper; and I have tried to find the clergyman or the witnesses to the marriage. That, I am convinced, is utterly hopeless."

"How will she lose her fortune?"

"Her granduncle's will left the money to Charles Sterns and his lawful issue; in default of that, to the children of Rashleigh, who is a distant cousin."

"I thought it was her mother's property."

"Oh, no; in that case, she could inherit; an illegitimate child can inherit from the mother, though not from the father."

"I see. But how is it that she has been so long in possession?"

"The trustees of the property made no special inquiries; requiring only proof of identity. And Bennet Rashleigh's only son, by his first marriage, being in the asylum for imbeciles, as long as the girl was in his house he made no stir about it."

"He will do so, now?"

"I was served with notice to-day that he means to claim the property, in right of his son."

"Poor Elodie! But you will not give up her right?"

"Not while I have an inch of ground to stand upon! But if I cannot prove the marriage, I fear resistance will be useless."

"Are you sure the marriage ever took place?"

"I am morally certain of it. Mrs. Rashleigh told me the certificate was with the other papers. She must often have seen it. It must have been stolen while she was helpless on her death-bed."

"Then the girl is truly of honorable birth, even if she cannot prove it?"

"I have not a doubt of it."

"That is the main thing. Fortune is of less importance."

"You do not know the world, Emily; or rather, you know only the society world that looks on the surface."

"Even if she loses her money, she may have a home here; and with her beauty and accomplishments she may marry well."

"I cannot give her the advantages she ought to have; and her talents merit them," said Wyndham, sadly.

"She must take her chance, like the rest of us," responded Emily. "Now I must go and dress. Oh, Wyndham, we might have had such a pleasant evening if you had not invited that Italian lion, the Count del Raggio! He will spoil everything!"

She glided from the room; and her brother began to walk to and fro, as was his wont when troubled in mind. The darkened prospects of Elodie distressed him.

The girl, white as death, had heard every word! She sat motionless as a marble statue. Her property lost! her right to her father's name disputed! her protectors giving her a home out of charity; and they apprehensive of public opinion, should her history be disclosed!

She felt as if the world, that had seemed so bright, lay crumbled to ashes around her. She started up to rush out and overwhelm her guardian with questions; but suddenly checked herself. She knew what his advice would be; that she should remain passive and quiet. Her brain reeled; her heart throbbed; she felt the instant necessity for the relief of tears and sobs. Softly she opened a door in the recess leading into the hall, and escaped to her own room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DENOUEMENT OF A ROMANCE.

EMILY had just completed her simple toilet, when she heard a ring at the front door-bell, and presently a light step ascending the stairs. A light tap, and the door of her chamber flew open.

"So I find you alone! That is so nice," cried Ruhama, as she took her friend in her arms, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"It is nice, indeed, if you have come alone!" replied Emily.

"I have; but the count is coming later. He was invited, you know."

"Wyndham told me so. How could you make him do such a thing?"

"Because I want you to know and to like our distinguished stranger."

"I told you I did not wish to meet him," said Emily, petulantly.

"But he is dying to be introduced to you—and his ardent wish balances yours. I throw my own inclination into the scale, and yours kicks the beam!"

"You are a faithless friend!"

"You will not say so, when you have had a conversation with our brilliant count. I am sure you will like him!"

"Ruhama, are you going to marry him?"

"I!" with a burst of merry laughter. "Ask him that question, and he will answer it, I trow, to your satisfaction."

"Then it is so. Well—I must wish you all happiness, dear. But I once hoped it would be otherwise."

She was about to put her arms around Ruhama's neck; but the lively girl seized both her wrists and held them, while she looked laughingly into her eyes.

"Now, you perverse creature! what are you taking into your head? I think of marrying the count? You will laugh at the idea, as I do, before you are three hours older!"

"You are pleased to be mysterious, and I cannot fathom you. Wyndham has been playing at it too. Well, I will bide your time for enlightenment."

"Good girl! Now, are you dressed? Sit

down here, and listen to me. Shall I tell you first a secret about myself, or give you a surprise?"

"Tell me about yourself; for, if I am not mistaken, that will be the surprise."

"Don't be too sure! Well—papa seems to have found a match for me!"

"Your papa? I thought you—"

"Would find one for myself, you mean! I am such a coquette, it is difficult to decide among numerous suitors. So an older head has weighed the matter, and decided the question."

"Who is it?"

"You would never guess. What think you of General Marsh?"

"General Marsh? why, he is nearly, or quite, as old as your father."

"Granted; but papa is not an antediluvian, you know."

"He is not a bit old—for a father—but when it comes to a husband—for a young girl like you—"

"It is quite a different thing! I grant you all that. And I have not given my consent; and I do not think I shall."

"Has your papa given his, to the addresses of such a suitor?"

"I am sure he favors him. He has said as much as that to me."

"And the General—has he proposed?"

"Not yet; but he has paid me compliments innumerable, which I have received in a manner that would be downright encouragement if he were twenty years younger."

"Oh, Ruhama! you have not practiced flirtation in this instance too?"

"Safe enough, dear, with one so old! There's always a loophole for escape! Pray, don't look so reproachful! Positively, I cannot bear to have you vexed with me; and to avert your anger, I must change the direction of your thoughts. See here; I have a package for you. Cousin Herbert called on me this morning, and begged me to bring it to you, with his cordial respects."

To open the packet with trembling hands, while her heart throbbed wildly, and the crimson rushed to her cheek, was the work of an instant with Emily Blount.

It contained only a miniature of Herbert St. Clare.

How like, yet how unlike him! There were his dark eyes and resolute mouth; his marked yet classic features; but the once luxuriant hair was combed smoothly down and parted in the middle, and the expression of the whole face was changed. There was a knitting of the brows, and a hardness in the outline, which time alone could not have given. It was manifestly the effect of care and disappointment; the slow corroding of the bright, soft jewel of the soul.

Emily shuddered, and laid down the picture.

"You find him altered," said Ruhama.

"And I own the original of this cannot be a very attractive lover. Confess, now, you

would prefer such a one as our brilliant count!"

"Ruhama!" exclaimed her friend, reproachfully.

Then she turned away to hide her agitation. "But my cousin, Herbert St. Clare, has not lost his common sense. He is quite aware of the disadvantages of his present exterior. He bids me say he is grown, besides, as prudent and calculating as—as you were seven years ago. He has seen you, and finds you vastly improved in your appearance, and as fascinating as he is the reverse. He is therefore good enough to relinquish all claim upon your hand, which you have allowed him, virtually, though not avowedly, to retain all these years."

"No, no!" cried Emily, snatching up the picture again. "This change is my work! Tell him I will keep my word, and I hold him to his!"

"That will be too great a sacrifice. How can you love him, Emily, changed as he is?"

"I can—I do! I am sure of it!"

"Supposing he has failed to secure the wealth for which you banished him?"

"I have learned to prize love more than riches."

"Uninteresting, ugly and poor! You have grown disinterested, my dear friend. Why, next, you will even consent to my marrying an artist!"

"I repent me of former errors. You may, if you love each other, Ruhama."

"Thank you kindly! And you would not object to my becoming Countess del Raggio—musician though he is! That I cannot do, however; and for the simple reason that the superb count is enamored of your fair self."

"Of me? You are jesting!"

"Yes, of you! and what is more, you have promised to love him. He will tell you all about it."

The provoking girl, even as she spoke the last words, ran out of the room, leaving Emily in bewildered astonishment.

She followed Ruhama down stairs, but stopped to give some directions to the servant about serving the dinner.

The front door bell sounded, and she drew back, as her brother entered with a gentleman of distinguished appearance.

It was their Italian guest. They came in talking merrily, and stopped an instant to deposit their hats on the stand, before entering the parlor.

It was dusk, and the lamps were not yet lighted; so that the young lady of the house was not observed by the new-comers. Directly after they had gone in, she moved to the parlor door.

Her hand was on the knob, when she felt it turned on the other side.

It was Ruhama, and she pulled open the door, seizing Emily's hand, and drawing her forward.

"Here she is, and I have pleasure in introducing to Miss Blount a gentleman whom I

trust she will welcome as her brother's friend and mine!"

The proceeding was so singular that Emily looked in amazement at her friend. Had she suddenly taken leave of her senses?

There was no light in the rooms, and the figures could be but dimly seen in the fading twilight, glimmering through the parted window curtains.

The stranger had come to the side of his young hostess, had taken her hand, and lifted it to his lips respectfully.

In increased surprise Emily drew her hand away.

At the same moment she noticed that Ruhama and her brother had gone into the back parlor, leaving her alone with the stranger.

With an effort, she recovered her self-possession.

"Count del Raggio—" she began.

"No count, if you please," interrupted the guest. "That was a title bestowed on me by mistake, and since then, borne a short time by sufferance, and as a kind of musical 'stage name'—Is it possible, Emily, that you do not know me by my own name?"

It needed but one look into his eyes to reveal the truth to her.

"Herbert St. Clare!" she exclaimed, faintly.

The surprise was almost too much for her. Her form swayed as if she would have fallen, while the color faded from her cheeks. Herbert had a good excuse for catching her in his arms, and he held her close to his beating heart, while he whispered:

"Your own Herbert! your true friend and faithful lover!"

Again and again he kissed her hand; she did not resist. He kissed her lips too.

She sat down on the sofa; and he drew an ottoman close to her feet.

Imperfect explanations followed.

Emily could only reproach him for having kept from her so long.

He had been persuaded by others to do so. He had doubts himself how the lady of his love would receive one who had profited so little by the penance her wisdom had imposed on him.

"Forgive me that," murmured the girl, as she dropped her head on his shoulder.

"We may add ourselves to the group, I suppose, now!" cried the merry Ruhama, as she and Wyndham advanced from the extension parlor. "I wish you joy, dear cousin, and my charming friend!"

"This was our mystery, sister. Ruhama wanted a romantic denouement, and we—Herbert and I, were compelled to indulge her. I am glad all has ended happily."

"And I am happy to inform you, to the credit of my cousin," added Ruhama, "that the years of his absence have not been misspent, in a practical way. He has made a fortune, at the same time he has cultivated his wonderful gifts, and gained refinement and elevation in his tastes."

"Indeed, I may be allowed to say, dear Emily," said the lover, "that I have gained in every way; and it is all owing to you. My wild and fanciful enthusiasm has become tempered by solid acquirements, which I could never have made my own under circumstances that encouraged, instead of checking, my earliest youthful impulses."

"You are too kind," murmured the happy girl, "to spare me the reproaches I deserve."

Far from reproach, her prudence was lauded. It might have wrecked the happiness of two lives; judiciously directed, under the influence of strong and enduring affection, it had prepared the way for a life of enjoyment.

Emily had made the seven years of trial—as all knew—"a noble task time." Herbert, with rapture he acknowledged, found her with developed powers, and chastened feelings; and with love deeper and warmer, for having been so long cherished in secret. More worthy than ever to be worn in his heart, he pronounced her.

The servant announced dinner.

As they went out, Wyndham inquired for Miss Sterns.

His sister bade the maid go for her.

They did not take seats at the table till she came.

Elodie was dressed with unusual care, and there was a flush on her cheek, and a fire in her eyes, that fairly startled her guardian.

The stranger was presented to her, and then Wyndham led her to a seat at his left hand. She was silent at the meal, but listened attentively to the conversation.

Of course music and songs were alternated with conversation that evening. The young girl enjoyed a rare treat in the Italian songs of Herbert St. Clare. She sung once or twice, and her eyes sparkled when she heard him commend her voice and execution.

"Oh, if I could have him for a teacher!" she thought. She whispered the wish to Emily, when she had an opportunity.

There was to be an art reception on the following Wednesday, and Herbert had tickets for all the party. Elodie received permission to attend. She little thought how eventful a time that would prove.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COQUETTE CHAINED.

THE art reception, with its exhibition of paintings, and its choice music, was enjoyed by the elegant fashionables of the "exclusive circles" as well as the lovers of art, and was the greatest success of the season.

Elodie was there and was invited to sing in a duet with a professional vocalist, taking the place of her friend who had not made her appearance.

The compliments paid the young girl upon her performance and the rich mezzo-soprano voice, so rare in one so young, were not so sweet to her ear as the whispered comment of her artist companion.

"You ought to sing in public, with such a voice."

Her face became irradiated. She longed to ask the speaker to let her come to her for advice; but she could not immediately gather courage, and in a moment the opportunity was lost. How bitterly she felt her thralldom, and how stout grew her determination to have her freedom!

The famous "Count del Raggio" was clamorously called upon for one song after another.

Obeysing the summons and thanking his friends in a brief speech, he took occasion to disclaim the name a few friends had bestowed on him by way of a joke.

The Italian birth attributed to him, also, he must deny, with all due respect for that glorious land of song, where he had sojourned for many years. As Herbert St. Clare, Virginian by birth—New Yorker by residence—he was happy to receive their kind encomiums; due, he thought, more to their partiality than to his merits, and he hoped to number many among his attached friends.

Emily felt prouder of him than ever.

When he gave her his arm for the promenade she did not heed the glances of her acquaintances, nor the whispers of ladies who guessed how matters stood with the pair so devoted to each other.

Wyndham nodded smilingly to them as he went to join the circle round Miss Seaforth.

She seemed unusually brilliant this evening. Nearest to her stood the gallant General Marsh, whose eyes appeared literally to devour her face, and whose glances spoke the love of a devoted suitor.

This kind of attention Ruhama was quite accustomed to receive; and she was pleased with it. She liked the homage of a living, loving heart; and was accustomed to give glances in return that kindled hopes she never meant to fulfill.

On one occasion after another she might be seen in a recess, half-curtained, listening to love-vows softly whispered; her eyes drooping till the dark lashes lay upon her cheek; her face wearing the hue of "love's flower;" the picture of a tender maiden, whose awakened heart was on the eve of surrendering itself. The beguiled suitor would fancy himself a conqueror.

But when the white lids were lifted, the dark, Oriental eyes shot forth a gleam of merriment, that speedily dispelled his dreams.

This was one phase of "firtation" with the belle. Another was to surround herself with admiring beaux, each waiting a gleam that should carry an electric message to his heart, ready to be laid at her feet. She would keep a dozen in this kind of expectancy; and send a thrill to a dozen eager souls in rapid succession. Each would imagine himself the one favored by stealth; the sole recipient of the magnetism of those wonderful eyes.

This evening was the last she ever enjoyed of the unalloyed pleasures of coquetry. She

stood in peerless beauty, wearing her favorite dress of delicate lemon-colored silk, with profuse trimmings of white point d'aiguilles, and pearls on her neck and in her hair.

Never had she been more conscious of the power of her charms. It seemed as if the arrows of the very god of love lay in the depths of her matchless eyes. She had bewitched at least a score, and as they stood round her, watching with eagerness for a word or a smile, from the lovely idol of their worship, she felt herself the "cynosure of neighboring eyes," and the acknowledged queen of love and beauty.

Tom Wyatt, who flitted in and out of her circle, was the only one who was not manifestly her slave; and on him she turned, ever and anon, the battery of her alluring looks. Twice he asked her to dance; but she declined on the plea of fatigue; she preferred to be the center of such homage as she was receiving.

That night she drank to the full the intoxicating cup a vain coquette finds so sweet. What bitter draughts were to be drained in the unknown future!

Ruhama and Wyndham exchanged glances, as he came near her. On him she had never practiced the arts of coquetry. She had always fancied reproof in his eyes when he fixed them upon her in that way. Yet she would have valued approval from him more than admiration from the others.

How long it seemed since she had enjoyed those confidential interviews with young Blount, so dear to her memory, when he had wanted the monopoly of her thoughts! She had power then to disturb—even to distress him, by her flirtations with others. What had come between them, absorbing his attention, till his eyes no longer sent fire-gleams into hers, his face no longer flushed or paled according to her humors!

Involuntarily her eyes swept the spacious hall, and lighted on a youthful form full of lithe grace leaning against one of the pillars.

Elodie was watching the singer, already mentioned, as she placed herself at the harp, while her fingers strayed over its strings.

The girl's face, with its rapt expression, was more beautiful than Ruhama had ever seen it. There was a rosy color in her cheeks, and her blue eyes were full of eager attention; her hands were clasped; her bosom was heaving with emotion.

And Wyndham stood watching her! Yes; he whom all knew to be sensitive to beauty and grace had his eyes fixed on this lovely creature—this child of genius—with an interest that was manifest in every lineament!

If there is a moment that can dash with bitterness the triumphs of a coquette, as the lightning shrivels the flower, it is that in which she discovers the chain worn by one of her victims rent asunder by the hand of a rival!

In that moment Ruhama almost hated the girl. Could it be possible that Wyndham, whose devotion she had fancied was all her

own whenever she chose to claim it, had bestowed his affection on this waif, this rude child thrown so strangely on his protection?

She watched him with a jealous pang at her heart. She saw that his eyes did not wander from the object of his attention, till the harpist had ended her song. Then, while the hall rung with applause, Ruhama saw him go up to Elodie, draw her arm within his, and lead her away. At the same instant Ruhama felt hers drawn within that of General Marsh, and heard him say they must go in to supper.

The coquette laughed to think how much she had been disturbed by this little incident. She thought of Olive, and her warnings, and sighed to feel how unsatisfactory were the triumphs of gratified vanity. Had Wyndham really been unmoved by her fascinations? She resolved to rivet his chains more firmly than ever. No word of love had ever passed between them; but she had felt certain of his attachment. Did she love him? No, certainly not; but she had prized the evidence of his regard; and she felt wronged to see it withdrawn.

He passed near her as she stood in the supper-room; and she whispered in his ear that she might be induced to honor him in one of the first waltzes when they should return to the hall.

Looking gravely in her face, with perfect self-possession, Wyndham thanked her, but regretted that he would not be able to avail himself of her kind favor.

"How can that be?" she asked, frowning. "I have promised my mother to take her and Elodie home directly after supper."

"The old lady and the child," returned Ruhama, with satirical emphasis, "must not be kept out late."

Wyndham looked at her in surprise. She laughed gayly, and asked if he had given up his liberty, that he could not remain for what he once protested was best worth waiting for!

Something about "business deferred," writing to do, etc., fell on her ears, and filled her with displeasure she did not attempt to conceal.

Tom Wyatt came up on the other side, and preferred his modest petition for the dance after supper.

Ruhama smiled brightly on him, while she flung an angry look after Wyndham, which he did not seem to feel, as they moved with the throng toward the hall, where the dancers had already taken their places.

With all her wealth of attraction, and the lavish homage paid her, Ruhama felt poor. She saw her cousin Herbert and his affianced love standing before one of the paintings, intent only on each other.

Happy Emily! she had tasted none of the luxuries served to a belle, but she had been faithful to love, and enjoyed its fruition.

Why, Miss Seaforth thought, could she not have a true heart waiting for her, when she had done with her butterfly-sipping of sweets!

Wyndham had already left the hall with his charge. Again she sighed, and a feeling of disgust with herself and her career crept over her.

It was late when she reached home that night, attended by the faithful lover, General Marsh, who did not, as usual, enter the house.

The banker, Mr. Seaforth, was passing the library, the door of which stood open. As his daughter came into the house, he went into the hall, took her hand, and drew her into the library.

"Oh, papa! you up so late! No—I cannot stop. My maid is waiting to undress me, and I am tired to death."

"Come in for five minutes. I have something to say!"

"Is it anything particular? Won't it keep till to-morrow?"

"I would rather say it to-night. You shall talk it over to-morrow with both of us, if you like!"

"Both? What do you mean?"

"General Marsh came home with you?"

"Certainly; he has been very attentive all the evening. What a good old soul he is! He took care of me as if he had been my own papa."

"He is not so old, my child; by no means as old as myself!"

"Papa! he looks older by five years!"

"Not at all; you must not fancy any such thing!"

"Well, we will not dispute about it. Good-night, papa, dear."

"Stay, my daughter. I want to tell you—I received a proposal of marriage for you to-day."

"A proposal!" Ruhama gave one of her musical, rippling laughs. "Who could he be; who was old fashioned enough to go to my father before coming to me with his suit?"

"One belonging to the good old school, my child; and the better and nobler for it."

"Not—not—"

"The General? Yes, it was he! You must have seen that he is deeply in love with you."

"Oh, father, so old as he is!"

"I tell you he is not past the prime of life. He is handsome, and full of spirit; accomplished, highly educated; a man of society, and possessed of a splendid fortune."

"Too good, by half, for poor little me!" cried the girl, with another laugh.

"He loves you; he offers you his name—an honored name—and his wealth."

The girl made a sweeping curtsy—still laughing.

"And you declined the honor for me, like a dear, good papa, with graceful thanks?"

"Ruhama! I gave my consent with joy. I hope yours will follow."

"Dear father, you cannot wish me to marry so unsuitably."

"How, unsuitably? In what personal or mental quality is he deficient?"

"Oh, I find no fault with him; he is well enough—for any one who would like him. But I never could fancy him for a husband."

"Ruhama, you have received his attentions for weeks past. What did you mean by it?"

"Only a little harmless flirtation."

"Girl, he has interpreted it to mean encouragement of his addresses."

"But, papa, I have flirted with twenty others at the same time."

"The more shame on you! But you have encouraged General Marsh in particular, and have committed yourself."

"Papa, now you are absurd! A girl cannot commit herself till she is asked to marry. Coquetry is allowable before that."

"It is you who are absurd, Ruhama. You have led General Marsh to believe you favored his suit; I have accepted it. I expect you to marry him."

"That, papa, is what I cannot do."

"Ruhama, I am speaking seriously. Sit down there."

The girl obeyed, but her face wore an expression of determination, which the banker now set himself to overcome.

"You force me, child, to disclose what I meant to keep a secret. I am on the verge of ruin—of bankruptcy!"

"Father!" exclaimed the girl, growing pale as death.

"I speak the truth, and it is a bitter struggle to speak it! I have striven for months to ward off the blow, which I knew would crush you. But it must come! This house, with furniture and carriage must be given up. In another month we shall be paupers."

Ruhama, stricken to the soul, rose and knelt by her father's chair. Her hands clasped his arm; her terrified eyes looked into his. Horror seemed to freeze her blood.

"I know what you would say, child; you thought me secure in my wealth; so do others; but the truth must soon come out, unless you will save me!"

He turned his face on one side, his features working with emotion.

"Save you! How can I save you?"

"Daughter, you can if you will! General Marsh stands ready to advance as many thousands as I require to stave over this crisis. He would replace the funds I have lost by Stevenson and the Brothers Merke."

"He would buy my hand of you?" exclaimed the girl, bitterly.

"I swear to you, Ruhama, he has never named the loan in connection with you; he is too high-toned a gentleman."

"Let him rescue you, then, without binding me."

"Do you think I could accept the assistance I must have, to set me on a safe ground, from any but a favored lover of my child's. No; if you will not confirm my assurance to him, I am lost."

"Your assurance!"

"I pledged my word that you would marry

him, girl. I thought myself sure of your consent."

"Papa, this is not the age or country when girls are bestowed by parents against their own wishes."

"I know it, child! Well—you are free to disappoint—to ruin me! The sooner the worst comes the better!"

He stooped his head on his hands, and his breast heaved with sobs. Ruhama had never seen him thus moved.

"Oh, papa, papa!" she sobbed, clinging to him. "Do not break my heart!"

"You had better retire now," he said, coldly, suppressing his emotion, and unclasping her arms from his neck.

He rose from his seat, and as the girl caught a glimpse of his face, she saw on it the impress of despair.

She rushed after him as he crossed the room.

"Oh, papa, where are you going?"

"No matter. I cannot sleep to-night. I must look over these papers. You may go to your rest."

The forced calmness with which he spoke showed how utterly hopeless he was, and his hands trembled as he handled the papers on the table. No words could have so deeply affected Ruhama.

"I will not leave you in this way, papa."

Then, catching her breath with a convulsive gasp, she suddenly seized his arm.

"Tell me—" she said, faintly, "is there no other way of escape for you, father?"

"None; I must school myself to bear all!"

"Then—then— Oh, father! I cannot see you looking so; with such trouble in your face! Oh, give me a little time to think! I will not let you suffer! Only give me time!"

"You shall have time! Ruhama, I would not have urged you if I had not thought you liked the General."

"Let me think!" repeated the girl, clasping her hands across her forehead. "Till to-morrow—to-morrow!"

She did not faint, but sunk, utterly unnerved, into the arms of her father.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELODIE'S PETITION.

WYNDHAM BLOUNT returned home with his mother and Elodie, and, having bidden them good-night, waited in his study till the arrival of his sister with her lover.

Herbert did not remain five minutes.

As the door closed on him, Emily smilingly said good-night, and ran up-stairs to her room.

Wyndham, too, smiled as he saw her face irradiated with its new happiness; but he was full of thought as he turned back into the study.

About ten minutes after Emily had gone to her chamber, a light figure, dressed in white, descended the stairs, and moved noiselessly to the study door. It was ajar, and she gently pushed it open. Wyndham wheeled round, and looked very much surprised.

"Elodie!" he exclaimed. "Is it you? What have you come back for?"

"I want to speak with you. Is it very late?"

"It is late, but I am ready to hear what you want to say!"

He looked at the girl. She wore her party dress, except the flowers, and the excited flush on her face made her radiantly lovely.

"I will not keep you longer than I can help," she said, coming up to the table, and leaning on a high-backed leathern chair.

"Mr. Blount—I mean to say—guardian—I want to study for the stage."

"The stage!" echoed the young man, aghast.

"Yes; I want to sing in opera. I have a fine voice. Madame Ferretti told me so to-night; and I can learn to be a singer as well as others."

"But you are taking lessons of Miss Weston."

"She cannot sing the music I want to learn."

"Elodie—I am sorry—"

"Hear me out, please! I know that I cannot afford to have the best masters now; but I could sing in choruses, and I have seen advertisements for young vocalists to take parts in them. Madame Ferretti told me there were vacancies continually. She could get me an appointment, if you would let me accept it."

"But—my dear child—"

"I know I could not pay for a master's lessons at home; but I could learn at the opera; and it would cost me nothing."

"Who said you could not have masters at home, when you are ready for them?"

"If I have lost my fortune I cannot pay them," answered the young girl.

"Who told you you had lost your fortune?"

Elodie hesitated. She was afraid of her guardian's grave looks.

"No one told me," she replied at length.

"But I heard you say it."

"Heard me say it?"

"I was in the library when you were speaking to Emily. You said my mother's marriage-certificate was lost, and without it I might lose my property."

Wyndham made no answer.

"And you know," pursued the girl, "if I lose that I must earn my living."

"Poor child, it has not come to that."

"But it may; and it is only right I should be prepared. I ought to earn it by music, if I have as much talent as they say."

"Your talent shall be cultivated, Elodie; I promise you that."

"But I cannot pay for lessons if my money is all taken away."

"Leave that to me."

"You have not found the certificate that was missing?"

"Not yet."

"If Mr. Rashleigh stole it I know he must have destroyed it. You will never find it. And he claims the property, you said."

"I am sorry you learned anything about the matter, child."

"Why should you be? I can help you. Be sure you will never find a paper Mr. Rashleigh has stolen. He is too cunning."

"I am afraid you are right."

"Then I must lose the money. His son is the next heir, I heard you say."

"Did you ever see that young man?"

"Oh, yes; Mr. Rashleigh used to bring him home sometimes. He is in the asylum where they teach imbeciles. He is not aunt Letty's son, you know."

"Yes, I know that."

"I never liked him; I never would play with him, though Mr. Rashleigh tried to make me. He used to say I should be Godfrey's little wife, some day."

"Ah!"

"That was what gave me such a dislike to the boy; for I knew his father was in earnest."

"He really wished you to marry his son?"

"I am sure of it. When aunt Letty was lying dead, and you had said you would take me home, I heard him say that."

"Indeed! Did any other person hear it?"

"Only the negro woman."

"It would go to prove that he thought you the lawful heir," said Wyndham, musingly.

"Where is this woman, Nelly?"

"Is she not at the old place?"

"No; she left there immediately after Mrs. Rashleigh's death."

"Then I do not know where she is. She said she would come and see me."

"It was unpardonably negligent in me not to give her my address. But she could get it from her master."

"Yes, if he chose to give it to her."

"But she must have left his service. Have you any idea where her home is, or her friends?"

"No, I know nothing of them. She never left my aunt."

"I wonder if it would do any good to advertise for her?" mused young Blount.

"She was fond of me, and I should like to see her," said Elodie. "But, guardy, we are wandering from the question. If I am to have no fortune I must be put in the way of earning a livelihood at once."

"Are you in haste to leave us?" asked Wyndham, smiling at her.

Elodie was given to speaking the truth bluntly.

"I am, indeed!" she answered.

Her guardian was visibly hurt.

"I hoped you were happy here," he said, in a voice that showed pain. "I am sure I have striven to make you feel like one of us—and Emily has been like an elder sister to you."

Elodie dashed away the tears that were overflowing her eyes.

"You must not think me ungrateful for your kindness," she said. "I am grateful—I bless you for it. Who besides you would have been so good to a poor orphan girl?"

"You must not talk so, child. You are like a sister to us."

"But I know your mother and sister will feel it a relief to part with me."

"Elodie!"

"Did I not hear Emily say she would not like to appear in society with a girl of doubtful birth?" questioned the girl, looking unflinchingly in the lawyer's face. "I do not blame her; I should feel just so."

"You are not of doubtful birth, Elodie."

"I know you think so; and I am sure of it myself; but the world will demand proof of my honorable parentage; and if you have to go through a suit for my property it cannot fail to come out that my mother's marriage cannot be proved. Is it not so?"

"It is so, certainly; but—"

"Then it will be in all the papers, and everybody will know that the girl you have taken to your home, and treated like a sister, cannot prove her birth lawful, and has lost her property in consequence. So that you will have not only poverty, but disgrace, on your hands."

"Elodie, you must leave such things to wiser and older persons. You are too young to be troubled with them."

"No; I am not too young to see my own position, and to seek the means of bettering it."

Wyndham was now pacing the floor in his perplexity and distress. Presently he stopped, close to the girl, and took her little hand in his own.

"Let this matter rest, I entreat you, my child. Confide in me."

"Oh, dear Mr. Blount, I cannot let you bear all my burden! You must let me have my way!"

"What is it you want? To leave this house?"

"Yes, to leave it and be placed at once in a situation where I can earn a salary, if ever so small—and be improving daily in my singing. Madame Ferretti said I could have an engagement to sing in a chorus, and in a few months take a part. Oh, I long to be at work! I shall die if I stay here, doing nothing toward accomplishing my great object!"

"You are ambitious, Elodie, and do not see the perils and difficulties that beset such a life!"

"I know them all, and I am ready to contend with them. Only let me go!"

For some minutes the young lawyer made no answer. At last he said, turning to the eager suppliant:

"I should not be doing my duty toward you, Elodie, nor fulfilling my promise to your aunt, if I should comply with your wish. You are under age, and incapable of judging for yourself."

"Once for all, Mr. Blount," cried the girl, passionately, "I tell you, I cannot bear this restraint!"

"You must bear it, foolish child. I forbid your thinking of the stage, at least till you are two years older. It would be your destruction. You shall continue your lessons,

and shall have masters to teach you, as you make higher advances."

"At whose cost?" cried the little aspirant, her blue eyes flashing, her cheeks crimson. "I have no claim on you, and you shall not pay for me! And I will not go out with your sister, to be scorned by her because my mother was the victim of misfortune!"

She covered her face with her hands, and wept and sobbed vehemently.

Wyndham quietly took her arm and led her to the door.

"Good-night, Elodie," he said. "It is very late; you must retire."

"You treat me like a wayward child," she faltered, through her tempest of weeping. "But I am not a child! And be sure, sir, I shall not stay here while the suit is going on for my property! I have been scorned enough as it is."

"No one scorns you," replied Wyndham. "We all love you, and would protect and serve you. You will think better of this to-morrow. Go now; and let me have some rest."

He stooped and lightly touched her forehead with his lips.

It was the first time he had ever caressed the girl, and the action seemed to humble her rash pride. She gave him one wistful glance, then burst into a fresh flood of tears, and fled up-stairs with the speed of one terrified. When she had reached her own room she locked the door and throwing herself on the bed cried till she fell asleep.

Wyndham remained long in his study, absorbed in painful thought. He began to realize that he had undertaken no light task, in the care of a willful girl, possessed of genius and determined to make her independent way in the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO WEDDINGS IN FASHIONABLE LIFE.

THE fashionable circles were surprised by the announcement of two matrimonial engagements.

One was that of Miss Emily Blount to Herbert St. Clare, the lion of society under his musical name of the "Count del Raggio."

Emily had never been a belle, but something of her early romance was remembered; and how she had parted with her lover because he was poor, and so fond of music she feared he would never seek the gifts of fortune. His wonderful success abroad, his acquisition of an independence while he cultivated to the utmost the genius with which he was endowed, were certainly strange, and contrary to the experience of most young men.

They did not take into view his patient and persevering application, his unwearied pursuit of the knowledge he coveted; his diligent industry, and his strict economy of time. These, with the inborn endowment of genius, had enabled him to triumph over obstacles

that would have been insurmountable to those less highly gifted. And he possessed more than the acquirements of art and science; the pure and noble soul which, while it apprehends the beautiful, can appreciate and feel the good.

That the happiness of the tried and faithful pair was without a drawback, could be seen by all who knew them. A united life of contentment and usefulness was before them.

The other engagement was that of Ruhama Seaforth, the banker's daughter, with General Marsh.

This announcement caused a wide-spread sensation. The young lady was a courted beauty, with scores of worshipers eager for a sign of preference from her. She had worn the crown of bellehood not meekly; and caused heartache to many of her suitors. She had never really favored one. That her choice should be made so suddenly, and the selection be one so much older than herself, and one so grave, so dignified, so opposite to her in all personal qualities, astonished all her acquaintances.

Ruhama gave no sign of the struggle she had undergone in the night and day succeeding her last interview with her father. Once fully satisfied that the disclosure of his financial affairs he had made was strictly true, that utter ruin was impending and that there was but one way to avert it, she decided on taking that way.

The prospect of poverty, privation, and loss of social position, she could not endure for a moment. The picture fancy conjured up of herself walking in plain attire, and meeting the friends she was accustomed to salute from her carriage, arrayed in splendor, to find herself treated coldly on every side, seemed to her worse than death. She could not bear the idea of such a reverse as Olive Weston had undergone; had borne with uncomplaining fortitude. Ruhama had often told herself she should die, if overtaken by such calamity.

She told her father, next morning, that she was ready to accede to his wishes, and would receive the General that evening as her accepted lover.

The banker kissed her deathly pale cheek, and thanked and praised her for the most generous and loving daughter in the world. But she disclaimed such laudation. She shrunk from her own share of the ruin that threatened them, more than her father's. She could not bear the scorn, the exultation of the many with whom she had trifled.

"If I had not been such a flirt," she confessed, "if there were not so many to rejoice in my downfall, I might welcome poverty rather than part with my liberty. But I could not brook even the contempt I know I have deserved."

The favored suitor came, and the banker welcomed him as his daughter's affianced husband. The General behaved nobly. He believed the girl's consent freely given, for he

would not have accepted the hand of a princess reluctantly bestowed.

Ruhama perceived this, and smiled brightly amidst her blushes, when she placed her hand in his. Even her father was deceived. She was heartwhole; it could not be possible but that she would soon love the gallant old soldier with all her heart.

The girl had begged her father not to invite her newly betrothed to remain to dinner. She wanted the evening to herself. But she did not spare her most becoming dress. Arrayed like a queen, she paced the brilliant drawing-room, weaving plans, and calling up visions of coming splendor that went far toward reconciling her to the strange turn affairs had taken.

Presently the door was thrown open, and the footman announced Mr. Wyatt.

Tom had not heard of Ruhama's engagement, of course. He greeted her with his usual chivalrous gallantry.

After some conversation, he said what he came to say, that he was on the eve of departure from the city; from the country, in fact, and had called to bid adieu.

"So sudden a departure! And where are you going, Mr. Wyatt?"

"To San Francisco."

He went on to tell her how promising an opportunity to make money had unexpectedly been opened to him by a friend at the head of a mercantile house there. To him, the making of a fortune involved a prospect of happiness to which he had never dared aspire while conscious that he had only a bare competence to offer.

His glowing looks, his glances of tender meaning, declared how much he was interested in some object dear to his heart. Ruhama honestly believed him devoted to a young lady of her acquaintance—Winifred Cameron.

"I have long imagined, or suspected, Mr. Wyatt, that you had placed your affections—when you hesitated to declare them," she remarked with a boldness inspired by the recent change in her own situation.

Tom looked unaffectedly astonished. A deep flush rose to the roots of his sunny brown curls.

"You have believed this, Miss Seaforth?" he stammered.

"Certainly."

"You have read my heart truly. I have loved—I do love—yet dare not reveal it."

"Not to her who has inspired the feeling?"

"To her least of all," replied the young man, more and more surprised.

"Not if her happiness depends on the avowal?" asked Ruhama, archly.

"Her happiness!" faltered poor Tom.

The girl laid her small white hand on his arm.

"Why should you maintain a silence equally cruel to both?"

Wyatt caught his breath convulsively. His color went and came like a maiden's blushes. Ruhama went on:

"I am sure your suit will be successful with the fair Winnie."

"Winnie!" exclaimed Wyatt, bewildered. "Of whom do you speak?"

"Of Miss Cameron, assuredly. You love her—I have long been convinced of it; and she—"

"Spare me, Miss Seaforth! You are utterly mistaken."

"Mistaken?"

"I have been in a dream! I am justly humbled for daring to indulge for an instant such an illusion."

"Tom, Mr. Wyatt, why not give me your confidence?" cried the girl, impressively.

"You will despise me!"

"How can I do that?"

"You will—Ruhama—when I tell you I have dared to love—you! Forgive me! I will never again offend you."

Ruhama turned away, in emotion she strove to repress.

"Tom—" she faltered—"you have not offended me."

"Your voice trembles! Ruhama! Can it be—" and the lover took her hand, and lifted it to his lips.

"Not a word more!" cried the girl, struggling to subdue her feeling, and drawing her hand away.

After a pause she spoke again:

"I will not spare myself—I deserve this. I am a coquette, but not utterly heartless."

"Will you listen to me, dearest girl! May I go forth to labor in the hope of being one day worthy the priceless treasure of your affection."

"Tom, I cannot deceive you. Of all who have sought my favor, I like you best; but I thought you devoted, heart and soul, to Winifred Cameron."

The young man's face was irradiated.

He tried to capture her hand again; he murmured protestations of ardent passion.

"You must not talk so; you must never speak in this way again!" Ruhama cried, dashing tears from her eyes; "Tom, I am engaged to marry another man!"

The announcement was like a thunderbolt to the startled lover.

Ruhama gave a sketch of what had happened to bring about her betrothal, without mention of the necessity of securing the General's fortune.

"But all this is shocking!" exclaimed young Wyatt. "Just now you said—I can never forget it—that you favored me."

"So I did—so I do—Tom—but that must end it. I have given my promise to papa; I will not go back."

"Ruhama, I shall gain a fortune in a few years; perhaps in a short time. Will you be forced to marry a man of unsuitable age, loving another at the same time?"

"I did not say I loved you, Tom," said the girl, coquettishly.

"You said you liked me best of all your admirers."

"That is very different, you know, from loving with all one's heart!"

"Oh, Ruhama, I would make you love me! You could not resist such love as mine!"

"I think myself incapable of love. The best I could rally would be a mere liking."

"Let me keep that till I cherish it into love! Free yourself from other ties, and wait one year for me!"

"Impossible; I have pledged my word!"

The pleadings and protestations of her lover could not drive her from this point.

Tom Wyatt was in despair. He had been something of a male flirt, but his fancy had finally settled on this vivacious coquette, whom he had hoped to bring to terms when he should have won his fortune. His pride had forbidden advances while she was rich and he poor.

Now the blight of disappointment overspread all his plans.

The girl could not really love him—he saw that; but the simple preference of one so hard to win was enough to concede, had the field been open for him in the future.

But a marriage with another—that shut the door, and sent him away in despair.

They were interrupted by the banker. He had not liked to leave his daughter alone with a probable suitor so long, and was anxious to have her engagement known.

Ruhama told him of Wyatt's intended departure and flattering prospects. The banker congratulated him with a cleared brow.

"When you return you may find changes among us," he said, with a glance at his daughter. She answered with a look that saved of defiance.

"I have told the news to Mr. Wyatt, papa," she observed, quietly. "He is an old friend."

"And the first to know what will make all our old friends pleased with your prospects of happiness," replied the banker.

Young Wyatt answered suitably, and in about half an hour made his adieux for a long absence.

The two weddings did not come off together. Miss Seaforth's took place at Trinity Chapel, about noon, and was attended by a crowd of fashionable friends. Private carriages blocked up the street for a long way up and down Twenty-sixth street. A carpet was laid, and a canopy raised for the delicate steps of the invited guests from the sidewalk to the vestibule. The altar and pillars were wreathed with fragrant flowers, and vases of the rich, snowy blossoms stood in sight.

The bridal train was long and gorgeous as dress, jewels and flowers could make it. The six bridesmaids, in pink, blue and white, preceded the bride, who came leaning on her father's arm, followed by the bridegroom, who gave his arm to her aunt. The General wore full uniform, and his tall, majestic figure and

noble air were admired by those who had objected to his gray hair and beard, and his age as unsuited to the youth of the fair bride.

Ruhama wore a dress of white velvet, with long, flowing train. It was profusely trimmed with point-lace, and a veil like silvery mist floated from the light wreath of white blossoms resting on her head. She was pale, but not more so than a bride ought to be; and the jetty ringlets clustering over forehead and temples, and the long, drooping eyelashes, made her cheeks fair by contrast.

When the ceremony was completed, and she was led out by her husband, there was a half-smile on her face intended to rebuke any ill-natured comment on the disparity of years between the pair; and the exultation in the bridegroom's face bespoke his happiness.

The newly-wedded pair, followed by numerous friends, drove back to the banker's house, to partake of a splendid collation. Afterward the bride changed her nuptial attire for a rich traveling-dress of steel-colored silk, trimmed with the same material, and bonnet to match.

The pair set forth on the bridal tour followed by the loudly-expressed good wishes of "troops of friends."

Wyatt was not among them; but Wyndham Blount was there, and Emily, whose eyes filled with tears as she parted with her friend. The question—Was she happy? lay deep in her heart; but she dared not ask it; and Ruhama made no confidences. She had gained what she wished; wealth and high social position; and should not that satisfy her ambition? At any rate, she was far too proud to let any suspect that her heart was not in the alliance she had made.

She summoned gladness to her eyes, and was even joyous in her demeanor.

The General, assured before of her willing reception of his vows, did not think of doubting her affection for himself, and vowed internally to fulfill every wish of her heart.

Even the banker felt certain that she would be a happy wife, and felicitated himself on so fortunate a termination to his difficulties.

Emily's wedding followed in less than two weeks. It was a far simpler one, but none missed the brilliancy of magnificent dress and adornment.

This pair made a short tour, and soon returned and established themselves in a house in Forty-second street purchased by Herbert. This was to be their permanent home; though in a few months it would be necessary for St. Clare to go abroad in the interests of the commercial house with which he was still connected; and his wife would of course accompany him.

One day after their return, Emily was surprised by a visit just before dusk, from her brother. He called to know if Elodie was there.

"No; the girl had not been near the house in a week," Mrs. St. Clare replied.

"Then she must be at Mrs. Weston's," he said, quietly. "I will go for her."

"Did not she leave word where she was going?"

"No; she left the house early this morning, and said nothing about it."

"She could hardly have gone to Olive's; she would not stay there all day, while Mrs. Weston lies so ill; so near death, one may say."

"True; it would be thoughtless; but where else could the child have been all day?"

Emily could see that her brother was more anxious than he would admit. She tried to make light of his uneasiness, and was sure the wayward girl would be at home by this time.

"Unless some one has invited her to go to the opera," she added, laughing. "She is so music-mad, you know."

"That would be a freak on her part I should resent," said her brother. "Well, I will go to Mrs. Weston's."

"Stay to dinner. You will have time after that. Herbert will go with you."

No; he would not stay. The cloud on his face pained his sister.

"It is downright ungrateful in the girl," she exclaimed, "to behave in this way, after all you have done for her! Is the suit come on about her property?"

"It has been postponed."

"What chance is there of success?"

"Very little, if we cannot prove her birth to be—what we want."

"And in case of failure, she will be left dependent on your bounty altogether?"

"Don't speak in that way, Emily. The girl has talents, and well cultivated, they will give her a maintenance."

"But she will owe all to you. I have no patience with her for not being aware of her obligations to you."

"I think she is too painfully aware of what you call 'her obligations.'"

"What do you mean?"

"She is proud, and conscious of possessing talent. It distresses her to feel that she is dependent."

"What folly!"

"I have seen it ever since she discovered the probability of her loss of property."

"You told her of it?"

"No, indeed; she was in the library the day you and I spoke on the subject, and she heard every word."

"Well, it was right she should know."

"I have seen her chafing like a caged wild doe ever since. She has a fancy that she could earn a living for herself."

"Poor little thing! She could do nothing."

"Her inexperience makes the future appear all *couleur de rose*."

"I don't see what can be done, Wyndham. Of course coercion is out of the question?"

"Of course."

"And you could not marry such a girl?"

Wyndham's pale cheek flushed a little.

"The doubt thrown on her birth would be a bar to her marriage into any respectable family."

"She is too young to think of marriage. How strangely you talk! as if marriage were the only end and aim of a woman!"

"So it is, usually; and in my opinion nothing else will tame your wild bird. Find her an indulgent husband, who is not particular as to antecedents, and has no family to be injured by the carplings of the curious."

The lawyer uttered an exclamation of impatience, and rose to go.

His visit to Mrs. Weston's was fruitless.

But on his arrival at home, where he fully expected to find the girl, for it was now late in the evening, his mother handed him a letter, which had been brought to the door by a small boy, who did not wait.

The letter was from Elodie. She wrote to thank her guardian for his care of her; but announced her determination to enter at once on her life of self-dependence. She was staying with a lady who had been her mother's friend, and who favored her views. She had left Mr. Blount's house that morning, never to return.

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG DEBUTANTE.

FOR many days had Elodie's resolution to take the step been maturing in her mind. She knew that her guardian would not consent to her casting off his protection. If she remained under his authority, to what must she look forward? To years of tutelage and submission; to humiliating dependence; to a consciousness of impotence that harassed her impetuous spirit. Her chains must be broken at one bound, or she must wear them till they fretted and galled her to death.

She had not failed to notice the change that came over Emily at her marriage. She had not invited the young girl to be a visitor at her house.

The reason was plain to Elodie; she was regarded as one unfit to move in the same social circle. Her want of fortune, and the question soon to be raised in a court touching her legitimacy, placed her beneath the notice of the proud women of fashion she had been accustomed to see for the past few months. Yet how superior to them she felt herself!

The kindness of Mrs. Blount, the brotherly tenderness of Wyndham, were not enough to soothe her pride under this slight.

She had vague hopes of making herself a name and fame that would compel their respect and attention, or else of being separated from them so far that their sneers would be unheeded.

Having fixed on the day of her leaving her home, the girl packed a large sachel with two or three changes of dress, and put the rest into a trunk which she could send for.

She counted her little store of money; it was not large, but sufficient for her probable wants for some time to come.

She had already decided where she would go. She knew the importance of keeping her-

self free from the chance of being called an adventuress.

Her aunt Letty had several times taken her to see Mrs. Brill, a worthy woman who lived somewhere about Eighth avenue and Thirty-fourth street, and had a house large enough to accommodate a few lodgers; eking out her income by doing a little dressmaking and millinery, to which a room on her second floor was devoted.

Mrs. Brill had petted Elodie when a child; had praised her beauty and sprightliness, and had more than once expressed a wish to adopt her.

On the last visit Mrs. Rashleigh had made her with the girl, after remarking her striking resemblance to her mother, the dame had predicted some great fortune, by marriage or otherwise, for her, and had bade her, if she should at any time need a friend, to come to her.

To this partial friend Elodie had written a long letter, confiding all her troubles, and her determination to win her own way in the world. No time was given for a reply; for Elodie would not risk the possibility of a denial.

The very same day on which her letter was received, a cab drove to the door of the brick house, and the girl alighted from it, paying and dismissing the driver before she came in at the little gate.

Mrs. Brill came to meet her in the hall, and took her up to her sewing-room.

"How the child has grown!" was her first exclamation; and she could not help remarking the elegance of the slender, symmetrical figure, set off by the very handsome dress of fine cashmere, so stylishly trimmed, and the velvet hat to match, with its brown feather and ribbon, and the clustering rosebuds on the left side.

The girl's flossy curls, in rich abundance, rushed out from the confinement of the hat, framing a lovely blooming face, that could not have failed to fascinate the gaze of strangers had it not been protected by a thick beige veil.

Mrs. Brill was very glad to see her, and assured her she was welcome to make her house a home. She had felt hurt, indeed, that Mr. Rashleigh—her uncle—had not sent her there upon her aunt's death.

"You should have come to me at once, and I said so," she cried, when she had embraced the girl, removed her wrappings, and shown her to a small room next her own. "I should have been a mother to you; and I will be poor darling! And so your uncle is going to take away your property, like a brute as he is?"

"He has claimed it for his son," replied the girl. "The trial is to come on soon, I believe. You know, without money to pay my board, I should have been a burden to the family of Mr. Blount."

"And you did just right to come here, my child."

"I have not money to pay my board here, Mrs. Brill; but I can help you in sewing, in the time when I have no lessons to take."

"Indeed, you shall do nothing but study and practice your music; and when you make money by that, you can pay me!"

"Oh, thanks, dear Mrs. Brill! I am going to study for the stage, you know."

"Quite right! I always said you would do something great."

"And I can play and sing so well now, I am going to try for a situation to sing in choruses; and that will secure me a salary."

An exclamation of wonder and pleasure burst from the well-meaning but hardly judicious dame.

"I am going to apply for it directly. And I hope my guardian will not find me out. If he does, I will refuse to go home with him."

"You shall stay with me, if you like it better, child. Has Mr. Blount legal papers giving him authority over you?"

"Oh, no; only aunt Letty asked him to take care of me, just before she died."

"She ought to have sent for me."

"Mr. Wyndham happened to be there, and—and he saved my life, when I was out on the rocks; and he was very kind—oh, so kind! I hope he will forgive me for leaving him in this way! Oh, auntie Brill"—she had called the dame thus when she was a child—"how can I send a letter to him? He will be searching for me, if I do not write, and tell him I have a safe home!"

"Will you tell him you are here?"

"No; I will keep that a secret; I do not want him to come after me, nor to visit me. He does not want me to sing in public. Auntie, I will write the letter now; will you send it?"

"Yes; Anthony shall take it for you."

The letter was written and dispatched.

Then Mrs. Brill took her young friend into a room on the third floor, where there was a fine piano, used by a young Italian musician who was lodging with her.

He was connected with a traveling troupe, and gave concerts in different parts of the country. This room was retained by him in his absences, and the piano was his own.

Elodie opened the instrument, and sat down to play. Mrs. Brill was amazed at her performance. To her uneducated taste, the girl seemed the superior of any professor she had ever heard.

When Elodie, after playing the piece, struck into a soft prelude, and sung, sending out rich volumes of melody from a voice of unusual power, and well trained, too, the worthy dame clasped her hands and listened breathlessly.

There was another listener: the young Italian, who had come up stairs, and stood outside the door of his own room, keeping time to the music, nodding his head, and expressing real pleasure in the song. It was a simple English

ballad, but gave scope for the exercise of voices in varied intonations.

"Bravo! bravissimo!" the young man cried, when the song was ended, clapping his hands. "*La signorina e brava cantatrice.*"

Elodie hurried out of the room, clinging to Mrs. Brill's arm, and blushing at being caught.

The dame made suitable apologies, which were met by an earnest entreaty that "*la signorina*" would use the piano as much as she pleased. The young man would tune it himself for her use, and would not be in his room except at certain hours, etc.

That evening, while the young artist was absent, performing his professional duties, Elodie sung and practiced her most difficult pieces. The instrument was of unusual excellence; and the owner was often out of the city for days and weeks together.

Mrs. Brill would not permit her young protégée to assist her in the household work, but insisted on her assiduous cultivation of her music. Apart from her pride in the girl's talents, she knew that she would be sure to profit by her success.

So time passed, during which Wyndham Blount made all the search possible, without calling in the aid of the police, to discover his missing ward.

He even went to inquire of Rashleigh, who would be likely to know any friends she might have. Rashleigh extracted from him all the information he could get, but gave none in return. The discovery of Elodie's musical gifts put a new idea into his head, by which he resolved to profit.

Mortified, despondent, and vexed at Elodie's ingratitude for his protection and services, young Blount at last desisted from his search.

He waited patiently for the time which he knew would come, when the rash girl would enter on a professional career.

He had sought interviews with the managers of the opera, and of other musical companies, and had received their promise not to engage her without sending him notice.

Emily St. Clare was severe on the girl's escapade. It showed her blood and breeding, she thought; she would never have been satisfied to live in retirement, and would sooner or later have brought her protectors into trouble on her account.

She said little, however, to her brother, for she saw that he felt deeply chagrined.

It was her opinion that the girl had gone to some of her mother's or aunt's former associates, and had been taken by them out of the city, that they might elsewhere make merchandise of her acquisitions.

Her conjecture was the most rational and nearest the fact. The young Italian had procured for Elodie an offer to take a tour with the troupe in which he was engaged, and to sing in their concerts, a subordinate part. The leading lady, Madame Leona—English, in spite of her Italian name—would take charge

of her. She was to appear as "*Mademoiselle Helene.*"

Mrs. Brill accepted the proposal, and Elodie was wild with joy. Her wardrobe was soon prepared; for she needed but two concert dresses, and one for traveling, with a household morning dress.

The troupe traveled through the smaller towns on the Hudson and thence through parts of New England; and everywhere the fresh, rich voice of Elodie, with her remarkable beauty, rendered her a favorite.

Madame Leona was a benevolent matron, free from jealousy of a rival; and she took infinite pains to improve her charge.

The girl, in fact, made such rapid progress as to impress all who knew her with the certainty that she would rise to eminence in her profession.

One evening a concert was given in New Haven. Elodie was to sing a difficult solo. She had studied it under the direction of her lady friend, and was perfect, as Leona decided.

The girl felt that she was approaching the crisis of her life; but experienced no timorous shrinking nor distrust of her own powers. These were to be tested as they had never been before.

She put on her best dress, a white corded silk, shot with pale rose-color. The low corsage and short sleeves displayed the girl's beautiful neck and arms, shaded by delicate illusion lace. She wore no ornament except a pearl brooch and bracelets—some of her mother's jewelry. Her abundant waving hair was unadorned; its curls confined at the back of the head by a simple ribbon. In all her life the girl had never looked more radiantly lovely.

When she appeared on the platform the burst of applause that greeted her was due more to her beauty than to any recognized professional excellence. It was delightful to her, and she bowed repeatedly in acknowledgment.

She did notice that she was furtively and closely watched by a man near the entrance, on one of the side benches, who sought to avoid observation as much as possible.

It was an evening of triumph to the young debutante. She felt that her position was now secure. Madame Leona congratulated her; praised her diligence and improvement; and advised her on the termination of the present engagement to demand a doubled salary.

Proud indeed was the girl that she had achieved this success. She threw her arms round her friend's neck, called her her guardian angel, and declared that all was owing to her instruction.

They had a joyous supper that night together, in Leona's parlor. But Elodie cared not to eat.

"When you are of my age," cried the good lady, "you will find a dish of oysters and a bottle of champagne a neat finale to an evening's triumph! Eat, my child, or you will

lose your roses, and then what will Enrico say?"

"What should he have to do with them?" queried the girl.

"You need not look so innocent!" retorted the prima donna, laughing. "Are you not to marry Enrico, and go starrang together?"

"Marry Enrico!" exclaimed Elodie, her rosy lip curling in scorn. "Who ever dreamed of such a thing?"

"He has, I'll warrant me! He got you this engagement. I was consulted by the manager about it."

"He was very kind. I was a stranger to him; and he was very good to take an interest in my future."

"Pooh, pooh, child! Men do not take interest in young girls without hope of reward. Enrico is deeply in love with you."

"No, indeed!"

"Indeed he is! All the artists have noticed it. And you have not discouraged his attentions."

The girl remembered, with a shiver of dismay, how often the young man—the owner of the piano at Mrs. Brill's—had escorted her to and from the concert-room, and had placed her in the carriage. She had been grateful for his kindness, but had never dreamed of such a motive for it.

With not a little disdain, she now repelled the idea.

"My dear child," persisted the prima donna, "you underrate Enrico. He is an excellent tenor, and a careful and correct musician. You have benefited by some of his instructions. He would be the best companion for you in a provincial tour; his voice suits with yours; you could not do better."

"Madame!" cried the girl, passionately, and starting up, "if you talk this way, if any one does, I will leave the company at once, and go back to auntie Brill!"

"*Cospetto!* but you have made a contract to finish our tour."

"I shall break it, if I am to be thrust upon a stranger in this fashion! Signor Enrico is nothing to me! I will receive no more attentions from him!"

"*Ebbene!* do not be violent about it; no one shall coerce you, child!"

"They had better not try it!" exclaimed Elodie, weeping and sobbing now, and crimson with excitement; "I am not to be coerced into anything, much less a marriage! I did not run away from home for that!"

Strangely enough, since her flight from Mrs. Blount's house, she had often spoken of it as "home."

"So, you ran away!" repeated her protectress. "I have heard as much. I can believe it, too, from your wild nature. Your parents would not have let you go into the profession!"

"I have no parents. I have not a relation in the world; and no one has authority over me. I had a right to run away. I am not a school-girl!" cried the debutante.

"From whom did you run, then?"

"I was living with my guardian; that is, with his mother."

"But he had authority over you. You are not of age?"

"I am almost seventeen. He had no authority; only my aunt, when she died, asked him to take care of me. Oh, he was so good!"

"You love him, perhaps; and that makes you cruel to Enrico!"

"Enrico be—hanged!" ejaculated the wayward girl. "I shall hate him, if you mention his name again!"

"Poor boy! I see there is no hope for him!" And the fair vocalist applied herself anew to her oysters and champagne.

Elodie had risen and stood by a small piano at the end of the room, her fingers straying over its keys to a soft, wild melody she had composed herself.

Recollections of her home with the Blounts were in her heart, and she was involuntarily contrasting it with her present life. The gentle refinement of all her associates there, the homelike atmosphere, breathing of affection, delicacy and benevolence, came to present themselves in contrast with the often rough, sordid and repulsive things she had been obliged to encounter of late. It was necessary for her to call frequently upon her dignity and self-reliance. In the midst of her triumphs lurked some humiliations. Her sensitive nature felt these, and she knew them inseparable from such a career as she had chosen; at least, till she had reached the pinnacle of success.

The remembrance of Wyndham, too, was a solace to her amid sad thoughts. He was her ideal of manly excellence. She had not thought much of the trouble she was causing him, when she deserted the home he had given her; but she looked forward to the time when she could meet him justified by the stamp of success; when she was earning an independence, and in possession of the honors of the celebrity she coveted.

"He will see, then, that I could not stay and be a school-girl; that I did right to earn my own maintenance," she thought. The recollection of his sister always awakened resentful feelings.

"Helene," said Madame Leona—she always called the girl by her professional name—"you want to sing in the grand opera?"

"Oh, so much!" cried Elodie, clasping her hands.

"Right! I wish it, too. We might join Maretzek's traveling troupe first. This concert singing does not suit either of us. We must see about it when we return."

"Oh, madame! How charming that would be!"

The girl threw herself on an ottoman at the feet of her friend, clasped her hands across her lap, and looked up eagerly in her face.

"*Ebbene!* you must practice the action; it is different, you know, from concert parts. They call it 'business' on the stage. You are

graceful, and would learn the poses easily; I will give you some lessons."

Another exclamation of delight, and the girl snatched Leona's hand and kissed it.

"But we need influence; we need an agent. Would the guardian you told me of, Helene—would he negotiate for you?"

The girl shook her head sadly.

"You might ask him. You must have some one to negotiate."

"I cannot ask him."

"Why not? You are independent of him."

"I do not know what hold he may have over me. He might compel me to go back."

"Very true. But if you are in danger of being reclaimed, the more reason you should have some one to make the terms and introduce you, and manage things."

"I have only auntie Brill," said the girl, musingly.

"She can do nothing. We must think. We will talk it all over to-morrow. Now it is too late. Good-night."

It was long before Elodie could close her eyes. Exultant hope and perplexed thinking banished slumber.

It was nearly noon next day when she was called up by the maid, who brought a tray of breakfast to her bedside, with the information that a gentleman had called, and finding she was not visible, had gone away, saying he would return at one o'clock.

Elodie started up.

"Who was the gentleman?" she demanded, in no little trepidation.

"He left no name. He said he would call again."

Could it be her guardian? She trembled at the very thought.

"What kind of a looking man? Young? tall? A handsome man?"

"Not young, nor handsome, Miss. A dark man, middle-aged, with bushy hair and a harsh voice."

No, it could not have been Wyndham. Perhaps some musician, who had proposals for a concert, or wanted to get her to sing for a charity. She had had such applications. Her excitement was quieted at once.

She performed her ablutions hastily, and threw on a dressing-gown; then ate her breakfast with the hearty appetite of youth and health. Then she sent a message to Madame Leona. She must have her presence in receiving a visit from a stranger.

Leona readily obeyed the summons. She liked the girl's confidence, and was well pleased that she should form no plans, nor accept any propositions, without her sanction. She helped Elodie to put on her morning dress.

The maid came up a second time with word that the gentleman was in the hotel parlor.

"Send for him to your parlor, madame," entreated the girl.

The message was sent, and the two ladies entered the private reception-room.

In three minutes after they had seated them-

selves the door was opened by the servant to admit the stranger.

Elodie rose, and advanced a step or two, then suddenly recoiled, with a faint cry of surprise and dismay.

The gentleman was Bennet Rashleigh.

CHAPTER XVI.

APPEARANCE ON THE OPERA STAGE.

MADAME LEONA hurried to the girl's side, when she heard her cry, and took her arm to reassure her, while she glanced somewhat sternly at the intruder.

"I see that she is surprised to see me," said Mr. Rashleigh, in his smoothest tone. "I ought to have sent up my name."

"Certainly, sir," replied the lady. "May I ask who it is? Helene, you know this—gentleman?"

A shudder ran through the girl's frame, and she kept fast hold of her friend's hand.

"She knows me well," the stranger answered. "I am her uncle."

"Her uncle!"

"Yes. She is naturally affected by the painful circumstances of our last interview. It was at the time of her aunt's—my wife's death."

Leona looked at her protegee in some bewilderment.

"This is Mr.—Mr. Rashleigh," returned Elodie, controlling her feelings by an effort.

"And he is your uncle? You did not tell me you had an uncle. You said you had no relatives."

"She meant none by blood," put in the visitor. "I was the husband of her mother's sister, and she has lived in my house since childhood, till within a few months. At the death of my wife she was consigned to the guardianship of Mr. Blount, who had undertaken the management of property she was supposed to inherit."

"Ah, and it was Mr. Blount's house you left?" asked the lady.

"I will tell you all, madame, another time," replied the girl. "This gentleman has no authority over me; none whatever."

"My dear girl, do you imagine I claim any?" cried Rashleigh. "Be disabused of that idea at once. I only mentioned our relationship to excuse the liberty I took in making you a visit."

"Thanks, sir," responded Leona, speaking for the girl. "We are happy to see you. You are aware that your niece is under my protection?"

The gentleman bowed, and expressed himself glad that she had found so excellent a chaperone.

"I heard, in New York," he added, "that she had determined to adopt the musical profession; and—"

Elodie interrupted him. "How did you hear it? From whom?" she demanded.

"Well, it was talked of among your friends."

"I have no friends to tell of my affairs. Who told you of it?"

"I heard it first from Mr. Wyndham Blount."

The girl grew suddenly pale.

"Did he come to you?" she asked, faintly.

"He did; I should never have sought him."

"To give up his charge of me, I suppose!" the girl said, with a convulsion of the lips that showed her painful emotion.

"Not exactly; it was to inquire after you."

"He thought I had gone to your house—"

"No; but he wished to know what friends of your mother's or your aunt's might have received you."

"And you told him?" the girl asked, quickly.

"I told him nothing. I kept my own counsel. He let out that you wanted to go on the stage, and that he might interfere with it."

"What right had he to interfere?"

"That remains to be seen. You are little more than a child, Elodie; and the law does not permit 'an infant,' as it styles a person of your age, to make contracts and choose a career. Blount might establish a claim to intercept you."

"But he has no claim. I consented to stay under his charge till I found out that I must earn my own living. I was free to choose how to do that."

"No, you were not. A child can do nothing for herself. If you have no guardian, the law will appoint one."

"I want no guardianship!" sobbed the girl.

"If I understand Mr. Rashleigh," interposed Leona, "he has a better claim than Mr. Blount."

"I should think so," meekly responded the gentleman. I have been her protector from childhood. She was a mere baby when brought to my house."

"But you received pay for my board," cried Elodie, passionately. "That was paid to the very day I left! You have no right to control me because I lived in your house like any other lodger! I will deny and resist your claim."

"I have made no claim, child," said Rashleigh, quietly.

"No, he does not," repeated Leona. "I think I understand you, sir. It is not your design to interfere with this young lady's choice of a profession."

"Far from it!" protested the gentleman.

"You are pleased, on the other hand, to think she has wisely decided, and you will sustain her in her decision?"

He bowed with suavity.

"Helene, my child, I regard this as a fortunate occurrence. This gentleman, the respected husband of your aunt, whose house has for many years been your home, approves and will stand by your determination. Is it not so, sir?"

"You have expressed my sentiments, madame," with another low bow.

"Perhaps you will do more, Mr. Rashleigh."

Having seen how well fitted your niece is to attain eminence in the career on which she has entered, you may be willing to assist her."

The visitor hesitated.

"I do not mean with money," Leona went on, for she read his thoughts. "But it is seemly that so youthful an artist should have a friend—a relation or guardian, to negotiate engagements for her."

The man's greedy eyes sparkled.

"I understand you, madame. If you would be satisfied with the best I can do in that way—"

"Your relationship makes you best fitted for the task, sir."

"Then I would undertake it with pleasure."

Elodie glanced at him, and made a movement as if to protest against her interests being committed to such hands.

Rashleigh anticipated her objections.

"I wish it distinctly, understood, madame, that I have not the slightest wish to interfere with my niece's freedom of choice. I shall esteem it an honor to act simply as her agent, under her and your instructions."

"Your remuneration shall be sure, though it may not be large at first."

"That, I assure you, madame, is a less consideration than the desire of rendering service to my niece."

The look which the speaker caught from the girl's eloquent eyes, fixed on his face, showed him that he had not imposed on her by this affectation of disinterestedness.

But the matron received it all in good faith. She began to unfold their plans. An engagement, even a minor one, was to be first secured for both ladies at one or the other operative companies in the metropolis. Meantime Leona would devote several hours every day to the training of her pupil in the music, and the action necessary. They would sing together.

The salary of the agent would be paid out of the first avails of an engagement, and Leona was to have her pay as instructress in addition to a share as vocalist.

Elodie did not interfere in the discussion of these points. She cared nothing about money in comparison with fame. She panted only for the larger field that might open for her powers, and for the reward of appreciation.

Rashleigh took his leave as agent of the two singers. He was to proceed at once to New York and begin operations.

"I do not like it, madame," the girl said, as the door closed upon him. "I am sure he is deceiving us in some way."

"How can he? Trust me, child. I will take care he does not outwit us."

Elodie did trust her friend's judgment, and gave herself up to the lessons which were commenced with spirit.

The girl's progress in learning the appropriate action was marvelous. She had depth of artistic feeling, and power of expression equal to any part. Her native grace, with the pas-

sionate intensity of her nature, would impress the spectators, and adorn any scene. Leona was often surprised at the fervor she exhibited.

In the weeks that elapsed before the return of the troupe to New York, she had studied several entire parts, and improved her voice in solos, duets and scenes, so that she was ready for examination.

Rashleigh's report was favorable. He had talked with the managers of two companies. One had expressed a wish to hear the young lady sing.

Mrs. Brill accompanied her young friend as well as Leona, who had taken board at her house.

Elodie dressed herself that morning with exquisite taste, in her neat brown cashmere, with snowy collar and cuffs, and her velvet hat with its short veil and plume.

They were to meet the manager and one or two of his friends at a large room in the rear of a piano manufactory.

He was favorably impressed with the young lady's appearance. Such fresh, glowing beauty was an excellent recommendation.

He heard her play and sing, and was manifestly pleased. When he began to speak of business, he was told that the young girl could only be engaged in company with her friend and preceptress, Madame Leona.

After hearing the latter play and sing, he inquired into their knowledge of parts, and finally engaged both for minor characters. The debut of both was appointed for the next Monday.

Elodie felt that it would be a severe task; but she did not shrink from it. Her confidence in her musical ability was great; while the more experienced vocalist knew that her success would be more owing to her action and the attraction of a new face.

The bill- announced the youthful *debutante* as "La Signorina Elena," an Italian just from Paris.

It was not mentioned that she was to appear for the first time on any stage. This omission led Wyndham, who had carefully read the bills, out of the way of suspicion. It had been contrived by the management of Rashleigh.

With a beating heart, and trembling with suppressed excitement, Elodie stood in the dressing room of the theater, arrayed in her white silk, with the addition of a full illusion overdress. She was to appear as the attendant of a princess. Her flossy hair was gathered closely, and confined by a white ribbon; but a few shining ringlets escaped, and clustered over her temples. She was pale for her; but she steadily refused to put on the least bit of rouge.

"I will never wear that," she said, impetuously, when Leona tried to persuade her.

And she did not need it; for when she stood upon the stage, and met the admiring gaze of hundreds, cheered by the applause called forth at sight of a new and charming face, her friends

saw, the lovely color return, till her cheeks glowed like a wild rose.

The first scenes were quiet, and she had time to recover her self-possession.

Then came a duet with one of the male singers, and one requiring intensity almost beyond what the manager expected from one so young. The girl knew that her test would be here, and threw into the part her whole soul.

She felt her triumph in the rapt silence of her auditors, even before the burst of applause that followed.

When the piece was ended, a bouquet was thrown and fell at her feet. One of the actors picked it up and handed it to her. Her swift glance wandered over the row of boxes, in some trepidation. She saw Rashleigh in the stage box, leaning over the front, and earnestly watching her. He could not have thrown the flowers.

As she retired behind the scenes, she felt herself clasped in a pair of stout arms. They belonged to auntie Brill, who embraced her with effusion, as she led her into the dressing-room.

"Do you know who threw me this?" asked the girl.

None of those around her could tell.

"What is this twisted around the handle?" asked Leona. "A note—perhaps!"

No; it was simply a piece of blank paper.

But something hard, wrapped in paper, was nestled amid the petals of a half-blown rose, and fastened by a silken thread to its stem.

Elodie pulled it out, to the destruction of the flower, and opened the paper.

It was a ring of chased gold, with a beautiful opal set in the center. She gave an exclamation of surprise and delight.

Various conjectures were made as the pretty bauble passed from hand to hand; but none could imagine who had sent it.

"A lover, certainly," cried Leona. "You must wear it at your next appearance, and let him see you appreciate the gift."

"I shall not wear it at all, if it has such a meaning!" cried the girl, contemptuously. "I have no lover, and I want none."

Both the ladies laughed.

"You are likely to have many and many such offerings," said Leona. "Let me advise you not to slight them, nor to snub your adorers. They always hover around the rising stars."

"As moths around a candle," suggested Mrs. Brill.

"To be scorched if they venture too near," added the young *debutante*.

They were interrupted by a tap at the door, and Rashleigh presented himself, to ask if the manager might come in.

That gentleman warmly congratulated both the new vocalists upon their success.

We say nothing of Leona's, for it is of no consequence to our story—and she was known as an old favorite in concert singing. He said less in particular to the young girl than she

thought she had deserved. But her more experienced friend saw that he was even better pleased than his words expressed.

The whole party adjourned to supper in a private room at Delmonico's, given by the manager.

Elodie was entirely unaccustomed to such scenes, and it struck unpleasantly on her feelings to find herself in so novel a situation.

With all her love of excitement and applause, she had much innate delicacy, and a shrinking reserve as far as herself—in her own person—was concerned.

On the stage she was in an assumed character, and found it altogether different. She could receive tumultuous plaudits, and feel sheltered in the part she had undertaken. But to know that admiring eyes were fastened on her face as she sat at a quiet meal, to have noisy congratulations offered and rather coarse approbation expressed openly; to feel that she had parted with the privacy she had as an obscure girl—was something she did not quite like.

She could not help contrasting this with the seclusion she had so murmured at, while with the Blounts.

There, she was protected from the slightest breath of flattery or free speech. Here, she felt that a rather unseemly freedom was used toward her. As the manager warmed with wine, he did not hesitate to lavish compliments on her personal charms.

Madame Leona checked him, for she saw the girl's embarrassment. She knew it was for the interest of both that a good understanding should be maintained.

Time went on, and her pupil continued to improve and to gain in popular estimation.

One day Leona came into Elodie's room while she was leaning with her head on her arms, upon the table, in a pensive mood.

"Are you out of spirits, child?" she asked. "I think you will be at effervescing point with the news I bring!"

The girl lifted her head languidly, with some indistinct complaint of its aching.

Her visitor went on to say that the Italian lady who was engaged for certain parts second only to the prima-donna's, was taken ill, and could not take her part for the following evening.

"What can be done?" asked Elodie. "They will have to change the opera!"

"No: the manager has just sent to know if I can fit you to take her place."

"Me? impossible!"

"It is not impossible, or I should not have promised for you."

"You have promised?"

"Yes. Don't you see that here is the opportunity desired for making both our fortunes? You can establish yourself; you will have the part through the run of the piece, for the signora's illness is a serious one. Next season you will be promoted; the manager can not help it—and I shall rise with you."

"Oh, madame, it would be splendid if I could sing the part! I might do the action."

"And the singing too! I can prepare you."

"Are you sure?" cried the girl with sparkling eyes.

"Certainly; I have pledged my word, and I never disappointed any one! But we must be diligent. Come—we must begin immediately."

Elodie roused all her powers for the new study. It was not a long part, but a very difficult one. In the music only she needed drilling; the passionate action came naturally.

Late in the afternoon before the performance, Madame Leona made her pupil lie down and sleep to recruit her energies. Elodie had the convenient faculty of being able to sleep soundly whenever she was fatigued; and after a light dinner she retired.

By dusk she was up and refreshed wonderfully. She called her maid to assist her in dressing for the part, after they had driven to the opera house.

Leona came into her room when she was ready. Her critical eye surveyed the girl from head to foot, and she pronounced her dress correct.

"You will have to change it in the third act," she remarked.

"I have every thing laid out," returned her pupil. "See!"

She pointed to a side table on which the costume was carefully laid.

"And you are calm and strong? I see you are, and I will not disturb you. In ten minutes you will be called."

"Dear Leona, be at the side scene, where I can see you."

"I will if you wish it. Let me send you a glass of cordial before you go on."

"No, indeed! You know I never touch a drop. It would flush my face, and confuse me."

"Well. Sit down now, and look over your music till the bell rings. I will not let you talk."

She retired, and the *debutante* kept herself quiet, repressing all exciting thoughts. She was calm as a statue.

When the time came for her appearance, the manager himself came to lead her to the side scene.

She took his arm in silence, and he argued the best from her composure and self-possession. A flutter of agitation would have alarmed him.

Elodie seemed to herself in a dream as she went on the stage. A burst of tumultuous applause greeted her appearance; but she forgot to acknowledge it. The lights, the crowded scene, wheeled before her sight. She was afraid she had overrated her power.

But the next instant she caught her friend's smile at one of the wings, and then lighted on the broad, buxom face of Mrs. Brill, seated in one of the boxes. She felt restored to self-possession.

For the first two or three notes her voice

did not reach its proper range, but she soon recovered herself, and entered fully into the spirit of the character she had undertaken to personate.

So far as acting went hers was a perfect triumph. The singing was not quite equal to that, not quite up to the range of the leading vocalists. But it was hardly fair to expect it from so youthful a *debutante*. It was highly creditable to her powers and her training. Even connoisseurs were disposed to be indulgent to so lovely a creature, so fresh and young, so ardent in her nature, so full of exquisite grace! The applause was unbounded.

Encouraged by the manager and Leona after every effort, to believe she had mastered all difficulties with success, Elodie reserved her best strength for the last scene. It was one to task her powers to the utmost. Leona, too, was on the stage, in one of her subordinate parts. She had noticed that the girl was pale and exhausted toward the close, and, aware of the importance of her sustaining herself throughout, she again pressed on her a glass of cordial.

This time Elodie did not refuse, for she felt the need of it. It brought the color to her cheek, and she rushed on the stage, with the impetuosity demanded by her part, fully determined to conquer or die.

The energy of steady determination seldom fails to meet its reward. Elodie's last effort crowned her success. She stood motionless while the house rung with plaudits. She felt conscious of her shortcomings now; but she knew that practice would overcome all drawbacks. Her heart swelled with exultation. Her eyes slowly swept the circle of spectators as she made her final curtsy with the other characters.

Suddenly she started and stood still while those around her were retiring. Some one seized her hand and drew her back; but her eyes glared fixedly at some object before her. In the very front of a box just behind the orchestra seats she saw Wyndham Blount.

He had evidently recognized her, for he stood up and was bending forward eagerly—his eyes fixed on her face.

The descending curtain hid him from her sight and brought her back to full consciousness. At the same instant she felt her arm drawn within another's and saw Rashleigh at her side.

"Come with me," he hissed in her ear. "He will follow you directly."

"I must go to my room," said the girl, with quivering lips.

"No, he will intercept you. I have your cloak: I will send for your things. This way, for the sake of your liberty!"

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

OLIVE IN A NEW POSITION.

THE scene was a handsomely furnished parlor in a brown stone house in West Forty-second street, New York.

A middle aged gentleman—unmistakably a gentleman from his looks and manners—was pacing the two rooms, for the folding-doors between them were open. He paused in his walk to look at a painting that hung in the back room, seen to advantage from the light that came through the ground glass doors of the extension room, or third parlor.

It was the portrait of a very handsome young man.

While the visitor gazed upon the pictured face the door of the front parlor opened and a young lady was seen, to meet whom he immediately turned.

"Ah, good morning, Miss Weston."

"Good morning, Mr. Sherman," the young girl answered, with a bright smile.

"I see by your looks," rejoined the gentleman, "that our friend is better."

"Much better, I am thankful to say. But she is not yet able to receive any visitors, Mr. Sherman."

"I did not expect to see her to-day. The doctor thinks her on the mend, does he not?"

"He spoke very encouragingly. The immediate danger is past."

"But she must be careful, very careful. I have known Mrs. Stanley many years and she has all the time been subject to these alarming attacks. She is particularly fortunate in having your care and your society, Miss Weston."

The girl—it was our old friend Olive—colored slightly and looked away as she asked:

"You received the note, Mr. Sherman, which I sent at Mrs. Stanley's request?"

"I did, and I wrote immediately to her nephew. But I saw his name in the list of passengers by the Russia, this morning."

"Then he could not have received your letter?"

"I shall go immediately to find him. Mrs. Stanley wishes to see him, you say. Would she be well enough this evening?"

"I think so. She has been anxious to have him sent for ever since her attack. You will bring him here?"

"I will, certainly. His arrival is most opportune—most fortunate. If the last attack had proved fatal it would have been a sad thing for him."

"Indeed it would. His aunt has loved him as a mother," said Olive, in a low tone, suppressing a sigh.

"More than that, he is the heir to her fortune, her sister's son," rejoined the legal gentleman, "and it is important that he should know her last wishes, to carry them out, as far as his power extends."

The young lady bowed, without reply.

"You have known Mrs. Stanley intimately for a long time?" the lawyer asked, after a pause.

"She was an early friend of my mother's," replied Olive, "but I did not know her well till I came here to be her companion."

"I have heard her speak of you so often and so affectionately I fancied much of your life had been spent with her."

"After the death of my mother had left me alone in the world Mrs. Stanley heard of my unhappy situation and invited me to make her house my home. But I could not accept her kindness unless—"

"I understand: unless you rendered some equivalent. That was true independence. I respect you for it, Miss Weston."

"I had accepted an engagement to take charge of a school in Ohio. But Mrs. Stanley procured my release and offered me the position of her companion, with a salary. She did this out of her indulgent kindness to me."

"As I said, she is fortunate. She has in you what money could not purchase."

"Oh, sir, she is more than a friend—she is a mother to me!" With difficulty the girl suppressed a sob as she spoke.

"I have not wondered at the regard she has expressed for you," continued Mr. Sherman. "You have deserved it. You have devoted yourself to faithful, unremitting attendance upon her."

Olive made an impatient movement, as if unwilling to hear praise of herself.

"And it is but right—I have had it on my mind a long time to speak of it to her—that some provision should be made for you in her will."

The girl started and looked as if she did not quite understand. Her thoughts had gone straying elsewhere.

"Three years since I drew up Mrs. Stanley's testament. The entire property she held was left to her nephew, Mr. Hamilton. She ought to add a codicil in your favor."

"Mr. Sherman, what do you mean? Mrs. Stanley leave money to me?"

"It would be but right and just."

"It would not be right or just! I have not the shadow of a claim on her."

"Her well known affection for you and your loving devotion to her certainly indicate a claim, which I have no doubt she will respect."

"Mr. Sherman, if you do not wish to send me out friendless from the only shelter I have, if you do not wish to deprive me of the love of the only being who cares for me, never, never speak in this way! Promise me that you will never, never do it—to her above all things!"

"But why not, my good young lady? I am the friend of Mrs. Stanley, as well as her lawyer. And I know she wishes to do something for you."

"No, no, indeed she never shall!"

"Why not, if such is her wish?" She regarded you as a daughter and you are worthy of her love. Better that she should care for your future than that it should be left in the hands of her heir."

"I would not accept anything from either!" cried Olive, passionately, clasping her hands, while her face crimsoned with her painful excitement.

"You are too scrupulous. Suppose Mrs. Stanley should bequeath to you—as a token of her grateful affection—"

"Mr. Sherman," cried the girl, starting up, "you will please say no more. Be assured I would not accept a legacy, even if you obtained it for me."

"But as a free gift from your friend—"

"No, not even from her! I would never accept one cent of her property."

"This, allow me to say, is Quixotic. Are you afraid of diminishing the possessions of the legal heir? He is heir at law, I believe, as well as legatee."

"Pray oblige me, sir, by saying no more on this subject, and by promising me that you will never name it to Mrs. Stanley."

"Well, if you are so much opposed—"

"It is a promise on which I insist."

"Then I make it. But I must do whatever my old friend, of her own will and pleasure, may direct."

"It is no time, sir, to talk of wills; my dear Mrs. Stanley is better, and I hope may live many years to enjoy her own. At what time will you bring Mr.—Mrs. Stanley's nephew? Before dinner?"

"Before dusk, I think. I shall find him at the Astor House. I will now say good morning, Miss Weston."

She had risen to bid adieu—when the servant man opened the door, and bowed.

"If you please, Miss," he said, "there's a quare sort of a gentleman—I mane a man—below, who says he wants to see Mrs. Stanley, and I tould him—"

Here he was thrust aside, and a stranger pushed himself into the room. It was a man somewhat past middle age, with abundant gray hair, beard, and whiskers. His face was

bronzed and leathery; his features were harsh and unpleasing; his small black eyes gleamed restlessly, and his thick, sensuous mouth betokened habits of reckless self-indulgence. His dress was decidedly seedy, and bore the dust of travel; although some effort had apparently been made to brush it into respectability.

He advanced, hat in hand, toward the lawyer, evidently taking him for some responsible director of the household.

Mr. Sherman drew back involuntarily. He did not like the stranger's looks.

"Well, sir; did you wish to see me?" asked the lawyer.

"I want to see Mrs. Stanley," was the gruff reply, as the man helped himself to a seat.

"Have you business with the lady?"

"I don't know as that's anything to anybody else, sir. I shall wait here to see her."

"You are not likely to do that. Mrs. Stanley is ill, and can see no one. Any business you have may be entrusted to me, as her agent and attorney."

The stranger turned to Olive, who was standing by the door, looking very much startled.

"Are you her daughter?" he abruptly inquired.

"The young lady is not her daughter," replied Sherman, speaking for her. "You may state your business to me."

"You are obliging. What if I refuse? I've come a long distance, to see Mrs. Stanley."

"And I tell you, you cannot see her."

"Is it you who will prevent me?" said the man, defiantly. "Who do you take me for?"

"From your style and figure," rejoined Sherman, "I should say you came for an answer to some begging letter."

"And I take you for some done-up old adventurer on the look-out for a rich widow."

Olive, terrified at the man's manner, now interfered.

"Indeed, sir, it is as Mr. Sherman says: Mrs. Stanley is too ill to see any one. She has had a most severe attack, and the doctor says quiet is necessary to her very life."

"Eh! well! You are more civil-spoken, Miss. I rather like you. I will give you my message. Tell her her half-brother, Richard Lumley, from Sacramento, has come to see her."

Both the others repeated the name in surprise.

"Yes—tell her I've turned up at last. It will be a surprise to her. She hasn't heard of me in eleven years!"

"I remember about long since hearing her say she had heard from a brother," remarked Sherman. "But she did not—"

"I understand you," said the man, with a grin. "She did not care to acknowledge me! I'm well aware of that; for I've been a precious scamp in my time. I shouldn't have hunted her up, but that I lost my money in

California, and got into trouble besides; and I know'd Maude was well to do, and could spare me some."

Mr. Sherman crossed the room, and whispered to Olive, who nodded and left the room. He had requested her to caution the servants against letting their mistress know of the stranger's arrival.

"That's a pretty girl," the man said, familiarly, as the door closed behind her. "I like her looks. Well, as I'm here, I suppose there's a room for me!"

"I regret, Mr. Lumley, to say there is not," replied Mr. Sherman, decisively. "The only room vacant has been prepared for Mrs. Stanley's nephew, who has just returned from Europe."

"Her—her nephew!"

"Yes; Mr. Claude Hamilton, she has always been like a mother to him—having adopted him when a child; and she educated him. He was sent for by her desire, when she was first taken ill."

"Her nephew! Ha, ha, ha!" And the seedy-looking man threw himself back in his chair, with a burst of coarse laughter. "And there is no room for me, you say," he added, when his strange merriment was exhausted.

"I regret to say there is not, Mr. Lumley. The housekeeper will tell you the same thing. And the doctor has positively forbidden Mrs. Stanley to be disturbed."

"I suppose you think it would disturb her to have a brother she has cast off so many years, appear in her presence—eh?"

"I should dread the effect of such a shock, in her enfeebled state," was the reply.

"The shock! Ah! that is a word that means something. I am likely to shock her. Well—I can wait a few days. I'll go back to the — House and come again on Saturday. By that time I expect her to see me."

He shuffled out of the room, his hat on his head, and his hands in his pockets.

Sherman quietly beckoned to the man-servant to show him out. When the door was closed after him, he called the man to him, and gave him some directions how to prevent a repetition of the unwelcome visit during the illness of his Mistress.

"I have heard of the man," he observed to Olive, when he joined her in the front parlor; "and very much to his discredit. He has been many years attached to a gang of 'roughs' in California. Mexicans and half-breeds, with disreputable adventurers, have been his associates; and the worst crimes have been laid to his charge. Something he did, caused his arrest and punishment; for no one knew what had become of him for several years. He was in prison when Mrs. Stanley last heard from him."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Olive.

"I know she supposed him dead, long after that. But he must have returned to his old associates, and his gambling habits. When these failed to yield him money, the disrepu-

table rascal comes to be a leech upon his noble sister."

"It will be a terrible shock to her," said the girl, "even to know of his existence."

"You must keep it from her as long as possible, dear Miss Weston."

"I will do my best, be sure of that."

"Now, I will say good morning. I have to find Claude the first thing; and—"

He was interrupted by a ring at the front door bell. When it was opened, a clear, rich, manly voice was heard, and a light footstep rapidly ascended the stairs.

Olive grew pale as death, and intent on escape, turned to go into the back parlor. But she was too late. Claude Hamilton came in and greeted Sherman with eager fervor, and came toward her with outstretched hand and a smile of cordial pleasure.

His greeting was mingled with apprehension, as he listened to the account of his aunt's late seizure.

"But the sight of you will do her an immensity of good!" cried Sherman. "She has so longed for your return!"

"Dear aunt Maude! can I see her this morning?"

Mr. Sherman and Claude both glanced at Olive, who silently left the room.

In a few minutes the housekeeper came, to say that the invalid would see Mr. Hamilton, and to ask from what hotel his luggage was to be fetched, for his room was ready.

Sherman took his leave, and Claude went up-stairs, wondering if Olive Weston were as much changed in mind, as he found her in person. In dignity and reserve, she seemed to have added a dozen years to her age. Her face had lost its childish roundness and gaiety; though he could not say she was less beautiful than he had left her. He noticed that her reception of him had been utterly lacking in cordiality.

"Afraid of my renewing my past folly, I suppose!" he mused, as he slowly ascended. "She need not be; she cured me of that long since!"

Olive had sought the shelter of her own room, and locked the door. She threw herself into a cushioned chair by the table, drooped her head upon her clasped hands, and strove to regain her composure, and calm the rebellious thoughts surging within her.

"I am so thankful it is over!" she breathed softly, at length, like a prayer. "I have so dreaded the first meeting! I was able to meet him; and it will be easier now! He is to stay here! Well, I must go! I cannot remain; he might think I wished to put myself in his way! I have always resolved to go when he came home; and now the time is come! I will speak to Mrs. Stanley the very first opportunity."

She rose and busied herself about the room, laying some of her things in a trunk.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEBUTANTE AND HER CRITICS.

ELODIE was handed out of the carriage at the door of a strange hotel, and led up the stairs to the reception-room.

Before she could turn to ask a question, she found herself alone. She wrapped her cloak more closely about her, and went to the door. The corridor was filled with people passing to and fro, all strange to her. She could see nothing of her escort.

She returned to her seat, and waited, chafing with impatience, some twenty minutes. Then she rose, and passing to the bell, was about to pull it, when the door opened, and a florid-looking, elderly woman entered.

"I beg a thousand pardons, Miss, for keeping you waiting," she began.

"Where is Mr. —, the gentleman who brought me here?" demanded Elodie, sternly.

"I do not know, Miss. The clerk sent for me, and I came as soon as I could. I was to show you to your room, Miss."

Elodie hesitated an instant, and then rose to follow her, dropping her veil. She was conducted up one flight of stairs, and then the housekeeper opened the door of a corner room, and lighted one of the gas burners.

It was a square room, with lofty ceiling, and elegantly furnished. The carpet was a rich pile of velvet, the windows were veiled by draperies of crimson satin damask, corresponding with the covers of chairs and sofas. On a table inlaid with mother of pearl and ebony, stood a vase full of fresh flowers. A door opposite the entrance was thrown open, revealing the white covering of a French bed, and a marble-top toilet table.

Without another question, the young girl crossed the room, and threw herself into one of the easy chairs. The housekeeper asked if she would have anything; but she only shook her head, and motioned her to retire. This the woman did, closing the door softly behind her.

Elodie then rose, threw off her cloak, and drew a deep breath. She went and stood opposite a large square mirror at one end of the room. It reflected her entire figure, in her opera dress and the jewels that sparkled on her neck and arms. Her yellow curls hung over her flushed cheeks, and as she flung them back, she half smiled, wondering what Wyndham Blount had thought of her in her new character.

"I know I did not sing my best to-night!" she murmured; "but I looked nice, and he is no judge of music. I wish he had heard me sing my best!"

When she had waited half an hour longer, there was a knock at the door, and a woman came in, closely muffled. It was Madame Leona; and she seized Elodie's hand.

"Oh, my child, you had a narrow escape!" she exclaimed. "But you are safe now, thanks to Mr. Rashleigh."

"What did he mean, by bringing me to this strange place?" asked the girl, displeased.

"What could be done? There was no time to think. Your guardian, as he calls himself, was coming to claim you—to take you away—no doubt. If we had gone home, he could have followed us. Your uncle did all for the best."

"And how long are we to stay here?"

"I do not know. To-night, certainly."

"I have not a dress with me—not even night clothes."

"Our things will be sent; never fear; pray calm yourself. The monsieur has ordered supper for us."

"I do not want any."

"You must have refreshment; and I am fainting. Be sure all will be right."

Another tap at the door; and two servants entered, one of them bearing a silver tray. The snowy cloth was soon laid, and a tempting supper set out. The choicest wine was not wanting.

In spite of her vexation, Elodie was not proof against the entreaties of her companion that she would partake of the dainties. When they had eaten—Leona not at all sparingly—the viands were removed, the wine and glasses being left.

"Now, it is late, my child, and you must go to bed. You will find our luggage sent in the morning; and a night sacque in my sachel."

"Sleep—in this strange place!" began the young lady.

"My dear, it is a first class hotel—only far down in the city. You need not be afraid. My room opens into yours—see."

And, leading the way into the bed chamber, she showed another door, which she opened. The bath-room was between the two, and the other doors were securely fastened. Leona produced a fresh cambric night dress, with brush and comb, and a neat embroidered cap, and laid them out for her young friend's use, while her own were thrown upon her bed.

The girl was ready to sink with fatigue and the exhaustion of her evening's excitement. She was not sorry to lay aside her robes and gems, and to seek the needed slumbers.

These lasted till very late in the morning. Leona had been up for hours; had gone down stairs from her own room, to have a confidential interview with Rashleigh, and had superintended the storing away of their trunks, which had been sent for from their late lodgings. One, the smallest, was brought up for Elodie's present use; the others were bestowed in the baggage-room.

When the girl wakened from her profound repose, and started up, bewildered, unable to imagine where she was, a soft step entered the room, and a soft voice spoke encouragingly to her. Leona was ready to assist her, and had her morning dress all ready, for the key of the trunk was in her possession.

"Just brush your hair, dear child," she said, "and refresh yourself by a bath, and then put on this dressing gown. There is no one here. Then I will ring for breakfast."

The breakfast was served in the parlor. Both enjoyed the chocolate, broiled chicken, omelet, and snowy rolls, with the appetites of health. When the things were removed, Elodie began to question her companion.

"We cannot tell what it will be best to do," said Madame Leona, "till Mr. Rashleigh comes."

"Why not? He is not my master," replied the querulous young lady.

"No, my dear, of course not; but we have to act by our agent under the circumstances. He was to see the manager this morning."

"Then he ought to report himself. It is past one o'clock."

"He will be here soon, I doubt not."

"And is it to depend on him, what we do?"

"On the report he brings, in part at least."

"I do not like it at all," muttered Elodie.

"Have you seen the morning papers?"

"They are in my room. I will fetch them."

Leona brought in half a dozen of the most prominent city journals, and laid them on the table. The girl unfolded them one after another, devouring the different articles recording her triumph of the preceding evening. "The Signorina Elena" was praised in unmeasured terms, as far as youth and beauty went; but two or three of the larger papers, in articles written by professed critics, spoke less kindly of her musical performance. Her voice, though fresh and full of melody, was pronounced deficient in force and compass; her rendering of many passages received unfavorable criticism. Her acting was praised but faintly; it was evident she had not understood the depth of the part she had assumed; but youth was in her favor; a few years of study might do much for her, etc., etc.

Elodie's chagrin and disappointment was unbounded. She crushed the papers in her hand, flung them on the floor with indignation, and asked what enemy had dared thus to attack her.

"Nay, my dear," replied her companion, "it is only what every *debutante* must expect. In the provinces you were a young queen; but here, the metropolitan critics are always severe. Success has to be won by strife with them, in which many wounds are received."

"These articles are all false!" cried the girl, starting up, her cheeks aflame, her eyes full of tears. "Everybody was pleased. You know how much I was applauded, and how many bouquets were thrown to me?"

"I know it, my pet; but these men never judge by marks of popular approval."

"What then? are not those signs of success?"

"The critics pretend to have a higher standard."

"Then I don't care about pleasing them at all. The audience applauded me, and that is enough."

"Yes; but you would find, and very soon too, that people are blindly led by these news-

paper critics. If you defy their judgment, they are sure to put you down. The very listeners who applauded you, and threw flowers at your feet, will fancy they have been too kind, and will pin their faith to such articles as these, and hold back in future."

"Fools!" exclaimed the irate *debutante*.

"Yes, they are fools, like more than half the world. There is one sure way of securing popularity, by bringing round the critics."

"What is that?"

"By bribing them. If your agent could have complimented each critic with a present of five hundred dollars, their verdict would have been unanimously in your favor."

"They would sell their judgment?"

"They make a practice of laying obstacles in the way of youthful artists, in order to extort bribes. But you could not have satisfied their cupidity. There was not money enough!"

"I would not have given one cent for praise that could be purchased!" cried the young aspirant after fame. "If these men require money as the price of their compliments, I want none of their good words."

Leona shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not see any mention at all of you, madame?"

"Oh, no! I am too insignificant. They never take the trouble to abuse an ordinary singer. You may console yourself with that, child! If you had not shown that you have merit, you would not have been visited by their censure."

"It is not possible, then, to establish a reputation as an artist, if one has no money to pay these critics for their approbation?" asked Elodie.

"It is difficult. It would take years—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you had a European fame. Then you would have an advantage over them, and the public might dare to decide for themselves."

"But you know I cannot have that."

"I do not know why Mr. Rashleigh should not take you to Europe. You might succeed in Vienna, or even Paris. It would be the best thing to do just now."

A servant came to the door, and announced Mr. Rashleigh.

As he came in, both the ladies noticed that he wore an expression of disappointment and perplexity.

CHAPTER III.

NEW ENGAGEMENTS AND PROSPECTS.

The agent brought unfavorable news.

The manager, who had seen Wyndham Blount, declined giving Elodie a permanent engagement. He was influenced, too, by the unfavorable tone of the New York press. Her performance, though most highly creditable to one so young, had been inferior to that of the tried vocalists who were used to the highest range of art, and even the applause her bril-

liant beauty had commanded, was an offense to them as lowering the musical standard. She was not in the good graces of the company; and the prima donna had protested against her being again entrusted with so prominent a part.

The guardian of the young lady had avowed his intention of taking home his ward, who had grieved him unspeakably by her rushing into a professional career. Should she again appear, the manager said, there must be a controversy, and perhaps an appeal to the courts, in which the guardian's authority would probably be sustained.

Thus the door was shut upon the young artist in the metropolitan opera.

Elodie wept passionate tears as she listened. She felt disgusted with the profession she had adopted.

"I would give it all up, and go home!" she exclaimed, bitterly, "if Wyndham had not been so harsh!"

"He has not acted like a friend!" put in Madame Leona. "After all, he has no authority over you; nor can he compel your obedience to him."

"As her uncle—in whose house and under whose care she has lived from infancy, I have the superior claim," asserted Rashleigh.

"Nobody has any claim to my obedience," cried Elodie. "I grew up by myself; only my aunt took care of me. You never did anything for me, Mr. Rashleigh! If I had to be subject to either of you, I would rather it should be Wyndham, because he was kind to me, and gave me a home when I had none, and promised my aunt—"

Here she broke down in a tempest of sobs.

"The question now is," said Leona, "what is to be done?"

"We must leave New York," began the gentleman.

"I will go back to auntie Brill," cried the girl through her weeping.

"And marry Enrico? Marriage would set you free, dear," suggested madame.

"Marry Enrico? Is this a time to jest at my expense? You are a wicked woman!"

"Pardon me, Helene; I meant no offense. I was only thinking how smooth everything would be made, if you had a husband who was an artist."

A look from Rashleigh checked Leona.

"I have conferred," said he, "with a French ex-manager, who wants to make up a company to go South. I can easily procure engagements for Helene and yourself."

Leona's face brightened, and Elodie ceased crying, and looked up.

"The troupe will visit Richmond and other smaller cities, before proceeding to Charleston. A series of concerts will be given."

"I like the opera better," said the girl.

"All in good time. In the larger cities, scenes from different operas may be given, in costume, with success. We shall make more money at first by concerts. And by next spring we may go to Europe."

Leona clasped her hands, in a rapture.

"But it will be necessary to leave this city immediately. I do not want it to get about that the 'Signorina Elena' has not been able to secure a permanent engagement at the grand opera. I would rather have it supposed that she is hurried away by new duties."

"Exactly so. I think as you do," rejoined madame.

"When do you intend us to leave New York?" asked Elodie.

"Can you not be ready to-morrow morning? The manager of the traveling troupe is in haste; and I am apprehensive of detention, if we remain."

Both understood that he feared Mr. Blount would trace them out, and put a stop to their proceedings.

Leona signified her approving consent. She would see to the packing, and the maid would take charge of her young mistress. The maid was to be taken?

"Of course," replied Rashleigh.

Elodie did not object, and he left them, to complete his arrangements with the manager of the traveling troupe.

Elodie went into her room, and in a few minutes came out in a walking-dress of dark-green cashmere, with a veil fastened in her hat, and dark gloves.

"Where are you going?" asked Leona, startled.

"To see auntie Brill. You do not think I would leave New York without seeing her?"

"But, dear child, you are not going out alone?"

"Who is to go with me? You have as much as you can do before dark. I shall take a carriage."

"Let me order one. You must not be seen in the street."

She rung, and gave the order.

The girl was proof against all attempts at dissuasion.

"Wait till after dinner, and Mr. Rashleigh will accompany you—"

"That he shall not. I will go now, madame. I am not a child."

Leona could not prevail; she gave up, and accompanied her young friend to the entrance of the hotel where the close carriage stood.

It was a tearful though joyous meeting between Mrs. Brill and her *protege*. Elodie told her everything, and besought her to close or let her house, and go with her on the Southern tour. But the matron could not do that.

"I have no true friend but you, auntie," pleaded the girl, in tears. "I am afraid of Mr. Rashleigh, and Madame Leona cares only for her own interest. Nobody loves me but you."

The good dame wiped her eyes, and hugged the girl; then smiled significantly.

"I know one who loves you dearly," she said. "And if you would marry him, you might both live with me, and nobody would molest you."

The girl understood that she spoke of Enrico,

the young Italian. She made a gesture of disgust.

"Never speak so, auntie, if you would not make me hate you! I hate Leona for the same cause."

The dame held out her spread hands in deprecation. "I will not!" she protested. "Indeed, he is not half good enough for my little girl. Only I thought you might work together in the profession. If it were not for the music, I know who would suit you much better."

"Who?"

"A certain young gentleman, who came this very morning to inquire for you, as he could not find you at the rooms where you have been staying."

"Auntie, who was it?"

"And who looked so pale and sad, and spoke so tenderly of you, and said they had all missed you so much, and seemed almost heart-broken; for his voice faltered, and the tears stood in his eyes while he was speaking."

Elodie covered her face with her hands.

"That was Wyndham!" she sobbed.

"Here is his card," said the dame, and she laid it on the stand before her guest.

"He was a real handsome man, and looked like a thoroughbred gentleman. He said his mother had grieved after you—"

"Auntie Brill!" exclaimed the girl, suddenly, dashing the tears from her eyes, "if you say the word, I will go back to my guardian, ask his pardon, and give up music altogether!"

"Give up music, and after you have made yourself famous, and can make a fortune if you go on!" cried Mrs. Brill.

"It would be hard indeed! But, oh, I was so much happier at home!"

"No, you must not draw back," decided the injudicious adviser. "You must gain a fortune, and then you may come back."

"Do you think he is unhappy on my account?"

"Oh, no! not more so than is natural at first. I should not have told you. He will soon get over it."

"And care no more about me? Is that what you mean?"

"Not at all. He will become proud of your talents, when you have established yourself; and will admire you a great deal more than when you were almost a child—bound to obey him—"

"Oh, that indeed—"

"And when you have made plenty of money, and are independent of him, then he will respect you the more."

"Yes, that will be so!" cried the girl, her face kindling; "and his proud sister will be glad to have my acquaintance, when I have a name in the world, and a fortune of my own."

"True, my dear; and when you are the equal of that musical husband of hers—whom I have heard you tell about. She would have nothing to do with him till he came from Europe, and had wealth of his own earning, and

was run after by all the fashionables of the city."

"And could I be ever so much sought after for my music?" asked Elodie. "How long first, do you think, auntie?"

"That depends on how hard you study. You might do it in one season."

"I wish I could! That would satisfy me. I would not care to go on. I would have a handsome house and gardens out of town, and auntie Brill should live with me, and I would give musical receptions, and have all the eminent foreign artists, and have a brilliant circle of society; and repay Mr. Blount for his goodness to me. I always meant to do that!"

Sympathetic exclamations, and warm embraces, answered the young artist's dream of a golden future. They went on building their airy castles till the shadows began to gather in the corners; and then Elodie started up, and said she must return. Mrs. Brill begged only for one song before they parted.

She led the way to the room where stood the piano belonging to the Italian. He was not in, she said; and so the girl yielded to her entreaties for one song after another, not heeding the deepening night.

A storm of applause at the end of one of the songs apprised them of the presence of the owner of the piano.

Elodie started up and hurried out of the room. But she was caught, as she passed out of the door, by her admirer, who had just understood that she was going to leave the city.

Before the girl could shake herself free, and in the presence of Mrs. Brill, the Italian had poured out his tale of love. He implored her to stay, to accept his proffered hand, to join him in his life work. The broken English in which he uttered his ardent protestations made them ludicrous enough; and it was struggling with a violent inclination to laugh that the girl silenced him by convincing him that she could give him no ground of hope.

Enrico begged at least that he might see her home; but this she refused. She would not be seen in his company. Mrs. Brill should go with her, if it was too late to go alone.

"But you shall not escape me," persisted the rejected lover. "I will join Signor —'s troupe. I will sing with the signorina; I will subdue her hard heart; I will."

"If you join the troupe, I will leave it!" cried the indignant girl. "You will gain nothing, sir, by persecuting me!"

"Per Bacco! 'persecute,'" repeated the despairing young man. "*E una Medea—crudele—empha! Oh! me!*" And, striking his forehead with his open palm, he dashed into his room, while the girl and the dame hastily descended the stairs.

The carriage had been dismissed, but another was presently called, and the two ladies were driven to the A— House. As they passed around a corner, the vehicle was stopped for a moment by a throng of carriages in front of a house brilliantly lighted up, with a

canopy and carpet from the steps to the street. A lady was just alighting, in party dress, attended by a young gentleman. Her "cloud" had fallen back from her head, and a bright face, with sparkling black eyes and clustering raven ringlets, was in full view for a moment.

"It is Ruhama Seaforth," exclaimed Elodie, shrinking back as far as she could behind the ample form of her companion. "Who is that with her? Can it be my guardian?"

"Drive on!" called out dame Brill to the man on the box.

He could not; for the carriages blocked up his way. Ruhama's companion turned at the dame's voice, and Elodie saw that it was not Wyndham. It was a great relief to her, but she still trembled violently and leaned against Mrs. Brill's shoulder.

Then she remembered Ruhama's marriage, and departure for Europe, and noticed that the gentleman with her was not her husband.

They drove on without further interruption to the hotel. Leona had been half wild with anxiety, and welcomed her young charge with effusion.

Auntie Brill was persuaded to take supper with them—for dinner had long been over—before she took leave, and was driven to her own house.

CHAPTER IV.

A MAD HUSBAND.

It was a scene of gayety and splendor that was passing in the house which the lady, whom Elodie had recognized, was entering.

She stood at one end of the spacious drawing room, the center of a brilliant circle, receiving congratulations and welcome on her return from Europe. The young gentleman who had been her escort—an old acquaintance, Tom Wyatt—had left her side, and was in conversation with a young lady at one of the tables loaded with sketches and engravings.

Tom had but recently arrived from the West, and was only staying for a short visit. He had dined that day with General and Mrs. Marsh at their house, and had accepted her invitation to escort her to the party at Mrs. Lyndon's, her husband excusing himself on the plea of having letters to write.

Tom had gained amplitude of form and rudeness of face; but his expression was graver than of old. His admiration for the beauty that had enslaved him had not diminished. He had hovered around Ruhama as much and as often as she would permit. He fancied she was not happy in her married life, and that her lord—so much her senior—was uneasy if any other man came near her. He did not wish to provoke marital jealousy, though he loved to sun himself in the bright eyes of the only woman he had ever really loved.

Ruhama, though she could not be said to have any of her old propensity for flirting, yet greatly enjoyed a return to her former social triumphs. She seemed, however, not wholly

at her ease, and she often lapsed into fits of musing. She drew back presently from the circle of her gentlemen friends, and seated herself upon a sofa, where she was soon in earnest conversation with Mrs. St. Clare—the late Emily Blount. It was a marvel to both that they had not met abroad, though Emily's travel had been rapid, and her stay not long in one place. Ruhama inquired after her old friend Wyndham, and learned that he had been absent on business, and had just returned to the city.

"And while I think of it," continued his sister, "I have never given you the miniature he had painted for you so long ago. You know you told him it must be a bridal-present."

"Oh, yes, I remember. I thought he had forgotten it!"

"It was not finished when you were married. By the way, do you know who painted it?"

"I do not; Wyndham said he should have it done by an Italian artist."

"That was when the artist skulked in disguise as an Italian—under an assumed name," said Emily, maliciously.

"Not your husband—my cousin Herbert?"

"The very same! You did not know he added the accomplishment of painting likenesses to his music?"

"Indeed I did not!"

"You will confess it now; for this is a capital likeness!"

"I shall be so glad to have it! I will come to-morrow and take it."

"Nay, I brought it with me. I knew you would be here; and I felt guilty in keeping it so long. You must prize it doubly as a specimen of Herbert's work, and a memento of an old friend."

She drew from her bosom a miniature set in gold, the rim surrounded by very small diamonds. It was attached to a blue ribbon and hung like a locket. Emily pressed a spring and the lid flew open, disclosing the painting. Ruhama took it, and gazed long and earnestly on the pictured face.

Neither of the ladies perceived that they were closely observed by a tall man standing near the door that opened into the hall; a guest who had arrived late.

"How beautifully it is done!" cried Mrs. Marsh.

"I am glad you think first of the exquisite workmanship! Yes—it shows a master hand, and it is a splendid likeness, too."

"So it is. I remember when Wyndham had just that expression; the night I first told him of our little plot to surprise you into a picturesque reunion with Herbert."

"And when I thought he was making love to you, Ruhama."

"Oh, he never thought of that, I assure you."

"The luckier for him, then?"

"You must thank him for me."

"You must do that yourself. If you were not married, Ruhama, I should have had a lock of his hair inserted, opposite the face."

"The General would have been angry."

"Is he jealous of you?"

"He thinks me a prize every one must covet," replied Ruhama, laughing. "And he takes good care I do not go astray. Papa told him I was a flirt, and that was very unkind of him, you know."

"Your father did not return with you?"

"No; he is at Vienna. I do not expect him home this winter."

Emily interrupted her by a faint cry.

"If there is not Claude Hamilton!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; he landed the day after we did—but from an English steamer," rejoined Mrs. Marsh. "How foreign-looking he is—with such a growth of beard and mustache! Strange that young men from America so soon take on French dress, habits and manners!"

"Is there any truth in the rumor that he is engaged to Miss Monelle, the rich young heiress?"

"I heard that, too! She and her father returned in the same ship, and he was very attentive to her in Paris. Yes; I think it will be a match."

"He has forgotten his former flame—our friend, Miss Weston!"

"Ah, poor Olive! have you seen her lately?"

"No; she has shunned society since her mother's death. I called on her and invited her to spend some weeks with me; but she refused, and never returned my visit, nor answered a friendly note I sent afterward."

"She may have left the city."

"No; she accepted some situation—as nurse or companion—with an old invalid lady. Her acquaintances thought she wished to repel all their advances, and soon let her alone. It was foolish on her part."

"Poor Olive! I should so like to see her!"

Herbert St. Clare came up at this juncture, and Ruhama showed the miniature, and complimented him on the painting. Then she closed the gold case and put it in her pocket.

Herbert offered his arm to his wife to lead her in to supper. Ruhama laughingly declined the offer of his left arm; for an army, she said, was in waiting for the honor of attending her.

And at the instant, the gentleman who had been conversing with Claude Hamilton, bowed to her, and solicited the honor. He had just parted with Claude, he said, and Mrs. Marsh wondered he had not come to pay his respects to herself.

"You must excuse him," observed young Percival, with a meaning smile. "He did not find his lady-love here, and has gone in search of her."

"His lady-love?"

"Miss Monelle! You know of his engagement to her?"

"I heard something of it."

"He is hard hit; and no wonder! She is a beauty, as well as an heiress."

Ruhama mused a little, and her thoughts ran back to the written declaration of love, and the mistake that had parted him and Olive. "Tom should have made all that right," she said to herself; "and, with that unanswered, how could he transfer his devotion to another? Had he been influenced by Olive's loss of fortune? Had he sought Miss Monelle for her wealth? If so, he ought to be despised!" She resolved to speak to Tom the first opportunity.

She had that when Tom claimed the first dance after supper.

"Did I explain the blunder to Hamilton? Certainly; I wrote to him by the next steamer. Never got any reply. Very true; the letter may have failed to reach him; he was off on a yachting tour with his friend Lord Adair. It is an awkward thing to speak of so long afterward, you know," Tom answered, stroking his tawny beard.

"And the poor girl in such changed circumstances," said Ruhama, with a sigh. "It is too late, especially if Claude has offered himself to another young lady."

"Not much doubt of that," opined the sentimental Mr. Wyatt.

"You know it to be true, then?"

"Heard he was her shadow in Paris and London; and they came home together. I have seen them twice, driving *tele-a-tele* in the Park; and we all know that means business."

"I should not have thought it of him," mused the lady.

"Come now, Mrs. Marsh, would you have a fellow be doleful for a girl who cares nothing for him? Don't be personal!"

Ruhama's dark cheeks flushed as she understood the allusion to her own rejection of Tom's offered affection. She could not utter a word more.

They had passed out of the crowded rooms through one of the French windows, open to the ground, in the third parlor, and leading into the conservatory. This was filled with a dim, misty light, and the perfume of a thousand flowers.

Suddenly Ruhama heard a firm, measured step at her side, and saw her husband.

She gave a little shriek of surprise. He was looking very stern, and the frown gathered darkly on his brow.

"Am I an ogre, to terrify you, madam?" he asked.

"You appear so unexpectedly—so like a ghost," said Ruhama, laughing. "I had no idea of seeing you here!"

"No, I suppose not."

The lady's arm dropped slowly from Wyatt's, and the young man stepped back a single pace, involuntarily. The look of the husband embarrassed him. Was he displeased at his leading Ruhama away from the dancers?

Tom had a horror of scenes; and the feeling he still cherished taught him a chivalrous

respect for the fair lady, and a dread of misinterpretation.

The General bowed to him coldly, as if intimating that he would take charge of his wife, dispensing with his presence. As Tom stood still, the two others passed on into the shaded depths of the conservatory. Then Tom turned and went back into the drawing-room.

The husband and wife were alone.

Ruhama, for once, felt embarrassed. She began talking lightly of young Hamilton's supposed engagement, and his inconstancy to the image of his former love.

"You are right," observed the General moodily. "Yes, there are memories time can never obliterate; features that are treasured in the heart even when that is closed, and has a false surface."

"What do you mean?" asked his wife.

The General stopped short, dropped her arm, and faced her sternly.

"I mean, madam," he answered, "that there is no treachery like that by which a wife, who loves not her husband, betrays him she has sworn to love and honor! Whose miniature is that I saw you receive with such rapture a while ago?"

"Miniature?" echoed Ruhama, aghast at an expression she had never before seen in her husband's face.

"Let me look at it, if you please. I would like to see the man whom you honor by making him my rival in your affections."

"Arthur! I do not understand you!" cried the wife, with dignity, and stepping back.

"This is strange language to use to me!"

"You have the picture about you. Let me see it!"

"I will not, unless you apologize for this insult to me, sir."

The General stooped a little, seized a bit of blue ribbon hanging from his wife's pocket, and drew out the miniature. She caught at the ribbon, but he was too quick for her.

The case was in his hand, as he glared at her. She remembered now that he had once confessed to her that he was subject to mad jealousy on the slightest cause; that he would not answer for any restraint of reason against this besetting sin.

"How absurd!" she went on, "for you to be angry at such a trifle!"

The General opened the case, and glanced at the picture.

"I thought so," he muttered. "He is the man."

"Arthur! you are not a fool!"

"No, madam; you can deceive me no longer!"

"That picture is Wyndham Blount's—"

"I am aware of that; he was your lover before you married me!"

"He never was a suitor of mine! He was the brother of my intimate friend; he was like a brother to me."

"Say not a word, madam! You cannot deceive me, in the face of this!"

"He promised me his miniature for my wedding gift; my cousin painted it. It was not finished in time; and his sister brought it to me to-night."

"I saw her give it; I saw you receive it. That is enough."

"And you played the spy, coming here in this sly way, after saying you had to remain at home!" cried Ruhama, indignantly. "I am ashamed of you, General Marsh!"

"And how must I feel, madam, reading here the story of your shame and my dishonor! But calm your nervous excitement; I will not be made a public scorn for fools!"

"You deserve it, cruel and wicked that you are!" cried the young wife through her sobs.

"Oh, if papa were here! You would not dare speak to me in this manner!"

"Your father countenanced your flirtations, but when you became a wife, they were outrages on decency. This is something more than one! When and where have you been meeting this man? He does not visit at my house."

"He has been absent; he has but lately returned. He visits me when he is in town—whenever I choose to see him!"

"I do not choose that you should receive him. What barefaced audacity! to send you his portrait! Had you any sense of the duties of a wife—of the honor of a matron, you would have spurned it!"

"But I prize it highly. Please return it to me!" said the wife, scornfully, reaching out her hand for the case.

"You boast of your love for him, to my very face!"

"Even so, sir. Wyndham and I were school companions and brought up together. He is worthy of my esteem; much more so than you are at present. That picture is my property; I demand it back."

The irate General flung it on the stone floor, set his foot on it and ground it to pieces. The picture was stamped out of all semblance to humanity. Then he kicked away the fragments, and looked at his wife.

His expression might have terrified her, but her spirit was in arms now.

"I hate you!" she hissed, in low tones of concentrated bitterness.

"I dare say," was the answer. "If you dare hold any communication with the original, he shall be served as I have served his picture."

"Coward! you would be afraid of him! You can insult a woman—your wife—because you think she is helpless. But you shall see that I can find some one to protect me. I will not return to your house!"

"You will go to Mr. Blount's?"

"I will go wherever I please, to stay till papa can come for me."

"Just now, madam, you had better return to the drawing-room."

Ruhama flung off his proffered arm. Her olive cheeks were aflame; her eyes flashed defiance.

"You must be aware, madam, that an open rupture with your husband will expose you to the condemnation of the world; the scorn of your fashionable friends."

"I hate you!" reiterated the offended lady.

"Do I not know that, to my cost?" cried the husband, with an agonized break in his voice. "I know you never loved me; that you married me without love!"

"I married you to save my father!"

"I know all that. He confessed it to me when we were in Paris. But he hoped you might learn the lesson of wifely affection. I hoped so, too, fool that I was, till my eyes were opened. But I will not be openly put to shame by your conduct."

"Do you mean to force me to go to your house, sir?"

"No; I only advise your return, till your father's arrival, madam. I shall go there with you, but not stay at home to-night; and tomorrow I am going on a journey to occupy some weeks. By the time I come back, your plans may be arranged."

"I will not live with a man who makes my life wretched by his causeless jealousy," sobbed Ruhama.

"You shall not be coerced into living with me. You have only to avoid one man—you know whom. To have your name linked with his, when separated from your husband, is to consign your own to infamy. Bear that in mind, madam. Now, will you go back to the company?"

"No; I will not."

"Better that your friends should not know, just at present, that you have quarreled with me."

"I will go to the dressing-room, and out that way," said Ruhama.

"Very well. I will conduct you. Take my arm."

But she refused, angrily. The General walked by her side to the door of the dressing-room; waited for her, and when she came out, escorted her with stately formality to the carriage. She stepped into it without accepting the aid of his arm, shut the door with a bang, and flung herself on the back seat, weeping violently.

The General changed his mind, and did not enter. He gave orders to the coachman, and turned away as the carriage drove off.

The husband went to a hotel for the night, and the wife, having reached her home, went up to her room, dismissed the maid who was waiting for her, and threw herself into an easy-chair by the window, which she opened, that the night air might cool her heated face.

She found it difficult to realize that the whole of her future life was changed by the trivial occurrences of this evening.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATHBED TRUST.

OLIVE WESTON found it difficult to fulfil

her intention of leaving the house of her friend, on the arrival of young Hamilton. The invalid lady, on receiving a hint of her design, not only opposed it vehemently, but seemed so wounded and grieved, that the girl dared not persist. She had become a necessity of life to the sufferer, whom she called her benefactress, though in her heart Mrs. Stanley regarded her as such. She would have none but Olive to sit by her bed when illness attacked her, or to read, sing and play to her when she sat in her cushioned chair, or ventured into the parlor of an evening. She had grown to lean upon her youthful companion as if her very existence depended on her presence and care. To the good-will of a kind patroness had succeeded the love of a fond mother. To part with Olive! it would kill her at once. Such a look of reproach, of sorrowful affection, of clinging, helpless dependence as she turned on the girl when her wish was intimated! It went to Olive's heart at once.

So she stayed on, week after week, becoming more and more necessary to Mrs. Stanley; more and more an object of grateful love. And she saw so little of Mr. Hamilton, the fear she had cherished grew less, and vanished altogether. They never met at meals, unless Mrs. Stanley was able to go to the late dinner, or company was in the house. Breakfast was served in the invalid's room; and Olive made her dinner at the two o'clock lunch, taking a cup of tea in the evening in her own or her friend's room.

She had heard the rumor of Claude's engagement to Miss Monelle, and believed it. He was out almost every evening; indeed, was seldom at home. He, on his part, could not fail to see that Miss Weston shunned him, and he was determined not to be in her way. She was a treasure to his aunt; he was glad of it; he would offend her sight as little as possible.

Mr. Sherman, the trusted solicitor, came and went like one of the family. He often spent the evening with them, and sometimes talked confidentially with Olive, when the invalid was asleep in her chamber.

"You perhaps know," he said abruptly to the girl one day, "that it has been a cherished idea with Mrs. Stanley that you should marry her nephew."

Olive looked up from her work, startled. Her face was flooded with crimson; but it soon receded, leaving her paler than before.

"Pardon me; I am a plain, blunt lawyer. I thought it likely our friend might have confided her plan to you."

"Indeed, sir, she has no such plan."

"I know that she has. But—you will excuse me—I was opposed to the idea."

"Pray, sir, do not jest on such a subject."

"I am not jesting. No; Hamilton is not the partner for you. He needs a woman of resolve; born to subdue; a leading mind."

"He is engaged, I hear, to Miss Monelle."

"The heiress! She is not the sort of woman I should have thought would please him.

She is frivolous and exacting. He would not be happy with her."

"I hope he may be happy!" murmured Olive, speaking under her breath.

"And he will not need Monelle's money, being his aunt's heir; her heir-at-law, if she dies without a will."

"You may rely upon it, Mr. Hamilton has not sought the young lady for her money."

"How do you know, my dear?"

"Because he is incapable of such a thing. He is too noble; too disinterested."

"You are a kind advocate. But it is my opinion that he has done that very thing. Young men of the present day know the value of riches."

"I cannot believe he has done it, sir."

"Well, it is none of my business. Will Mrs. Stanley be down this evening?"

"I think not."

"The doctor thinks her out of danger; but as her disease is of the heart, no one can tell when she may have another attack."

"Oh, sir, I hope not! She has been brighter and better for some days, and I trust she will have no return of the pain from which she has suffered."

"Does she know of the visit of the man who claims to be her brother?"

"She has known of it several days. I told her as soon as she could bear it. But she has not seen him."

"She had better not. It would do her harm. He is a scamp. His career in California was one of crime, and ended in a prison. He was leagued at one time with a gang of counterfeiters. For that he was sent to jail for a term of years."

"How terrible!"

"Having served his time out, he comes here to be a burden to his sister; and a disgrace, too; for he may be seen almost any day at some low tavern, disgustingly drunk, boasting to the people at the bar that he is the rich Mrs. Stanley's brother."

"She must not be told of this, sir."

"No need of it. The rascal makes no secret of the fact that he is waiting for her death, to secure the lion's share of her property."

Olive shivered. She could not bear allusion to an event she had so much dreaded.

"I want a good long talk with our friend on business. Do you think she can see me this evening?"

"I do not know, Mr. Sherman. I will see if she is still asleep."

As she went out, the lawyer muttered as he paced the room:

"A fine girl; and she must not be unprovided for. I gave Mrs. Stanley a hint to that effect, and she took it kindly. She must put it in black and white. Nothing like being prepared for any event, and adding a codicil to a will does not hasten anybody's death."

Olive returned to say that the invalid would prefer Mr. Sherman to call the next day. He took his leave, saying he would

come at eleven o'clock. But when that time arrived on the following day, and he presented himself, true to the appointment, the lady was in no condition to receive him.

A severe attack of her malady had seized her. It was controlled with difficulty, and left her in an exhausted state. The physician enjoined the utmost quiet, and strictly forbade his patient seeing any one but her faithful companion, besides the nurse. He no longer held out the hope of recovery to even partial health.

All day sat Olive by the bedside, soothing the sufferer, holding her hand, or wiping the clammy dews from her forehead. Claude Hamilton came more than once to the door, to be denied an entrance. All that day, and part of the night—the hour of slumber Olive passed on the lounge in a room adjoining—and all the next day.

Toward evening Mrs. Stanley's pain had left her, and she smiled sweetly on her young friend, and took from her hand a little nourishment, looking in her face as the most affectionate mother might regard a beloved child.

"Tell Claude I will see him, when he comes again," she said, cheerfully.

The nurse went for him, and Olive rose to leave the room.

"Stay, my child!" called Mrs. Stanley.

"You must not leave me!"

"Mr. Hamilton is coming—"

"But you need not go away. I would rather have you here. Stay, child."

The girl obeyed; but retreated to the other side of the room when Claude entered.

He was warmly attached to his aunt, and had deeply mourned her illness. It was a deep relief to her nephew to see her so much improved. He sat beside her, congratulated her, and expressed his ardent hopes of her speedy recovery.

"That may not be, my dear boy," she said, softly. "I feel that my days are numbered." She went on to talk of various little matters she wished attended to, chiefly concerning her objects of charity. Olive drew her chair so that the bed-curtain screened her from observation, and wept silently. She saw herself about to be cast back into the friendless desolation she had experienced, and reproached herself for allowing thoughts of self to mingle with grief for the friend she was about to lose.

In the silence Mrs. Stanley's words became distinctly audible. She was speaking to her nephew.

"I have known of your love"—she was saying—"of one worthy of all affection. It was the dream of my life to see you happy. I know you will cherish her, Claude; I do not ask any promise."

The young man bowed his face over his aunt's hand.

"And I know her deep affection for you, my boy; it has been a tried and faithful attachment."

"She is speaking of Alice Monelle," said Olive to herself. Her heart was beating violently.

"I have wished only to see you united before I am taken from you. Cannot that be, Claude?"

"Do not speak of this, dearest aunt," Olive heard him say, in low tones of deep feeling.

"You are afraid of exciting me," answered the invalid. "There is no danger; it can make no difference. I wish I could see you—happy—happy!"

A paroxysm of gasping seized her. Claude started up with a cry of alarm. Olive rushed to the bed, and held to the invalid's pale lips the cordial she always took when those attacks came on. Holding her head against her own shoulder, she whispered that the excitement had been too much for her, and Mr. Hamilton had better retire.

But the invalid held out her hand to detain him. "Stay, Claude," she murmured, and caught his hand. With the other she clasped Olive's.

Raising herself upright, she suddenly brought their hands together, placing the girl's in that of her nephew. "God bless you both!" she murmured, pressing them in both her own, and repeating the blessing, while a seraphic smile illumined her face.

Then she sunk slowly back. Olive caught and supported her. Her eyes were closed, her lips were parted; yet she breathed softly.

"Has she fainted?" asked the young man, bending over her.

"No; but she is exhausted," returned Olive. "Pray excuse me, Mr. Hamilton, if I ask you not to remain. She will go to sleep now."

He stepped back from the bed, his eyes fixed on the young girl, who did not once look up. She was arranging the pillows, and placing the invalid in a comfortable position. When she turned to take her own place by the bed, she saw the door close on the nephew, who had gone out quietly.

He muttered as he went to his room:

"It is strange that she has so set her heart on my marriage, and does not see that I am an object of aversion, not of regard! Poor soul! I could not undeceive her!"

He felt deeply humiliated; yet with an undercurrent of resentment. How had he deserved scorn and contempt? His spirit rose in rebellion. The girl need not, he thought, take such pains to show him that she would accept no tender of his affection. He would not incur the danger of a repulse.

Olive sat and mused by the sleeping patient. She took her treacherous heart to task.

"Am I weak enough to feel wronged!" she said to herself. She felt humbled by the discovery of her heart's falsehood. It would not be swayed by her pride! With the shame she cowered under was blended a feeling of anger toward young Hamilton. How mad was the dream she had once indulged! How delusive the happiness she could not help feeling, born

of his mere presence, which, like the spring sun, had awakened her from torpor into life! She would crush down the feeling; she would dispel the dream; she would remember that he would be happy with another!

Later in the evening Mrs. Stanley was awake, and feeling better. She made Olive sit by her as usual, and tea was brought up to her. The invalid partook of the repast. Then she began to talk, and Olive could not restrain her. She expressed her earnest desire for a union between the girl and her nephew. She had known of Claude's attachment before he went abroad; she knew that he was faithful to it still. She had read the hearts of both—

Here Olive interrupted her, laying her hand on her friend's, and speaking with difficulty amid choking emotion. Mrs. Stanley was utterly mistaken; she averred Mr. Hamilton did not care for her; he was averse to her rather than otherwise. She implored her dearest friend, as the only favor she had ever craved at her hands, not to speak again of this matter; never again to allude to it. She might be assured it could never be!

"I know my own boy too well to doubt him," answered his aunt. "And you—I may be mistaken in you. Speak frankly, Olive, do you dislike him?"

"Dearest Mrs. Stanley, it is not for me to have any thoughts of your nephew!" almost sobbed the girl, averting her face.

"Olive, you must tell me the truth. Do you not owe that to me?"

"I owe you everything, my beloved friend!"

"If you do not love my nephew, you have made me wrong him! I acted on that presumption. I have robbed him of his rights if you do not!"

The girl did not understand her words.

"Never mind; you will soon know what I mean. Answer me as you would at the day of judgment, girl: do you love Claude, or do you not?"

The poor girl fell on her knees beside the bed, and her clasped hands hid her face.

"Answer before it is too late for me to do him justice! The truth, girl!"

"Oh, madam, I dare not deceive you!"

"I have been deceived, if my judgment has been wrong. Tell me the truth. Remember, I am on my deathbed."

One wild, scared look the kneeling girl gave her benefactress. She saw a deathly pale face, with fixed, eager eyes devouring her face; with white, quivering lips, as in the act of adjuration.

"I do—I do—love him!" she faltered, while she buried her burning face in the bedclothes.

The invalid passed her hand caressingly over the bowed head. In broken tones she faltered a blessing.

"Now you know my secret!" wailed the girl, at length lifting up her face. "It has humbled me in the dust to own it—but you bade me speak the truth!"

"And you did right, my dear child."

"It is to you alone I have confessed it!" sobbed the girl. "I should die of shame if he knew it. Oh, Mrs. Stanley, promise me that you will not tell him!"

"There will be no need. It will all be right now."

"I could not bear that he should despise me. But I was not always a poor dependent, you know. He knew me in better days."

"Hush, child. Sit in the chair, and hold my hand. Never talk of being a dependent again."

As Olive resumed her seat there was a tap at the door. A servant entered with a letter on a salver. It was addressed to his mistress.

Mrs. Stanley took it, put on her glasses, and read it. Then she pressed Olive's hand, and bade her open one of the drawers of a cabinet standing opposite the bed. In it was a small ebony box, under the tray of which was a package of bank-notes.

She selected several of these, and made the girl inclose them in a thick envelope. Olive understood her intention. It was not the first time she had answered the demands of her half-brother, by sending him money without consulting her solicitor.

The envelope was sealed and directed to "Richard Lumley."

Then the rest of the money was restored to its place, and the drawer locked.

"I want you to do something else for me, my child," said Mrs. Stanley.

The girl bent her head to listen.

"You know the old Indian cabinet in one of the recesses of the library?"

"I know which you mean. It is kept locked."

"Yes, dear. It is too large a piece of furniture for a bedroom, and is full of old papers and quaint curiosities, not opened this many a day. There is a secret compartment in the right hand upper drawer. That drawer, you will notice, is very deep. You must feel along the back till you touch a flat steel button, and then press the spring. That will bring out the compartment. Do you understand?"

"Yes, madam, perfectly."

"You will find some papers there, put away for safe-keeping. My lawyer knows of them; not Mr. Sherman, but Abel Reynolds. These papers are not to be touched. But there is a package of letters with California postmarks. Those letters I want destroyed without any one seeing them."

"I understand, dear Mrs. Stanley."

"You must be particular to destroy that packet of letters; to let no one see them when I am gone. They are memorials of the crimes and punishment of one near of kin to me. I wish I could as easily efface the record of his wrongdoing; but God may grant him repentance and reform. You will do as I tell you?"

"Be sure I will. Shall I do it to-night?"

"Not to-night. I may want to refer to them if he should cause me trouble. Not while

I live, dear child. But give no one a chance to see them when I am gone."

"I will not. But, dearest friend, do not speak as if you were going to leave me."

Her voice was broken by fresh sobs.

"There, do not weep, my poor child! I am satisfied now. We will talk no more on agitating subjects. Here is the key of the Indian cabinet, and of the drawer. Keep them about you."

She drew out from a pocket in the bosom of her dressing-gown two keys, fastened to a ribbon, which she put into Olive's hand. The girl put them in her bosom, securing the ribbon to her brooch.

Shortly afterward the invalid sunk into a calm sleep, watched over by her loving young friend.

CHAPTER VI.

A RASH ACT.

THREE days passed, and the household was in mourning. Mrs. Stanley's transient improvement after that evening was delusive. Hopes were entertained that she would regain strength till two hours before the end came, and that was awfully sudden.

The blow fell on Olive most heavily.

She was stunned at first. The nurse could hardly prevail on her to quit the death chamber. When led into her own room, she sat for hours in a chill stupor. She did not weep; she gave no outward sign of the grief that had crushed her. She would not touch the breakfast or the lunch that was brought to her, and which the nurse begged her to eat. She would not taste the wine held to her lips. She seemed almost unconscious of the calamity that had turned the house into a place of gloom.

Mr. Sherman dined there, and sent up a request for Miss Weston to join him and Mr. Hamilton; but she refused to come. On the morning of the second day, a dirty card bearing the name of "Richard Lumley" was brought to her. She started when she looked at it, and then dropped it as if it had stung her; but she would not go down. She seemed roused, however, out of her abstraction. When he maid came with a tray, and again begged her to take food, she complied mechanically; ate a few mouthfuls, and drank a cup of tea; then asked for the key of the room in which her dead friend lay.

The nurse brought her the key, and took her to the door of the room; but Olive would not permit her to go in. "Leave me alone," she entreated, and she went in, and closed the door.

The room was dark from the closed blinds, but two of the gas-jets were alight. A rigid form lay upon the bed, covered with a snowy sheet. Olive went up to it, and reverently lifted the covering from the wan face. She touched the cold forehead; a shiver ran through her whole frame; and falling on her

knees, she burst into a tempest of tears and sobs.

It was the wail of a heart bereaved of its only friend—its only hope. With passionate grief she apostrophized the lost one, and pleaded her own desolation. But the weeping did her good; it saved her brain from a pressure that might have killed her.

Hours passed. At last she rose and replaced the covering over the white, waxen face, on which she had pressed farewell kisses. She went out of the room, locking the door, in which she left the key, as she heard the maid coming up-stairs. She went into her own room, and took up Richard Lumley's card.

It seemed to remind her of a forgotten duty. "It shall be done," she repeated two or three times. "The letters shall not be seen by any human eye. I have the keys." She felt them, still attached to the ribbon. "But I must wait till they are gone—to-night."

When Mr. Sherman, after the dinner hour had passed, sent up again a request that she would come down, she went, and saw him in the drawing-room. He wished to consult her upon the arrangements for the funeral. Mr. Hamilton had left everything to her judgment. He had been absent all day, and had left word that he would not return that night, though he would be in the city early on the following day, and would attend his deceased relative to the cemetery. He had sent his respects and condolences to Miss Weston, and had begged her to order everything according to her own wishes.

The details of the sad ceremony were speedily settled, and Mr. Sherman charged himself with carrying them out. This he did as an old friend; another legal adviser, consulted frequently of late, Mr. Reynolds, having claimed to represent Mrs. Stanley's interests. Sherman did not precisely understand what he meant; but all would soon be made clear. It would not be proper for either to enter on business matters till after the funeral.

At ten o'clock Mr. Sherman took leave, and the house was still. Olive saw the nurse going up to bed, as she left the drawing-room. The other servants had retired.

The girl took up her candle—for the lights were out in the hall—and descended to the library.

The room was large and lofty, but well warmed by the fire which yet burned cheerfully in the grate. Olive turned the key in the door by which she entered, and glanced timidly around the room, looking well into corners where the shadows lurked. Then she went to the Indian cabinet, and set her candle upon a marble stand near it.

She opened the door and the drawer with her keys, took out the drawer and felt for the secret spring. A narrow compartment flew out, full of papers. The packet of letters was there, but upon them lay a fresh one, addressed "to Olive Weston," in Mrs. Stanley's handwriting.

The girl took this letter and opened it.

Yes; it was addressed to her. The first sentence, "You will read this, darling Olive, when I am no more," quickly arrested her attention.

The letter had been written to explain Mrs. Stanley's reasons for the latest will she had made—bequeathing the bulk of her property to Olive Weston.

The letter nearly fell from the girl's hand as she read this. "To me!" she repeated, bewildered.

She had to collect her thoughts before reading further. This bequest, Mrs. Stanley stated, had been made in the hope of bringing about the union she had so ardently desired, between her nephew and the daughter of her love. "I know that in heart you belong to each other," the letter continued, "but you are opposed to Claude's wishes, on account of a scrupulous feeling that fortune has lifted him above you. Therefore I bestow the advantage of wealth upon you, my child. You alone can make Claude happy, and you will accept him when you can bring him fortune. He has therefore only a small legacy. He must receive from your dear hand the riches I have always meant should be his. And you, dearest girl, will not thwart my design. From the world unseen, if permitted, I shall come to you, and bless my united children."

Like a statue in marble stood the girl when she had finished reading the letter. Her face was white and set; a kind of horror seemed frozen in its expression. She—the heiress! Claude disinherited for her! He—who cared not for her—reduced to the alternative of bitter poverty, or accepting his own from her hand! Then a tide of crimson swept over her face. She seemed to hear his voice protesting against the cruel injustice; she seemed to hear him say he preferred poverty to a chain binding him to an unloved wife.

Quickly she turned again to the receptacle of papers, and drew out a bulky-looking document. It was labeled "Last Will and Testament of Maude Stanley," and bore a recent date.

Yes—that was the will. She tore it open with trembling hands, and read it through.

An annuity—five hundred dollars—was left to Claude Hamilton—named as the testator's "dear nephew"—and the residue, in real estate and money invested in bonds and mortgages, was bequeathed to herself!

This was the will which, in a day or two, when the funeral was over, would be brought forth by the lawyers, and proved in court; and she would find herself in possession of all, and Claude deprived of his inheritance, and driven from his home to labor for his bread.

Would he accept his birthright as the price of his liberty; would he stoop to ask her to marry him because she was enriched by the spoil torn from him? Or would she lower herself to say that all might be restored to him on the condition prescribed by his aunt?

"Oh, how mistaken! how wrong!" she exclaimed. "How could he be happy, forced to marry one he despises? He, who loves and is pledged to another! And if I resigned all to him, he would not accept it as my gift! No—he would go, and welcome poverty. This shall not—shall not be! If there is no will—did not Mr. Sherman say Claude would inherit ever, thing? Then there is the will he drew up, leaving all to him! That will be found!"

She walked swiftly across the room, and laid the bulky paper on the fire. It was scorched and shriveled with the heat, and presently burst into flame. Olive watched it till it was consumed into light ashes.

She looked up, as if invoking the spirit of her benefactress to witness and approve what she had done.

The letter to herself, too, must be destroyed! She took it up, and the packet of California letters, and threw them into the grate. When they were all reduced to ashes, she stirred them with the poker, that no trace of her work might remain. Then she replaced the secret compartment and drawer, and left the library. Conscious that she had done but her duty, she felt peace in her heart, and retired to tranquil repose.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE funeral was over, and Olive had made all her preparations for removal; but Mr. Sherman insisted on her departure being deferred till the reading of the will. He was confident that some provision had been made for her.

On the morning of the second day after the funeral, the two lawyers and Claude Hamilton were in consultation in the library. The most diligent search, the day before, had failed to discover any will.

"It is very strange," Mr. Reynolds was saying. "I drew up a will for the old lady scarce six weeks ago; it was duly executed, and she took charge of it herself. It must be among her papers."

"Do you remember its provisions?" asked Mr. Sherman.

"I remember them, but Mrs. Stanley's special request was that I should never speak of them to any one."

"But if we cannot find the document—"

"The more reason I should keep silence. She may have changed her mind and destroyed the will. It was an eccentric one, and mischief might have been made, had its provisions become known."

"Have you looked in that?" asked Hamilton, pointing to the Indian cabinet.

"No—did she keep papers there?"

"She did, and always had it locked. Let us send for the keys."

This was done. The housekeeper found the keys in Mrs. Stanley's escritoir, where Olive had put them, after fulfilling her friend's last request.

Claude opened the cabinet, and pulled out one drawer after another. They were full of old relics and curiosities; but no papers of importance were found. Then he remembered having heard his aunt say there was somewhere a secret receptacle, opening with a spring. It took them some time to find this; but when revealed, it contained nothing like what they sought.

"Plainly she has destroyed the late will of which you spoke," Claude said to Mr. Reynolds.

The gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought it as likely as not she would," he said. "It was a foolish idea of hers, and to humor it went against my inclination. I am glad she thought better of it."

Mr. Sherman fancied that in the last will she had left a large part of her fortune to the returned convict, and was of the same opinion as the other lawyer. There was but one way of disposing of what she had to leave, he opined, glancing at young Hamilton.

"We must fall back, then, on the will I drew up some three years since," he remarked. "Was that placed in your charge, Mr. Reynolds?"

"I was not here at the time, you remember. I came from the South, after the death of my late partner, Mr. Brandon Hall."

"True; then he had it in charge."

"There was a fire, you know, a month before his death, and his premises were burned. The loss—for he was not fully insured—was a heavy blow to him; I always thought it killed him. His papers were consumed, except a deed-box one of the clerks saved. But Mrs. Stanley's leases and mortgages were not among his papers. She kept them in a box of her own at the — Bank."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Sherman, beginning to pace the room. "The will was not among those! It must have been burned!"

A silence fell on the group.

"Send for Miss Weston," at length suggested Mr. Reynolds. "She may know something of the last will."

A servant was dispatched to request the presence of Miss Weston and the housekeeper.

The latter was closely questioned, but had no knowledge of her mistress having hidden or destroyed any papers. Olive evaded the inquiries made of her; she had not been in Mrs. Stanley's confidence as to her disposition of the property; indeed, Mr. Reynolds testified that the testatrix had been particularly anxious that she should know nothing.

When she heard Mr. Sherman say that no will could be found, she turned with a smile to Mr. Hamilton, and held out her hand.

"I would congratulate you, Mr. Hamilton," she said, with dignity, "were not the occasion so mournful; but you will allow me at least to say I rejoice in the knowledge that you are the inheritor of all your aunt's possessions."

"Yes," echoed Mr. Reynolds, "as heir-at-law, he is master of all. He must take out letters of administration."

"I suppose so," added Sherman. "The fellow who came here the other day, and claimed near relationship, is of no consequence. The lady never acknowledged him."

"Any legacies named, Mr. Sherman, in the will you drew up, and your fees as executor, I shall be happy to allow. You were named as executor, I understand?" said Mr. Hamilton.

"I was, certainly. And I remember all the provisions. But that will may not have expressed Mrs. Stanley's latest wishes."

He glanced at Olive, who sat in a chair in the corner, her eyes fixed on her mourning-dress, the folds of which swept the carpet.

A servant entered hastily, and brought in a card on a tray, which he presented to Mr. Sherman.

"Richard Lumley," repeated the lawyer, reading it.

A shabbily-dressed man had followed the servant, and now pushed into the room, hat in hand. Sherman recognized him at once for the disreputable individual who had once before called, demanding to see Mrs. Stanley.

Olive looked up, and her face blanched with a vague terror. She knew the intruder had some sort of a claim upon her benefactress; for she had known of his receiving money on demand more than once during her last illness.

The housekeeper, too, knew him, as the person to whom she had given what her mistress sent. But neither said a word.

The strange man had now shuffled fairly into the room. The servant stood behind him, as if waiting for the order he supposed was coming, to show the intruder the door.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Sherman, without any sign of recognition. "May I ask your business, sir? We are not receiving visitors."

"I know that very well," rejoined the stranger, turning round his hat in his hands. "You are having a meeting on business, and are puzzled that no will has been found."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I have sources of information. I have a lawyer, too, in my pay; and I come here by his advice, to ask you plump—is there a will, or did the old lady die without one?"

The two lawyers whispered together.

"We can answer no questions put by a stranger, unless he proves his right to ask," replied Mr. Reynolds.

"Well—I have a right, and can prove it and my interest."

"What do you know about a will?"

"I only know that if she made one without giving her only brother his share—and that is the whole—she did a mighty mean thing."

"Silence, sir!" said Mr. Sherman. "You may leave the room, if you use such language."

Young Hamilton advanced a step or two, a

flash in his eyes, as if he would expedite the departure of the intruder.

The man coolly drew a chair forward, and seated himself, depositing his hat on the floor.

"You will find I am not to be frightened from my claims," he said, with an air of dogged determination. "I may turn the tables on you all presently."

"Who are you?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"I sent in my card. My name is Richard Lumley, and the late Mrs. Stanley was my half-sister."

Mr. Sherman turned to Mr. Reynolds.

"I need not remind you," he said, in a low, impressive tone, "that this kind of imposition is often practiced. Any stranger might walk in, and assert himself a relation."

"But he might not be able to bring such things as a certificate of birth and baptism—eh? or a bundle of letters from the deceased, or other proofs that will stop your mouth, and teach you manners, my fine fellow!" put in the stranger, insolently.

Hamilton strode up and seized the man by the shoulder.

"If you cannot behave with decency," he cried, "you shall not remain in this house."

"Oh, ho! my cock-of-the-walk," retorted the intruder. "I don't wonder you want to be rid of me! But it's no go! I'll knock all your pretensions into smash, with my proofs, in a minute or two."

"Bring out your proofs, then, and hold your tongue!"

"I have them here—at least the copies; the originals are in my attorney's strong-box. I've been getting up the case on the sly all this time," with a leer at Sherman. "I'll trust you with the copies."

He drew a bundle of papers from his pocket, filed and labeled in legal fashion.

"And supposing it does turn out"—remarked the elder lawyer—"that you are what you pretend to be; you prove yourself a—"

"A knave, you would say; and a convict to the back of that! You have heard of me, I find! Well, I'm not ashamed of the State prison odor that hangs about me! My sister's money can make away with all that, and turn me out a perfumed exquisite, as dainty as this strutting young rooster, who has pecked in her barnyard so long—eh?"

Olive was gazing in a trance of horror at this man; now she shuddered with a tremor from head to foot. The idea that she had done something terrible, which she could not undo, first dawned on her apprehension.

"Now where's the use," proceeded the self-confessed convict, "of shuffling off or shirking responsibilities! Best let me send for my legal adviser, and settle the matter at once. Here I stand for my rights—"

"A villain and a convict—" muttered young Hamilton, with a groan of dismay.

"Exactly; I don't want to shirk the truth. I have no objection to sketching my history for you. After my sister Maude's marriage

to John Stanley, a coolness fell between us; he never forgave a little practical joke of mine, by which I tricked his bankers into paying a check for three thousand dollars, that he never drew."

"You were guilty of forgery!" exclaimed Claude.

"You must allow it hard that my brother by marriage should make a fuss about such a trifle; but he did! I went to California. I had a jolly time there before I got into trouble. Well—I won't go into particulars on that head. I saw the inside of a prison more years than I care to remember. I served out my time honestly; and see, my reward at last! The persecuting brother-in-law amasses a large fortune; he dies and leaves it to his widow, who obligingly does the same, leaving no will; and the coast is clear for me to walk in and take possession of the whole!"

The thrill of disgust at the chuckle which followed this speech went through every one present. Sherman was first to recover himself.

"You are reckoning without your host, sir," he said, sternly. "Even supposing you able to prove yourself the relative who was a shame and disgrace to my late respected client, whose existence she concealed, and whom she never recognized, that would not place you in possession of *all* her property! A brother can inherit but half while there is a nephew."

"Where is the nephew?" asked the man, a hideous leer of triumph in his bronzed face.

Sherman nodded toward young Hamilton.

"He the nephew?"

"Certainly. Mrs. Stanley had a sister as well as a brother."

"I grant that."

"The sister married Mr. Hamilton, a respectable merchant of this city; though he was not fortunate in business. This young man is the son of Mrs. Hamilton."

Richard Lumley threw himself back in his chair, and laughed long and loudly.

Only when Claude came up threateningly, as resolved to turn him out of the room, did he recover himself.

"Don't put yourself in a passion, young fellow!" he said. "You have a certificate of your birth, I suppose?"

"That is not necessary," interposed Sherman. "On the death of her sister, who had been a widow two years, Mrs. Stanley adopted her son—her own nephew—and educated him. His home was always at her house."

"Her own nephew! ha! ha! That is the point of the joke that tickles me!" ejaculated the ex-convict, again indulging in a fit of laughter, but checking it soon. "And you were all led by the nose! I will let you into the truth. Mr. Hamilton, who married Maude's sister and mine, had another wife before he married her!"

"And you dare insinuate—" began Claude. The other interrupted him.

"Nothing of the sort, young man; I stick to

facts. Hamilton's first wife was safe under the sod before he married sister Lucy. The first wife left an infant, and Lucy, who never had any children of her own, loved it as if she had borne it. You were that engaging little cherub, my boy!"

Again the silence of consternation fell on all present.

"When Hamilton brought his wife to New York, after his failure in Cincinnati, you passed as her child. When she was dying, she made a solemn request to sister Maude, that you should never know, nor should any one from whom the secret could be kept, that she was not your own mother."

"You must *prove* these assertions, sir! your word goes for nothing," said the elder lawyer.

"Proofs shall be forthcoming; and when I have demolished your claim, then I will clear you all out of this house. You need not look for me to support you, young sir."

"Keep a good heart, dear friend!" whispered Sherman to Claude, who was leaning on one end of the mantelpiece, his hand shading his forehead. "This man's story will not bear the light, I am assured."

"Will you glance at these papers, gentlemen?" asked Richard Lumley, turning over those he had brought, and laid on the table. "Certified copies, you will see. The originals are in my strong-box, at Arnold, Blake & Co's. And, strange enough, I've a Cincinnati man who remembers all the particulars of that amiable young man's history. Quite a romance, is it not? His adoption—his ignorance of his real parentage—my sister's late act of justice in dying intestate, and my walking into her entire fortune in spite of you all! ha! ha! I will leave the documents with you; there's no risk; they're only copies, you see. I shall bring my legal adviser to dinner!" And with a mocking bow, he shuffled out of the room.

Olive had started from her seat when the fatal truth was disclosed, and its full meaning burst on her tortured brain. Vainly she had struggled, through the scene that had just passed, for strength to speak, and tell what she had done. But she knew not how to begin. No one but the housekeeper noticed how deathly white her cheeks and lips had grown; how she staggered as she tried to move; till just as the man who claimed everything passed from the room, she gave a wild, gasping cry, and fell on the floor in a dead swoon.

The others rushed to her assistance. Claude raised her in his arms, and bore her to a sofa at the end of the library. The housekeeper ran for water, and Sherman, with an exclamation of pity and regret that she had been overtasked in her weakness, helped to chafe her hands.

"We had better have her taken up to her room," he said, when the housekeeper returned. "This scene has tried her too severely. Poor girl! she has been so devoted to our deceased friend!"

"She has scarcely slept a night this week!"

exclaimed the good woman. "No wonder her nerves broke down. Let me carry her, sir. She is light as a child."

But Claude Hamilton would not permit her to lift the insensible girl. He raised her in his arms, and followed the housekeeper to Olive's chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EARLY FRIENDS AGAIN TOGETHER.

Two days later, a private carriage stopped before the door of the house in West Forty-second street. Out of it stepped a lady, richly though quietly dressed, and ascended the steps to ring the door-bell.

She asked for Miss Weston, and was told she was not well enough to receive any visitor. But she persisted; giving her card to the servant, and saying she would wait in the parlor till he brought the young lady's answer.

In a few minutes the man returned, and begged the lady to walk up-stairs. Miss Weston would see her in her own room.

Once more the friends, who figured in the first part of our story, were clasped in each other's arms. Ruhama in the bloom of health and beauty; Olive, pale, wasted, dejected. In the months that had passed, how much had occurred to both, which the other was anxious to know!

"I have come for you, Olive," Ruhama said, when they had talked awhile. "I shall take you home with me."

"Ruhama!"

"Oh, I know what you would say—I am too gay for a mourner like yourself! My dear, I am one of the disconsolates at present. My husband is away, and my house is the picture of desolation."

"General Marsh absent! But he will soon return, and I should be a blot on the gayety of the scene."

"No, he will not return in such haste. To let you into a secret I would not hint to any one else, we have had a little misunderstanding."

"Oh, Ruhama!"

"Do not leap to the conclusion that I am to blame; for I am not. You must know, he is one of the most jealous men in existence."

"Is it possible?"

"He confessed to me, before our marriage, that he could easily be driven mad with jealousy. But I gave him no cause, and we have been a pair of turtle-doves all these months. But the other night I went to Mrs. Lyndon's party, and met Emily St. Clare, who gave me the miniature her brother had promised me for my wedding, of himself, painted by my cousin. The demon of jealousy had inspired the General to follow me secretly, and spy out any flirtation in which I might indulge. He saw me receive the miniature and put it in my pocket. He has always had a suspicion of Wyndham. He took me into the conservatory after supper, snatched the picture out of my

pocket, abused me shamefully, and told me I should go home alone."

"How dreadful! But he was soon penitent?"

"He did not come home that night, and I have not seen him since."

"Write to him, Ruhama; tell him how he has wronged you!"

"My dear, I do not know where he has gone! I said to him all I could: that Wyndham had been like a brother, and all that; but he would not listen to me. No, Olive, I shall not write. He may get over his absurd pet as it pleases him. Meantime, I am all alone; and I don't like to go anywhere, or accept any invitations. People would make a talk, you know. I was thinking of you, when I saw Mrs. Stanley's death in the papers."

Olive pressed her hand to her eyes, aching from the tears they had shed.

"You must come with me. You have no idea of remaining here, of course?"

"Certainly not. I have had everything packed and ready to go, for three or four days."

"All right; come, then; and I will send for your luggage."

"I was going to a private house—Mrs. Van Brugh's—in Thirtieth street. It is the best place for me."

"No; the best place is with the old friend who needs you; whom your presence may save from some act of madness or folly. I am utterly disgusted with being alone; and my pride will not let me take blame I do not deserve. You shall be my guardian-angel; we will bear each other's burdens."

"I would not load you with mine, dear Ruhama."

"I have the burdens of two to bear, you know. Oh, Olive, never be persuaded to marry."

"I am not likely to be!"

"Can that be? and you in the same house with Claude Hamilton!"

"Hush, my friend! You must not link his name with mine. He is engaged; you must have heard of it?"

"Can that be true? And was the misunderstanding with you never healed up?"

"How could it be? Mr. Hamilton only lately returned from Europe—hardly three months since. I saw very little of him; I would have left this house when he came, but Mrs. Stanley would not hear of it; and she was so ill! I could be of use to her, and it was my duty to stay. Ah, I wish I had gone! I wish I had gone!"

The girl covered her face with her hands, and burst into a storm of passionate weeping.

"Come, child, you are sadly nervous!" said Mrs. Marsh, caressing her. "Where is your bonnet and mantle? You shall come with me, and I will cheer you up—downcast as I am."

"Oh, Ruhama, you do not know how miserable I am!"

"I know you have lost a loved friend—"

"And wronged him she loved; ruined him! He ought to hate me, and curse me!"

"I do not understand you, Olive! Have you done anything to injure Mr. Hamilton?"

"I have done him a fatal injury. I cannot undo it. Confession will not restore his right! Only the maddening remorse of guilt is left me!"

"I cannot imagine any evil you cannot remedy, as far as he is concerned. But you want counsel, Olive."

"I dare not seek it; they will not believe me if I confess!"

"Confess what? You are beside yourself, Olive!"

"If I could only die! But I could not even die in peace!" And the wretched girl wrung her hands in despair.

Mrs. Marsh heard steps at the door, and ran to open it. The maid was there, and in a whisper she asked her to bring Miss Weston's cloak and bonnet, and to put in her sachel such things as she might immediately want.

With her own hands Ruhama put on the things—vanquishing all resistance, and led the girl down-stairs, bidding the maid have the luggage ready when she should send for it.

Olive suffered herself to be placed in the carriage. She was utterly exhausted, and Ruhama held a bottle of salts to her nose, fearing she would faint. When they arrived at General Marsh's house, the servant was called to lift her out; but she declined assistance, and taking her friend's arm, went up the steps.

"I am quite well, Ruhama," she said; "it is only the mind that is sick—sick unto death."

Ruhama led her up-stairs to the beautiful room she had selected for her occupancy. It looked southward, and the golden sunshine illuminated the amber satin draperies of the windows. The carpet and upholstery were to match, and of rare elegance. A low French bed, covered with snowy linen with frilled pillow-cases, stood in the middle of one side; and there was a couch of amber satin, broad and soft, on which the tired guest was placed. A table, inlaid with different colored polished woods, stood by it, with a vase full of fresh flowers, and upon it were several of the latest publications in rich bindings.

"You must rest here now," said Ruhama.

"I will read to you, or play for you, whenever you feel disposed; but you will be the better of a sleep, I think, after a little refreshment."

The maid brought in a tray, on which was a tempting lunch of broiled birds, thin bread and butter, a salad, fruits, wines, lemonade, etc.

It was soothing to the poor girl to be thus cared for. Her friend would not permit her to recur to her troubles, till after she had slept. They would take counsel together in the evening, and there must be some way out of the difficulty, which their sagacity, or that of some wiser friend, might discover in time.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE CONFESSION.

DILIGENT inquiry convinced both the law-

yers that the claims advanced by Richard Lumley were but too well founded. They were waited on by his attorneys, Seth Blake & Co., with unquestionable proofs of his identity, and of his relationship to the deceased. Letters in her handwriting were produced. The history of Claude Hamilton was also proven: that he was only the adopted son of Mrs. Hamilton, and therefore of no kin to Mrs. Stanley. The law allowed him none of her property unless it were bequeathed to him; and no will was forthcoming. The one drawn up by Sherman they were obliged to believe consumed with the rest of Mr. Hall's papers at the time of the fire. That which Mr. Reynolds had prepared, and had seen executed, Mrs. Stanley must have destroyed with her own hands, after reflection.

The lawyer obeyed her strict injunction not to disclose its provisions; he only said it was not in her nephew's favor, and might have done him little good. No doubt she had destroyed it for his sake, and wished it forgotten.

Hamilton felt the blow severely; for he had loved his aunt, and believed himself the first object in her affections. To find that he had no claim of kindred blood, and that the latest will had in fact disinherited him, after her many assurances that he should be her heir, sorely wrung his heart. He had depended on her promises, and had taken no care of his future. Now he must gird on his armor to fight the battle of life. He subdued all useless regrets, in the endeavor to do it manfully.

Richard Lumley, meanwhile, had taken possession of the house. His lawyers had not yet settled the preliminaries to his taking out letters of administration. But there was no one to dispute his rights. He established himself in the best bedchamber: that in which his sister had died; and filled the rooms he occupied with the odors of tobacco and bad whisky. His low associates came every evening to eat and play at cards with him; and coarse guffaws of laughter, and drunken yells, were heard instead of the music that had once awakened the echoes. The servants were disgusted, and, one and all, resolute to leave the house; but Sherman requested them to stay till matters were decided.

One morning the lawyer was seated in the private room, in the rear of his office, when one of his clerks informed him a lady requested an interview.

"A lady?"

"Yes, sir; a young lady; at least I judge so from her figure and voice. She came in a carriage, with a coachman in livery."

"You may show her in here," said Sherman—who happened to be at leisure.

A tall, slight figure, closely veiled, entered, and took the seat placed for her accommodation. There was silence for a moment.

The lawyer began, politely, to inquire her business, by asking what he could do for her.

She threw back her veil and loosened the cloak that covered her black dress.

"Miss Weston! is it possible? I am happy to see you! I have been really anxious about you!"

He took both her hands, and looked into her wan, sad face.

"You have been ill!" he exclaimed. "I heard that you had gone to stay with a friend; but I had not heard of your illness."

"Mr. Sherman," the girl began, in the cold, calm tones to which she had schooled herself, "I have come here to make a confession."

"A confession! What can you have to confess, my poor child?"

Olive rose to her feet. She was trembling, but she steadied herself by grasping the arms of the chair. The words rushed from her lips almost without her consciousness.

"Mr. Sherman, I am the guilty one! I destroyed Mrs. Stanley's will!"

It was the lawyer's turn to start up.

"Bless my soul! What is it you are saying?"

"I burned the will!"

"You?"

"Mrs. Stanley made me promise, before her death, to burn some California letters in a secret drawer of her cabinet. She gave me full directions, and put the keys in my hand. I promised her to destroy them before any one else could see them; I did it the night before the funeral."

"And you found her will, and burned it by mistake with the other papers! It was a terrible pity!"

"There was no mistake! The will was burnt first!"

"Do you mean to say you found the will, and deliberately destroyed it?"

"I did! I found first a letter addressed to myself, explaining her reasons for such a will. Then I looked for the will; I took it out of the drawer; I read it through!"

"You read it?"

"I read it carefully. It was the latest will. Mrs. Stanley had left everything to me; to me, except an annuity to Mr. Hamilton of five hundred dollars."

"Left everything to you!" repeated the astounded lawyer.

"Everything! She gave her reasons in the letter she had written to me."

"And then you—"

"The will was exactly as she had said it would be in her letter. I did not want her property; I would not receive it! I thought—I was sure—for I had heard you say so—that Mr. Hamilton would inherit all if there were no will. I ran to the fire and threw the paper on it; I saw it burn to ashes!"

Mr. Sherman took to his habit in perplexity, of pacing the room.

"Then, as you know, I heard what that rough man said—that Mr. Hamilton was not the nephew—that he would inherit nothing! I ruined him! meaning to do him service! I

deprived him even of the small annuity left to him! I want no pardon, sir, nor excuse, nor indulgence for what I did. I only want to know if I can do anything—even to the sacrifice of my life—to repair that cruel wrong!"

She wrung her hands piteously. Her eyes were fixed imploringly on her auditor.

"Bless my soul! I don't know— Stay! have you the letter of Mrs. Stanley—the letter addressed to yourself?"

"No; I burned that letter first of all."

"The devil!"

The lawyer suppressed the imprecation that rose to his lips.

"But—but you read the will? You remember its contents?"

"There was a bequest of five hundred dollars to her nephew—Claude Hamilton—"

"Are you sure she called him her nephew?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Any other small bequests?"

"None that I recollect. The rest of her property was bequeathed to me."

"With what purpose, or conditions?"

"None were named; none whatever."

"Stay; what were the reasons she gave you privately in her letter?"

Olive looked down, and a flush rose to her face.

"I would rather not say, sir, what was in that letter."

Sherman stopped short, facing her.

"Who were the witnesses to that will?"

"I did not notice, sir. It had been witnessed, and was under seal."

"Who was appointed executor?"

"I did not observe."

"Do you know the name of the lawyer who drew it up?"

"I do not, sir. I never knew."

The lawyer fixed his eyes sternly on the young lady's face.

"You will pardon me, Miss Weston, if I cannot credit so improbable a tale. You are not candid with me."

"How so, sir? I have spoken the simple truth; alas, to my shame and sorrow!"

"You refuse to reveal the contents of Mrs. Stanley's letter to yourself?"

"It was a private letter, meant for my eyes only. Am I bound to tell what it contained?"

"Certainly you are; if it threw light on the testator's intentions."

"Then you shall know all, sir. Mrs. Stanley had wished that I should marry her nephew. She said in the letter that there was no obstacle except my pride; that I would not marry one so much wealthier than myself. She was determined to remove that difficulty by making me rich."

It cost the girl pain to make this disclosure. She was surprised to see the sneer of incredulity on the lawyer's face.

"I cannot credit this statement," he said, after a pause. "Do you know, Miss Weston, that in destroying a will, you have been guilty

of a criminal act; have placed yourself in a position of danger?"

Olive's looks were assent enough. Again she sunk into the chair, and hid her face in her spread hands.

"If you really burned a will, I believe it to have been that drawn out by myself, which was entirely in Mr. Hamilton's favor."

Olive lifted up her face.

"What motive could I have had in destroying a will made in his favor?"

"That I cannot tell. But what you tell me of Mrs. Stanley's letter is too absurd; it is utterly incredible."

"Then, sir, you believe me capable of having committed a crime to the injury of another, without any motive?"

"You say you wished to make Mr. Hamilton the heir! It was in your power to have restored his inheritance."

"But he would not have accepted it as a gift from me."

"Perhaps not. It is a pity, however, you did not give him the chance. You have muddled matters terribly as it is; and it is my impression that you destroyed the will that would have made him the master of all, according to Mrs. Stanley's intention."

Pale as death, but with the fire of indignation in her eyes, Olive rose, and drew the cloak around her shoulders. As she moved toward the door, she turned for a last word with the lawyer.

"I have not deserved your cruel aspersions, sir," she said. "I have told you the simple truth. My rash act was for the good of Mr. Hamilton, and that I have injured him is my bitter punishment; how bitter, you can never know! I came to ask you if there were means of reparation. I am willing to go to prison, if that will undo the mischief. There is my address," laying down a card. "If necessary, I will go into a court of justice, and swear to the truth of what I have said, and suffer the punishment."

She passed from the room, after lingering a moment for Mr. Sherman's reply. But he only bowed coldly in farewell. As the door closed behind her he resumed his walk through the room, plunged in a profound fit of musing.

An hour later young Hamilton came in. Orders had been given for his admission whenever he might come. He looked cheerful, notwithstanding the dark prospect.

Sherman told him what had passed and his own grave doubts.

The young man started up in astonishment. He put down at once all question of the perfect truthfulness of the young lady. He described the scene at the bedside of his benefactress, when she had so strongly manifested her desire for a union between them.

"It was just like my dear aunt," he cried, "to resort to that romantic method of bringing us together. And it was like Miss Weston's chivalrous delicacy to destroy a will that put her in possession of my rights."

"Then you entirely believe Miss Weston's statement?" asked the lawyer.

"I would pledge my life on her truth in anything she might say."

"And what do you suppose her real motive for the rash act?"

"Just what she said: her unwillingness to avail herself of my aunt's mode of enforcing her wishes. She would not accept a fortune on such implied conditions; she would not bestow her hand where her heart was not given; she would not wrong me by compelling me to receive from her bounty what was my right—at least I had been taught to think so."

"Then you do not believe Miss Weston would have willingly married you?"

"I do not," replied the young man after a pause, and looking down.

"Now it occurs to me, that the impulsive act, the girl's burning a will that gave her a fortune, and made her mistress of your destiny, could have been prompted only by a romantic love for you."

Claude's face was suddenly irradiated.

"You think so?"

"I feel sure of it. It is just what young ladies do in tales of romance."

"But hardly in real life. No, I can not flatter myself that she ever cared for me."

"By her own account the thing was done under sudden impulse. After reading the will she ran and threw it in the fire."

"In her generous eagerness to free me and free herself from an obligation. She little knew me to deem it necessary."

"Would you not have proposed to marry her?"

"To recover my fortune? Most assuredly not. If I loved a woman to desperation I would never become her suitor while such a contingency existed."

"Then you are as foolish as herself. Well, we must take a business view of the matter and see what we can do to remedy the difficulty."

"To remedy it? How can we do that?"

"Reynolds may have drawn up the will destroyed. If he did he will know the witness, and we may establish its contents yet."

"And its authority?"

"If the court so decides."

"And will it be necessary for Miss Weston to appear and bear testimony?"

"Certainly; we must prove how it is that the document is not forthcoming."

"I will not consent to that. I would rather suffer the loss."

"It is not a matter for your decision, my young friend. In fact, you have nothing to do with it. As the lawyers and advisers of the late Mrs. Stanley, trusted by her to fulfill her last wishes, it is our duty to prove them, and abide by them. If the court establishes the will, the fortune, remember, will not belong to you."

"That is true."

"And the alternative is the enjoyment of it

by that scamp and ex-convict. Do you know he has taken full possession?"

"I suppose so."

"He sent the servant out for brandy the other night and I met him. He gave me a doleful account of the state of things. Lumley and his associates make the house a perpetual scene of beastly revelry, drinking and gambling every evening till half the night is over. The servants have all given warning."

"He has not yet taken out letters of administration?"

"No—but that makes no difference. There is no one to dispute his heirship. He'll make ducks and drakes of the money—as they say in my country—before the year's at an end. We must act promptly if we hope to dispossess him."

"I hope you will do so, with all my heart. The property will then go intact to Miss Weston."

"Five hundred dollars a year were left to you, my boy."

"That was kind considering I had no claim of kindred blood."

"And you will have the whole, if I understood the young lady aright."

"Never, sir. I would not accept it as her gift, and I would not sue for the hand of a princess for the dower she would bring me."

"Between you both, with your chivalrous notions, you may balk your aunt's intentions. She undoubtedly meant the result to be a union between you."

"She took the way to defeat it, had there been any chance before, of such a result."

"Well, my duty is plain. I must take steps at once and see Reynolds about it."

The two parted, Hamilton by no means in a happy frame of mind.

CHAPTER X.

RETURNING TO SOCIAL LIFE.

THE suit was commenced. With the testimony of Reynolds and the witnesses, as to the contents of the will, and that of Miss Weston, accounting for its destruction, the lawyers hoped to procure its establishment by the court.

Richard Lumley made a furious outbreak when notice was served upon him. The idea that any one should dare dispute his rights enraged him beyond expression, and he had reasons to dread the investigations into his past, which might be deemed necessary by the court. His counsel assured him, however, that no inquiry would be made into his antecedents. That question was not to be entered into.

The sole thing to be decided was whether or not the will destroyed was the last will and testament of the late Mrs. Stanley, and as such, would undoubtedly prove of its contents reestablish it in its legal authority? If so, then Lumley's claims were set aside; but Seth Blake and Company had several difficul-

ties to throw in the way, and during "the law's delay" in settling the matter Lumley remained in undisputed possession.

Olive went into court when summoned as a witness, with the firm spirit of a martyr. She was prepared to suffer any of the consequences of her rash deed, by which she had ruined the future of him she had striven to benefit. She would go to prison, she would plead guilty to an indictment, she would wear out her life in expiating her fault, if she only might undo the mischief.

Ruhama declared her intention of going with her, and standing by her during the trial. In vain Olive implored that she would not; she might be compromised by her friendship for a self-confessed criminal. Even the prudent Emily St. Clare advised her not to go on the score of offending her husband; but she would listen to no remonstrance.

"My husband has left me to my own discretion," she would say, "and if he were here I should expect of a soldier and a gentleman that he would stand by a friendless girl, who has committed no fault, except being too generous and self-forgotten."

So the two ladies entered the court-room together, Tom Wyatt walking on the other side of Olive, who declined taking his arm.

The brilliant Mrs. Marsh was greeted with a buzz of admiration. She wore a black velvet mantle, richly trimmed with guipure lace and bead work, a black velvet hat and drooping plume, a rich collar, fastened with a large ruby brooch, and lavender kid gloves.

Olive was in deep mourning. When she was called to the stand, and threw aside her crape veil, Ruhama also threw back the spotted thread lace one that had covered her face. Her rich color, her rippling waves of dark hair, her midnight eyes scintillating fire, and fastened upon the face of her friend, formed a contrast to the pale and worn, yet inexpressibly sweet face of the witness. Their manner, too, was in contrast. Mrs. Marsh was anxious and restless, Olive was dignified and composed. She had nerved herself to the worst, yet never had she appeared to so much advantage as when thus prepared and resolved to criminate herself.

Her story was simply told and made a profound impression upon all present. When required to repeat the words of Mrs. Stanley urging a marriage between the son of her adoption and the young girl who had won her heart, her emotion was repressed with difficulty. The blood rushed to her face, and her lips quivered sadly; but she maintained her calmness, and did not hesitate in her answers. The recital of the contents of the private letter from her benefactress to herself was another trying part of her testimony; but she went heroically through it all.

When she came to the burning of the will, the generous motive for which had been made apparent, the murmur of admiration would have burst into enthusiastic applause, had not

the presiding judge firmly and promptly restrained its outbreak.

When her testimony was given the court adjourned; and Olive was led out between her friends. Mr. Reynolds came to shake hands with her, and congratulate her on the weight and power added to their cause by her evidence. He was of opinion that the prospect was bright of a speedy decision in their favor.

Olive looked bewildered. She was almost fainting when placed in the carriage. And when once more in the shelter of her own room, with her friend bending over her, her self-possession seemed to have utterly deserted her. She wept long and bitterly; she listened to no words of consolation; finally she sunk back exhausted on the sofa, so white and rigid that Ruhama called the maid to help in chafing her hands and forehead while she offered a restorative. By degrees the unhappy girl was soothed into quietude.

When she came to full consciousness two hours later, the maid brought in a tray of refreshments, and Ruhama pressed her to take a cup of coffee.

Olive suddenly started up.

"Have they come yet?" she asked.

"Who, dear friend?"

"The officers—to arrest me. I thought they would have taken me in court; but I suppose they waited. They should have been here before this time."

"Child, you are dreaming! For what could you be arrested?"

"For the crime! The crime of burning the will! Mr. Sherman told me I had placed myself in danger, and I know it!"

"Nonsense! no one thinks of attributing a crime to you! Everybody admired your heroism; I saw it; I heard them praising you!"

"But it was a crime, Ruhama!"

"Your generous self-sacrifice made it heroic; and so they all said and thought. Come, Olive, you must get over this nervousness. Drink this; it will do you good. We shall have visitors this evening; and I have invited Tom Wyatt to dinner."

"And you think I will not be arrested and taken to prison?"

Ruhama laughed.

"The only result I apprehend is, that when you are declared the heiress by the establishment of the missing testament, you will be beset with suitors and friends that you will not be satisfied to remain here. You can then take possession of your own house; and then I shall expect an invitation from you."

"Ruhama! do you fancy for a moment, that, should the will be established, I would avail myself of its provisions?"

"Why not?"

"That I would take the fortune which belongs to Mr. Hamilton?"

"He is provided for, as I understand. If he has not enough you can give him part of the rest."

"And keep any portion myself—bequeathed to me under the understanding—"

"That you would marry Hamilton! Do you know, Olive dear, I have always thought he loved you; and I still believe it."

"You are mistaken, Ruhama. And even if he did, he would never own it, while I held the fortune to which he has the sole right. He is too proud to seek a bride for her money."

"And you—"

"I will give it all up to him, every cent of it, if he can be induced to accept it. But I fear he will not; I know he will not!"

"Then these foolish scruples on both sides will keep you two apart, and defeat his aunt's object, after all?"

"Dear Mrs. Stanley! She could not have devised a surer means of preventing what she most wished for!"

"What a pity! You are both too proud!"

"I am determined on one thing," said Olive.

"What is that?"

"I will never accept the property—even if it is awarded to me! I would die first!"

"What can be done with it, then?"

"I will send Mr. Hamilton a deed of it drawn up in due form, and signed. If he will not take it—then it will have to remain in the hands of the executors, who may persuade him when I have left the State. I shall go to the West."

"Or to Europe with me, Olive. You shall not leave me. But I shall not like Mr. Hamilton, if he consents to the sacrifice. He knows what were the wishes of his aunt; if he takes her fortune he is bound to fulfill the implied condition."

"Do you think I would accept him, or the money, acquired by compliance with such a condition?"

"Would you not, if he asked you to marry him?"

"No—a thousand times—no!"

"Olive, you are a puzzle to me! You once cared for Claude Hamilton."

"I thought once—he cared for me," faltered the girl, covering her face with her hands. "But he does not. He does not."

"How do you know?"

"Is he not engaged to Miss Monelle?"

"They say so; but I do not believe it. He has not seen her since some days before Mrs. Stanley's death."

"Are you sure?"

"I heard her say so, when I met her last. She inquired about him in a manner no betrothed young lady would ask after a lover. And she was merriest of the merry, with half a dozen beaux hovering around her. No—no—my dear; rest assured Mr. Hamilton is heart-whole from that quarter."

"How thankful I am!" ejaculated Olive, clasping her hands.

"Ah, Olive!"

"That so noble a nature is not the slave of one so frivolous as I hear she is! She would never have made him happy."

"I know of but one who could do that!" said Ruhama, significantly.

"Hush, Ruhama! Let us not speak of him! I hope, I pray for his happiness, but it does not depend on me."

"Now, my dear, you really must dress and come down to dinner. I will not excuse you again. You have just three-quarters of an hour."

Mrs. Marsh went into her own room and came out arrayed in corn-colored moire antique, trimmed profusely with black lace. She wore no ornament in her hair, whose wavy abundance framed her dark, beautiful face like a picture. Smiles were on her countenance, though only a few minutes before she had been weeping bitterly.

Olive had made no change in her dress beyond a fresh collar and cuffs. Her light brown hair, with its ruddy tint, rippled on either side her well-shaped head, and escaped in loose curls behind the ears and in clustering rings over the temples. Its massive coil at the back of the head was confined by a slender jet comb, and had not even a ribbon by way of adornment. Both, in their different styles of loveliness, looked best when dressed with simplicity.

The dinner passed quietly, with only one guest; but several came in after it was over; among them were Mr. and Mrs. St. Clare. Olive was surprised to find how much her spirits rose from the weight that had depressed them so long. She played and sung and listened to music with real enjoyment; and the old days seemed to return, with oblivion of the wretchedness that had so crushed her, and caused her to feel that life was at an end for her, and the grave would be a welcome refuge.

The guests departed early, and Mrs. Marsh attended Olive to her room, dismissing the maid, who waited to tender any service.

"I have made an engagement for you," she said, drawing their cushioned easy-chairs near the grate, in which a few coals were dying out. "For to-morrow evening."

"For me?"

"Yes, Olive. You have too long shunned society. It is time you appeared again in the circles you always adorned."

"You forget, Ruhama," returned the girl, glancing at the mourning-dress she was unfastening to remove it.

"No—I do not forget. That will not interfere with the engagement. It is only to Emily's house; a musical reunion of select friends. You need not make objections; your going is decided upon, beyond remonstrance."

"I am sure you will excuse me, Ruhama."

"No—I will not. I have set my heart upon it. It will do you good; you need to be drawn out of your brooding over sorrow. I never saw such an improvement as this evening over this morning in you, Olive."

"Ah, I was so wretched this morning!"

"True; you had a terrible ordeal to pass. But it is happily over; you have atoned for

what you call your rashness, and have shown the dignity and worth of your character. You may be a lion in society if you choose, my dear."

"Ruhama!" exclaimed the girl, reproachfully.

"There—don't be angry; I don't mean that you will be; you are too proud and reserved. But I will not have you suffering your talents to run to waste, and your health to be worn out by nursing woe that you might struggle against, and overcome, and put away from you. While you were engaged in the discharge of duties, I did not interfere; I left it to Mrs. Stanley to soothe you, and bring back health and happiness—"

"Then you thought of me, Ruhama? I am grateful for that!" murmured Olive, sinking on one knee by her friend's side, and leaning her head upon her lap.

"When have I forgotten you, my friend?" answered the warm-hearted young wife. "Did you think yourself forgotten and forsaken?"

"I have thought so at times."

"Then you made a great mistake. Now, sit you there, Olive"—indicating the easy-chair beside her own—"and listen patiently; for I want to open my heart to you."

Olive did as she was bidden; first throwing on a white cambric dressing-gown.

"I want to tell you about myself. It will be a relief to lighten my burden, and your sympathy will do it."

"Your burden?"

"I am not so gay and thoughtless as I seem. Do you know how many weeks it is since I have gone out or received visitors, till you came to me?"

"I did not know—"

"You shall hear what I have to say; and then judge if I have not had my sorrows, as well as yourself."

"But, Ruhama, your troubles can be thrown off whenever you please."

"Can they? You shall judge. You know the circumstances of my marriage, Olive?"

"You married a man your senior by many years, but one of such noble nature that he deserves all respect and affection."

"He does indeed!" said the wife, with a deep sigh. "But for my acceptance of him; it was to save my father from distressing embarrassments in business. Did you know that?"

"Something like it I heard, but it was only a surmise among people who knew nothing of your affairs."

"It was true, nevertheless."

"And he—the General—he accepted the sacrifice?"

"He never suspected it. My father persuaded him that he had won my affections. I tried to act so, that he should not be undeceived."

"Poor Ruhama!"

"No, you need not pity me. When I put on the semblance of gayety and happiness to cover the deceit that had been practiced, I

schooled my heart to submission and obedience. I learned to love my husband."

Olive seized her hand, and pressed it warmly between both her own.

"To love him as I had never loved any man. While we were abroad, I saw how superior he was to all others I met; how highly educated, how able to instruct and guide me. My heart surrendered itself to him as a guide and teacher. His wish was my law. This was growing more deep and earnest day by day, this feeling; and it is only since we came home that the storm has arisen that threatens to root it up, and leave only waste and desolation."

"Oh, my friend! this will not be!"

"It looks like it—my husband's long absence, when we had not been parted before since our wedding-day; and his leaving me in such violent anger, Olive."

"But you had not deserved it, Ruhama?"

"I had done nothing, child; nothing to justify the least unkindness. But my husband has the one failing, that darkens his many splendid traits of character."

"You never gave him cause for jealousy?"

"Never. All my flirtations, you know, were on the surface, and never touched the heart of either party. These harmless pleasantries I gave up when I married."

"That was your duty, Ruhama."

"When the General first confessed his failing, I vowed he should have no cause for its outbreak. I have kept my word."

"It was such a trifle, too, that aroused his anger."

"Was it not? Nothing to justify his using bitter language, and reproaching me in a manner I thought I should never be able to forgive!"

"But you told him—"

"I would not condescend to a denial of such a frivolous accusation. I told him I hated him—and just then I did! I did!"

The impulsive woman burst into a passion of sobs and tears.

When Olive had soothed her to calmness, she went on recalling the scene:

"He said he would take me home, and then leave me—that very night."

"Not forever! He will not stay away?"

"How can I tell? He is so resolute—so proud! Olive, I can hardly think he ever loved me!"

"Nay, you cannot know the force of love in such a heart. The long garnered affections of a life were lavished on you."

"And if I have thrown them away in a moment's petulance?"

"No fear of that, Ruhama. He will come back to you."

"If I had only pleaded my own cause! I could have made him ashamed of his unworthy suspicions."

"Perhaps not then. Jealousy is a kind of madness. But you might write to him, dear."

"I will, as soon as I know where he is. He has cut off all communication between us. He

—who seemed to live but in the sight of his wife!"

"Then be sure—be very sure—he is not far from you!"

"I thought so at first. I thought he might have means of finding out everything; might even play the spy on me. And so I have shut myself up in this house, and refused all invitations; receiving very few visitors, and those ladies—my intimate friends."

"Dear Ruhama! It has been a cruel trial."

"I was miserable, till you came to me. Olive, I found my own peace of mind returning while I sympathized with you."

A gentle caress was the girl's response.

"I have tried to keep up my spirits, and succeeded tolerably well; though at times my heart seemed like to break."

"Shall I tell you, dear, what is my advice?"

"Do, if you please."

"Continue to live in seclusion. Avoid society of persons who would give you injudicious sympathy and counsel; who would involve you in fresh difficulties. Find out—as you surely will before long—where your husband is; and either go to him or write to him. He cannot withstand your pleadings."

"I do not think he would, were he convinced of my love."

"Make him sure of that. He is doubtful of his own merits. Numbering twice your years, he cannot fancy that you prefer him to the young and the light-hearted. You say he is only jealous of one?"

"Of Wyndham only, as far as I know. But his jealousy might break out toward any one else."

"Then avoid Wyndham. Do you know I once fancied he was in love with you?"

"The lightest kind of a flirtation was between us for a few weeks. He never had a thought of addressing me. He was nearer being a suitor of yours, Olive."

"He was never that, I am sure."

"No, you kept every one at such a distance. Of late, whatever heart Mr. Blount has to give has gone in a different direction; so Emily thinks."

"Indeed?"

"After that wild little girl, your pupil formerly."

"Elodie Sterne!"

"You heard of her running away, to go on the stage?"

"Yes; and I was grieved to hear it, too!"

"Wyndham made every effort to find her, and persuade her to return to his guardianship. He discovered her at last, in a young *debutante* at the opera, under an Italian name. She had been engaged in some one's place, to appear in a part beyond her powers; but the manager trusted that her youth and beauty would make amends for all deficiencies. Mr. Blount was at the opera that evening, and saw her. He found out from the manager where she was living, and went the next day to see her. But she was gone."

"Gone!"

"She and the people with her had left their lodgings, and the city, no doubt. The manager had decided not to let her sing again in that part. She was too much in need of cultivation for such advancement, as he became sensible when the newspaper critics condemned her."

"And she had vanished, you say?"

"Utterly and completely. Her guardian thinks she was taken to Europe."

"With whom?"

"She was in charge of an English woman, a concert singer of no artistic repute, who went by the name of Madame Leona. Elodie's uncle, Bennett Rashleigh, was their traveling agent."

"Then she was with her uncle?"

"Her aunt's husband; but a man not fit to have the care of her. All he cared about was making money out of the poor child's talents."

"Mr. Blount has not pursued her to Europe?"

"No; he knew it would be useless, if she had determined upon a professional career. And Emily was so opposed to further search. The girl had been ungrateful and treacherous, she said, and she never wished to see her again. Herbert thinks she will be brought to a sense of her own deficiencies by hearing the best music abroad, sooner than by anything else. But it has been a severe blow to Wyndham. I think he would have married the girl."

"Let us hope he may find her, and penitent for the trouble she gave him."

"Be it so. But, to return to myself. I have accepted Emily's invitation, Olive, for you and myself—sure of its doing us both good. I am longing for some really fine music, and you are starving for it, too. The society of a few chosen friends draws me out of my dismal thoughts. You will go with me to-morrow evening?"

"It is but a small party?"

"A score or so, I suppose; Emily's acquaintances most devoted to music. Your dress will do well enough; and I shall wear my plainest. Be a good girl, Olive! I am so miserable, you might help me to recover my serenity."

"That will be a reason quite sufficient, were there no other, Ruhama. But I shall enjoy the music, too. As you say, I have starved for some those many months."

The two friends embraced with a hearty good-night; and both rested the better for the interchange of sympathy and mutual resolutions to aid each other.

CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE AND A SHOCK.

A NUMBER of enthusiastic connoisseurs in art were assembled at the house of Herbert St. Clare, and seldom had a party been so keenly enjoyed by the invited guests. The host did his best to entertain his friends, and his powers had not diminished since the time when he had been the lion of fashionable circles. Olive, in

contributing her share to the general feast of music, forgot to feel that she had entered too soon the circle from which she had fancied her poverty excluded her forever. She caught herself, indeed, now and then, wondering at her new position, and feeling that she was tasting of forbidden joys. But the cordial kindness with which she was greeted by all her former acquaintances, was soothing and delightful to her.

There was no formality or dullness in that select circle. They had come for the enjoyment of music, and to hear one or two artists lately arrived from Italy, who would not have given their performance at any other private house in the city. Each guest, therefore, felt that he or she was admitted to a rare and enviable privilege. And there was no display of refreshments to please those who care for eating and drinking. A table at one end of the third parlor was set out with wines, light punch, lemonade, sandwiches and cake, and any who chose might help themselves in the intervals of song and conversation.

Olive remained near Ruhama the first part of the evening. She saw the light of pleasure in her friend's eyes, and sympathized in her feelings. Mrs. Marsh was dressed in black silk, with a chemisette and collar of point lace in the square-cut front, a becoming though simple costume. Her overskirt was richly trimmed with Brussels lace; her hair was wholly without ornament.

When the music ceased, she was surrounded by friends; but Wyndham Blount, who was present, came not near her, after the first greeting. He was very attentive to Miss Weston. He talked to her of the musical treat they had enjoyed, and discussed the merits of the professional vocalists, and the public sensation they had already created. Wyndham had little scientific knowledge of the art, and was glad to learn the opinion of a lady whose taste was so well known. Her approbation—so enthusiastic as it was—convinced him he had a right to be delighted.

Olive ventured at length to ask if he had heard any news of her former pupil, Miss Sterne.

He had heard nothing since she left New York so suddenly. She had been hurried away, he did not doubt, by the persons who had her in charge, to avoid his claims on her.

"Though I should not have insisted on these," he added. "If the young girl were bent on a professional career, I should have interfered no further than to urge her to consent to a course of instruction likely to develop her powers and fit her for the place she aimed to attain."

"You think she had great talent?" asked Olive.

"Nay; I should ask your opinion on that subject, as you had full opportunity of judging. You know how little I am qualified."

"I thought," Olive replied, "that she might some time or other, realize her dream of emi-

nent fame. She had a fresh and charming voice, though not yet brought out to the power it might have reached, by long and laborious practice. She was too impatient for the hard work necessary, and disposed to slur it over, if not restrained."

"Your judgment agrees with that of the manager, with whom I talked the day after I heard her at the opera. He said she was imperfect in the instruction she had received; and that her voice lacked volume; years, perhaps, of the best and most careful training would be necessary before she could command a high position. I would have sent her to Paris, if she had returned to me."

"And you think those in whose care she has placed herself, will not do her justice?"

"Their aim is solely to make money; and they have no object in giving her better knowledge. Rashleigh, her uncle, is the man who claims her fortune for his son; and he will be governed entirely by his own interest."

"Poor girl! he will prevent her return to her real friends?"

"I fear he will; he is capable of any wickedness, in his eagerness to obtain money. He would hide her, or carry her among the Indians, sooner than permit her to stand in the way of his securing the property that belongs to her."

"You have no clue to her place of residence?"

"Only a promise from a worthy, but poor old dame—Mrs. Brill, her late aunt's friend—that she will inform me when she learns whither Elodie has been taken. I have convinced the old lady that I am no tyrant of a guardian, but the young lady's well-meaning friend. As soon as I can, I will lay my reasonable proposition before her; and when she finds I am not disposed to crush her ambitious hopes, I think she will agree to my plans."

"Is it Miss Sterne you are speaking about?" asked his sister, who came up at that moment. "I never want to hear her name again. Don't you think, Olive, that my brother is fully absolved from his charge of such a willful little traitress?"

"If he can at any time do her good, or save her from evil, by his interference, he is bound to do it," returned Olive, gravely.

"But not to torment himself to hunt her up again! For my part, I was glad when she took herself off, to pursue her visions of fame and fortune."

Before Olive could reply, her attention was arrested. What she saw caused a crimson flush to mount to her very forehead. It was so painful a betrayal of emotion, that she turned away, and stooped to pick up her handkerchief, having purposely let it slide from her lap.

"Ah, there is Mr. Hamilton!" exclaimed the hostess, turning to greet the new-comer. "Better late than never!" though he has missed the best songs."

The young man bowed, as he took Mrs. St.

Clare's offered hand, and smiled at her reproaches.

"You have lost the Signora—and the Signor B——," she said, "and that is your punishment. They have just left us."

Olive had recovered her self-possession when she received the greeting of Claude, and his expression of pleasure that she had been persuaded to come.

"You have too long immured yourself," he added in a whisper, "and I have seen that your health was suffering."

There was unwonted tenderness in his tone; and no friend of the girl's would have had reason to complain of the lack of color in her cheeks. He saw the bloom he had missed, and was pleased, as his looks showed. Olive met that look for an instant, and her eyes drooped before it.

"I am a fool!" she mentally exclaimed. "Why can I not meet him as a friend, like Mr. Blount?"

When she looked up, she saw Claude in earnest conversation with Ruhama Marsh. They began to promenade, to the slow music just then beginning in the extension parlor.

Wyndham offered his arm, and Olive took it, joining in the procession. They had taken the second turn, when, as they approached one of the French windows in the front drawing-room, Olive suddenly stood still, growing very pale, with her eyes staring in one direction.

"What is the matter, Miss Weston?" exclaimed Wyndham. "You are ill; take a seat. I will bring you some wine."

But the girl only raised her finger, and pointed to the window.

"Did you not see it?" she asked, in a faint voice.

"See what? Nothing is there!"

"Yes—the face—the face between the curtains! It is gone now."

Wyndham led her up close to the window.

"I see that one of the blinds has been blown back," he said. "Did you see a face?"

"Yes, just there. A man was looking in."

She was trembling violently.

"Some loafer from the street. But it was impudent of him to come in at the gate, and cross the lawn over the flower-beds. Perhaps a footman from one of the carriages."

"No, it was no servant."

"Sit here, and I will go to see."

The young man left her, and passed out of the door, through the company into the hall, and out at the front door.

But Olive arose quickly the instant he had left her, passing behind the voluminous draperies of the window, which she drew close together, so as to screen her from observation. She then unfastened the window, pushed it open, and stepped out.

She stood on a narrow balcony, only two feet from the ground. The air was warm and balmy. She leaned over the trelliswork and

peered into the foliage that shaded the front of the house.

She thought she saw the figure of a man, but could not tell. Instantly her resolution was taken. By that time Wyndham had about gained the front door.

Stepping on a low, wooden bench, she swung herself over the light railing and stepped on the ground. The turf was dry and soft as a carpet. She stole after the retreating form which she fancied she had seen.

The thick shrubbery concealed her from the view of any one at the front door. And the wide lawn extended some distance to the railing that divided it from the street. In that locality, the houses were scattered, and there was none adjoining St. Clare's on either side.

The girl had a motive strong enough to overcome any fear she might have entertained. Hearing a rustle among the leaves, she followed quickly. The angle of the house was turned, and the faint moonlight fell upon the green, free from the intercepting tracery of foliage. Here, indeed, the figure of a man might be dimly discerned. He stood still; he seemed to have just caught a glimpse of his pursuer.

Olive came near enough to touch his arm, but she did not. She was trying to gather courage to speak.

"Is it Ruhama?" asked a low voice.

"No, but it is Ruhama's friend," she replied, firmly. "I am not mistaken. I am so glad I have found you."

"Why are you glad?" the deep tone responded.

"Because I have an opportunity to show you how unlike yourself you are, thus hovering in concealment—"

"And playing the spy? Speak out; do not spare me."

"I hope there is no need. Will you come in?"

"I am not an invited guest," the man remarked, in a bitter tone.

"But a most welcome one. Give me your arm, General Marsh, and let us go in together."

"No, I will not."

"You have just returned home?"

"I came two hours after you had gone. I was surprised to find my wife had gone to a party, and of all houses to this one. But all this does not interest you, Miss Weston."

"Indeed it does. I have been your wife's guest for some time."

"So the housekeeper told me."

"And to me your wife confided the cause of your—leaving her."

"It is made public, then?"

"No, General; not a soul knows of it but myself. Ruhama said very little even to me, before last night, much as she has suffered. She has been very unhappy."

"It is likely! she has sought her usual solace!"

"This is the first time she has spent an eve-

ning from home since you left her!" cried the girl, eager to vindicate her friend. "Come this way, General Marsh; they cannot see us from the front. I know that Ruhama is wretched on account of this misunderstanding; and I implore you to put an end to it."

"How did you know I was here?" demanded the husband.

"I saw your face at the window. I knew you at once!"

"Then you saw me in a situation I am ashamed to have been caught in!" moaned the unhappy man. "All the company know I have been spying, I suppose?"

"Not one, I hope and believe!" cried Olive.

"Mr. Blount was with me, and when I told him I had seen a man's face—for he asked what startled me so—he came to the door to reconnoiter. He must have gone in again. They will miss me presently; they will know I have come out, for I had to leave the window open. I must go back directly. Oh, General Marsh, how can you be unkind to such a wife?"

"I should not have followed her to any house but this!"

"Ruhama loves you with all her heart."

"I cannot believe it!"

"She does; she told me she did! She wept bitter tears over your lost confidence! You have wronged her; she never gave you cause for suspicion!"

"You say this, Miss Weston, in pity for me—"

"I say it because it is the truth! Come in with me, and see how delighted she will be! She has only waited to learn where you were to follow you, or write to you."

"She would have followed me?"

"You could not have escaped her—had she known where to find you!"

"She said to me something very different!"

"She was stung and outraged by unjust suspicion. General Marsh, you did wrong to suspect her."

The wretched man smote his forehead with his hand.

"To-night," continued Olive, "she has not once spoken with Mr. Blount. He has been close to me nearly all the evening. It is too ridiculous, jealousy, of him. If he cares for any one it is for that little ward of his, who ran away some months since, and came out at the opera, and vanished again. I heard him talking of her. Oh, General Marsh, it is hard to speak to you in this manner, to you who are so much my superior; and you may think me very forward; but I must try to undeceive you! Pray forgive me!"

"Miss Weston you have my respect—my gratitude—"

"And you will come in with me?"

"No, no, I dare not! I cannot meet her yet, nor with others looking on!"

"Then go home and let her find you there. I will bring her presently."

"She is angry with me; I could not bear harsh words from her! You know not what a state my mind is in! I feel as if I should go mad!"

"Go—go—and wait for us! We will follow you directly! I dare not stay!"

And the girl turned and fled hastily back. She heard voices at the front door, and saw that the window was closed by which she had come out. There was no other way but to brave a shower of questions.

She walked up the steps composedly, and answered to those who asked where she had been, that she had been taking a mouthful of fresh air at the end of the balcony. It was so warm in the rooms, and so pleasant without. Now she felt refreshed. As she passed in, Ruhama caught her arm.

"Were you faint, dear friend?" she asked.

"Not faint—but—I feel better now! Let us go home."

She grasped her friend's hand with a significant pressure. Ruhama led her at once to the dressing-room.

"What have you to tell me?" she asked.

"He was here a few moments since; I saw and spoke with him. We shall find him at your house."

"My husband?"

"Not a word now. I will tell you all as we go!"

The two ladies came out into the hall, and took leave of their hostess. Mr. Wyatt drew Ruhama's arm within his own, and Wyndham led Olive down the steps.

"Did you see any one?" he whispered. "I know you were outside. I missed you when I went back into the rooms."

"Do not question me, Mr. Blount," replied the girl, "for I must not repeat anything I heard. I fancied I recognized—an old acquaintance, and went out to get an explanation of conduct that appeared singular. I only found that it was all right; it was no business of mine. Did any one wonder at my absence?"

"Not till the moment you came back. I was afraid, Olive, of an attack on you by that reprobate brother of Mrs. Stanley's. He is furious, I understand, at the probability that the court will soon reinstate you in your rights as the heiress."

"It was not he; Mr. Lumley has never spoken to me since I left that house."

"I am glad of that. You must call on me if you need a friend, Olive."

They were at the carriage, and Ruhama was waiting. Wyndham helped both ladies in, and Tom Wyatt said he would see them home, in spite of their remonstrances, he sprang upon the box beside the coachman.

Olive told her friend all! Ruhama flung her arms round her, and embraced her with tears of joy.

"You are indeed a true friend!" she cried.

"And you think we shall find him at home?"

"I trust so. At any rate he is in New York,

and as penitent for his cruel jealousy as we could expect a husband to be. Don't be agitated, dear; it will all be well! You have nothing to fear!"

"I owe it to you, Olive!"

Both hurried into the house, and the young wife eagerly questioned the servants; but no one had arrived within two hours. The General had come, early in the evening, and had seen the housekeeper; he had left orders, no doubt, with her, for they talked together in the library; no one else had seen him but the butler, and he only for a moment. The housekeeper was sent for, and came. She only stated that her master had seemed in a hurry; had made some excuse—she did not remember what—for not having written before his unexpected return; had asked who was staying at the house, and where the mistress had gone; and had said he might see her before she came home. The dame thought he had certainly gone to fetch both the ladies home.

When the servants had retired Ruhama threw herself into a chair in the library, and dashed the indignant tears from her eyes.

"Is it not too cruel?" she cried, "thus to subject me to the curious comments of my domestics? They will all be wondering what is the matter, and spreading the news of some disagreement, exaggerating what they do not understand! This is the worst of all!"

"They will not suspect that anything is wrong," said Olive. "They understand that we saw him at Mr. St. Clare's, that he was hurried, and expected to join us at home. I took care to say this to the butler. If he walked he may be here yet. At the worst you will see him to-morrow."

"And the whole household will know he was in town and did not come home!" wailed the deserted wife.

"Ruhama, you have done nothing amiss, and have nothing to fear. It is not for you to shrink and tremble at phantoms. Whenever the General returns you will receive him as a true wife should, and not trouble yourself at the carpings of indifferent people."

"What should I do without you, Olive?" murmured the wife, as she returned her embrace.

"Now I will say good-night," said Olive, "and I advise you to retire to your room, and to bed—for you are tired. Throw off the care that would keep you from sleep."

"Ah, child! If you were married you would not give such counsel! I will wait here half an hour."

"Then I will stay with you."

"No, I would rather you did not. If Arthur comes, he will want to see me alone at first. He is so reticent, it would be death to him to humble himself before a spectator. It was bitter to him, no doubt, to know that you were aware of his jealousy; and for that he will reproach me."

"Dear Ruhama! He would have thought it made public if I had not told him."

"Yes, you did right. Now leave me, dear; I would rather be alone."

With a good night kiss, Olive went out, and up-stairs to her own room.

Ruhama went to the window, and saw that the blinds were all closed and fastened. She drew the curtains closely, and their shimmering folds swept the floor. At the rear end of the spacious room a heavy silk curtain hung before a small apartment called sportively the boudoir, in which, opposite the entrance, was a large bay window with deep alcoves richly draped with silk damask, matching the window curtains of the library. The door curtain was looped on either side, as usual, but the draperies of the bay window stirred, and Ruhama's heart seemed to stand still with surprise and terror, as she saw a man's figure in the dim light stepping from behind the curtain.

The next instant she sprang forward with a glad cry.

"Arthur, is it you?" she exclaimed.

Her arms were outstretched, and her swift bound brought her close to the figure. She recognized it as she came near, and recoiled several paces.

"Mr. Wyatt!" was all she could say.

Tom followed her as she went back. She was near fainting, and sunk upon one of the large leathern chairs. He could see that her face was white and her lips were convulsed.

"Oh, Mrs. Marsh! forgive me!" he pleaded. "I thought you knew that I came in with you; I thought you knew I was here!"

Ruhama struggled for self-control. She waved back the intruder as he approached to offer assistance.

"I am a ruffian—a wretch—a fool!" cried the young man, "to frighten you thus! I cannot forgive myself! Let me bring you a glass of wine!"

The lady recovered power to speak.

"No, no; I want nothing! Why did you conceal yourself?"

"I did not mean to do that! I merely strolled into your little room while you were speaking to Miss Weston. I was looking at the painting that projects over the window, and noting the effect of the spectral light upon it. I never dreamed of surprising you. Pray pardon me."

"It is late," Ruhama began.

"I know it is, and I will detain you but an instant. Ruhama, you are in trouble—I heard what the General said to you that night at the ball, when he snatched the miniature from your pocket."

"You heard him?"

"And I—my very soul burns to espouse your cause, dear, injured lady! He who could speak in that manner is not worthy of you. You must not bear such injustice."

"Mr. Wyatt—"

The young man came near her; he stooped to raise her hand, but she snatched it away.

"Ruhama, the laws of our Western States would release you! You could obtain a divorce

for such cruelty! Why not avail yourself of them?"

The wife covered her face with her hands.

"I have so longed to speak to you alone! I must seize this opportunity! Ruhama, I have never ceased to love you! I love you more than ever! I suffer with every blow hurled at you! Will you not accept succor at my hand! Ah, you hide your face—"

"It is in shame!" cried the lady, impetuously, uncovering her face and rising, though she trembled so she could hardly stand. "The worst of my humiliation is that you dare to speak to me in this manner."

"Ruhama!"

"Mrs. Marsh, if you please, sir! That is my name—and I am proud of it! I love my husband! If the laws offered me release by any crime of his, I would not take it! I would cling to him! Oh, what have I done to be thus shamed and humbled?"

"I beseech you, forgive me," pleaded the offender.

"Leave me, Mr. Wyatt! You have given me a great shock! You have shown me the danger of trusting one I esteemed a friend! You can do me no other service or favor than to leave me!"

"Only say you pardon me!"

"Your very presence here is a peril and a reproach to me! Why will you not go? Will you force me to call the servants?"

Wyatt had moved toward the door; he turned quickly and rushed to her.

"I am gone!" he said, "and will not again offend your sight. Only say you forgive me; give me your hand in token of pardon. If you only know how miserable I am!"

Ruhama's hand was outstretched; it may have been to enforce his departure. But he snatched it, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

"Now, farewell!" he gasped, in a voice hoarse with feelings that almost suffocated him.

Ruhama snatched her hand away and stepped back. As she did so, she noticed that the door of the library nearest the front, which had been ajar, was pushed gently open, while a rush of cold air came in, evidently from the outside door of the mansion, opened likewise.

Tom Wyatt saw her eyes fixed, and instinctively turned. A figure stood in the doorway; but before he could recognize it, or speak, it had vanished. In a second the house door was closed with some violence, as if some one had gone out.

Ruhama stood transfixed with horror.

"It was Arthur!" she cried. "Quick, go after him; bring him back!"

Wyatt obeyed her. He was outside the front door in an instant; but he could see no one. The street was solitary. He ran to the corner, to the one on the other side, but not a human being could be seen. Then he went again into the house to report his want of success.

Ruhama had staggered to the bell and rung it, for she felt herself growing deathly faint. The housekeeper, who was up, ran in, and found her mistress on the floor, but not quite insensible. As Mr. Wyatt entered she bade him fetch some cold water from the dining-room. He brought it, and then, with a muttered, imperfect explanation that Mrs. Marsh had been alarmed by the entrance of some stranger, who had retreated, he turned away and left the house.

Olive, who had not yet taken off her dress, and had her door open, heard the commotion, and came rapidly down-stairs. She thought the General had returned. The housekeeper told her Mrs. Marsh had had a fright, and was near fainting, but was better now, and would be able in a few minutes to go to her own room.

"You had better leave her to me," said Olive, going up to her friend, and clasping her arms round her. "I will take her to her room. You may put out the lights."

She led Ruhama tenderly up the stairs and into her own sumptuous apartments. She placed her upon the couch, and supported her in her arms. She would not ask a question till she had regained composure.

Ruhama sat up and looked around her.

"Did you know," she whispered, "that my husband has been here? He has been—and he is gone. This time it is forever!"

"Oh, no! no!"

"An evil fate has pursued me! A fate I have not deserved. Mr. Wyatt followed us in, and after you left me, he came out from where he was hid."

"Hid!"

"He spoke wild and wicked words! He insulted me, Olive! I bade him go, but he would have my hand in token of my forgiveness. Just then, my husband—he must have entered with a night-key—stood in the doorway! He rushed out again—out into the street! He heard—he saw only enough to make him believe me unfaithful and treacherous! Olive, I shall never see him again!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEBUTANTE DISENCHANTED.

THE scene was a country house near one of the salt marshes of New Jersey, not far from the seacoast.

It was the close of a day in spring. The rosy sunset touched the tips of a few scattered trees, and the reeds that covered acres of the soil, and the gable end of a rude, weather-beaten wooden dwelling.

The interior of the house was less inviting. A room covered with a rag carpet and furnished with settees and chairs—a few of them cushioned with pillows of red marine cloth, admitted the purple light through unshuttered windows. There was a fire of sticks in the wide chimney, and a door stood open, revealing an interior chamber, that served as a bed-

room. By one of the windows stood a large easy-chair of red stuff, luxuriously cushioned; and in it reclined the wasted form of a young girl.

An elderly lady was crossing the room bearing a tray, which she was about to deposit on a stand close to the invalid's chair.

"You must eat," she said, coaxingly; "you must gain strength as rapidly as possible."

"Yes, I will eat," the young girl answered. "My appetite has come back since you promised to take me to the city. When shall we leave this place?"

She did full justice, while speaking, to the delicate viands before her.

"When? Oh, very soon, I hope," was the response of the elder.

"To-morrow?"

"Hardly so soon; you are not strong, remember, Helene; you might have a relapse, and that would be worse here than in Richmond, because there are no skillful physicians."

"I don't want them; I have been gaining strength without them. I only want to go to the city, and be at home again."

"You are impatient to leave me, Helene."

"I am very grateful to you, madame, for all your kindness," answered the girl. "But you know I have no voice since my illness, and we could not sing any more, even if we had engagements."

"Your voice will return when you are quite strong again."

"Maybe; I do not know. But I do not want to sing any more in concerts, or in such troupes as visit the provincial cities."

"You have had as much success, Helene, as a young vocalist could expect. You cannot equal the leading prima donnas of the world with a few months of training."

"I know that. I have learned to be aware of my defects, if I have learned nothing else. I have had mediocre success, as you say; and I am not satisfied. I would rather go back and submit myself to rules."

"You should not be discouraged by one trial, or by many. Such a position as you have aimed at cannot be attained without labor."

"True, and my efforts for the last months have done me harm rather than good. I am sensible of that."

"No harm, surely, Helene—"

"Call me Elodie; that is my name."

"Mademoiselle Elodie—"

"And you need not prefix a 'Mademoiselle'—I have dropped the French and Italian. I am content with plain Elodie Sterne, a willful schoolgirl, who has had her holiday and her heyday, and is willing now to complete her education in the most proper way."

She shook back her still luxuriant flossy curls, as she pushed the stand and tray from her, having made a hearty supper.

The madame rung the little bell on the table, and the things were removed by the un-

couth attendant who was the only servant on the premises.

"The day after to-morrow we start, do we? I understood you to say so?"

"I did not say. Only that you were not strong enough to go to-morrow, and the monsieur, your uncle, has not yet returned."

"What difference will that make?" cried Elodie, drawing herself up in the chair, her eyes flashing. "He has no right to control me!"

"Not to control, of course; but—"

"Why should we wait for his return? We are not far from the city! Ten—twenty miles—how far?"

"Somewhere about that."

"And the railroad, I know, passes within a couple of miles. We were set down at a station, and came that distance in a carriage."

"Ah, you remember that, dear?"

"I remember it well, though I was so weak from the fever. And I heard you ask the distance from the city. I know these are the salt marshes, for I have been over them; and I know that some large New Jersey towns lie back—that way," pointing in one direction; "while the sea is yonder. We were not to stop here long; there are no accommodations for us."

"True, my dear; and no piano—nor music."

"We had no need of them, when I could not sit up," remarked the young girl, forgetful that Madame Leona was an artist, too, and would find the time hang heavily without opportunity of practicing. "Now I am well again. We will have the packing finished to-morrow, and set out early the next day."

"Where will you stop in the city?" inquired the lady, after a pause.

"I will go first to auntie Brill's, and then send word to my guardian."

"Do you think he will receive you?"

"Why not? He promised aunt Letty to take care of me, and said I should look to him until I was of age."

"But you cast off his authority, child."

"That was when I thought I must earn my own living, and not be a burden to him," replied the girl, a flush mounting to her face. "He thought me too young for that; and he wanted me back again, or he would not have sought me so diligently. Would he, think you, madame?"

"I do not know," mused the lady.

"Madame Leona!" the girl suddenly exclaimed, sitting up straight—"did not a letter come from auntie Brill while we were in Richmond?"

"I do not know of any."

"But I am sure one must have come. I had written to her, and told her to write. There must have been a letter. Will you ask for it?"

"You told me to do that weeks ago; and I did ask."

"Was there none?"

"No; no letters at all had been received."

"But I know there was one from auntie Brill! I know she has written! Madame, I will tell you what became of that letter: Mr. Rashleigh has kept it!"

The young lady had risen to her feet, and held herself steady by the arms of the chair.

"Nonsense, child! How you do startle one! Sit down; you are too weak to stand."

"I am not too weak! See, I can walk!"

She made several steps forward, waving back the assistance her companion offered. Then she went back to her chair.

"I know Mr. Rashleigh intercepted that letter."

"Child! you wrong your uncle—"

"Don't call him my uncle! He was only my aunt Letty's husband, who always treated her ill. I have never called him uncle! I was a boarder in his house; he had the money every week for my board; I owe him nothing!"

"He has been a faithful agent in our tour—Helene—Elodie, I mean."

"Because it was his interest. We agreed to give him a heavy share of the profits. Now that is at an end. We want his services no longer. I shall not sing any more at present. We will not have his company back to New York. Have you settled with him for good?"

"Settled? of course. We never had any account together. The profits were always divided after each concert; and our expenses paid as we went."

"How much money is there left?"

"For our share?"

"Certainly."

"I am sorry to say, very little. Your illness drained the fund sadly; and there was the doctor's bill in Richmond."

"Enough to take us to the city?"

"About enough. But, Elodie, something is still due to me. I have lost much time—waiting on you, these many weeks; and if you are not going to sing in public, it is but fair that my losses should be made good."

"I will take care of that," said the girl.

"Every cent shall be paid to you."

"How are you to pay my claims, if you have no money?"

"I will ask my guardian to advance it out of the installments due to me. Or, if I cannot draw on my property, he will lend it to me."

"Suppose he cannot, or will not, do either the one or the other?"

"Then I will go to work again, and never rest till I have repaid you!"

"Suppose your voice does not return?"

"You said it would, not half an hour since."

"But it may not. I have known singers lose their voice from such an illness as you have had, and never recover it."

Elodie grew pale.

"That would be a great misfortune," she said. "Then I shall have to teach music. I

have had some experience. I am as able to teach as Miss Weston was, when she took a class; and I play as well as she did, when I went to her for lessons. Do not fear, madame, but that I will pay you, sooner or later; with interest, too. Only help me to get away from here. One thing is certain: you can get nothing from Mr. Rashleigh."

"I mean to do so," muttered Leona, "and that before I leave this house."

Her words were not audible to the girl, who was lying back in her chair, drowsily closing her eyes.

"You had better go to bed now," the dame suggested.

"Thanks; I will! I am sorry my maid is not here to undress me; it is hardly fit work for you, madame."

"I have done it these four weeks, and never complained," observed Leona, rather sullenly, as she laid out the night-clothes for her charge.

When Elodie had retired, and the doors were closed for the night, the madame went out on the long veranda that overlooked the marshy expanse seaward.

The moon was struggling through scattered clouds, and poured a sickly light on the dreary waste, over whose distant edges a thick mist had arisen. The house was still as death. On the other side was the road, a rough, seldom used highway; and a wide stretch of flat country, partially cultivated, extended beyond.

Madame stood leaning on a low railing that overlooked the stone terrace protecting the frame building from the marshy land, so subject to inundations that the water would else have undermined the house. While wrapped in meditation by no means agreeable, she heard the quick tramp of a horse on the road. She moved swiftly along the veranda, entered the open hall door and passed through, emerging on the front piazza, which also extended across the entire width of the house.

She saw a man coming down the road. He halted at the little gate, threw the bridle over a post, and came in. Madame Leona made a gesture enjoining caution as he approached. With almost noiseless steps he came to her side.

"What news?" he whispered.

"Everything goes on as you expected; but I have had a deal of trouble with her."

"She is not worse again?"

"No; she is fast gaining strength. But she has a mind of her own; you know that, Mr. Rashleigh; and you must know, too, that I cannot control her. I must put an end to this; I will go home."

"You must not leave her just now; she has confidence in you. She suspects nothing?"

"No; how could she? I have waited on her patiently; and cooked every meal; it is new work for me."

"Your work is nearly finished. We shall be ready to leave here by the end of the week."

"Your niece says she will go the day after to-morrow."

"That is too soon. I cannot have the others here before Saturday or Friday evening. We shall have the girl married in the morning, and set out at once."

"Do you expect to get her consent so soon? I will not undertake it."

"You think she cannot be compelled, if not persuaded?"

"I could do neither; nor will I attempt it. She has the strongest will of any girl I ever knew. She has made up her mind now to go back to her guardian."

"She shall not leave this house but as a married woman—as the wife of my son. I shall have him brought to E—to-morrow, with the priest and the hospital attendant; on Friday night we will be here. The marriage can be either that night or the next morning. You will stay with her till then?"

"I will stay and do what I can. But I will not undertake to bend her will, nor to force her to anything she does not like."

"Leave that to me," said the man, with a low, chuckling laugh. "If she will not yield I have drugs that will paralyze both her will and her strength. You may give here something in a cup of tea that will put down resistance."

"I do not like it," returned Leona. "But for what you will pay me I would go at once."

"True; you want your slice of the cake; you will be lucky to have that at once; while I must do some fighting yet with the lawyers for the fortune. Anyhow, it is better than the music business."

It may be as well to mention here that the tour of concert giving had by no means fulfilled the expectations of Rashleigh, though it had yielded sufficient for support and traveling expenses. They had visited many of the Southern cities—going as far as Charleston. Elodie's health had failed; she became petulant and unmanageable; and then Rashleigh conceived the idea of bringing her North, forcing her into a marriage with his imbecile son, and then securing the property, which could not be withheld when he, Rashleigh, should represent the rights of both claimants. It was with a view to this consummation of his plans that he had taken this lonely house by the marsh for a month, hoping to accomplish his designs here. The presence of Leona was necessary, as a respectable matron, known to have been trusted by the girl, and to have been long her companion.

"What will be the effect of the drug you wish me to administer?" she asked, after a pause. "Is it dangerous to life?"

"No; certainly not. It will confuse her perceptions, filling her with pleasant fancies, and for the time paralyzing her will. Then she will fall into a profound sleep and waken perfectly well."

"Will she be conscious while the ceremony is going on?"

"Partially; but she will not think of resistance. The effect will be like that of my potations, in the days before I cured myself of drinking." Again a low laugh.

"Hush; what was that noise? Some one may overhear you."

"I heard nothing but the water-rats scampering over the stones. There—they are splashing in the marsh."

Madame Leona declared her intention of retiring to rest; and, as she turned to go, asked if she should inform Miss Sterne in the morning of her uncle's return.

"It will be better not," he replied. "I shall be off early, to complete my arrangements for having my son brought from the hospital. We shall all come together Friday evening. Keep her quiet; she must know nothing. I will have no quarreling about the matter."

"It is best so."

"We shall put her in a happy state with the medicine in her tea, and have the courtship and the wedding hurried up and all over before she wakes out of the sleep. On further reflection, we will have it on Friday night; then she can have the night for rest; and need know nothing of the arrival of her bridegroom till next day. I depend on you to keep her here till then."

"I think I can do that; but I will do no more. Catherine must give her the drugged tea. And I must receive the money you promised immediately afterward."

This was agreed on, and the conspirators separated.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONSPIRACY DISCOVERED.

LEONA was not without compunction of conscience for the promise she had given to aid in the nefarious project of Rashleigh. He had, indeed, found it difficult to persuade her. But he prevailed finally by arguments founded on her belief that she would really do the girl a service. It had become manifest that, without years of scientific instruction, Elodie could not command the fame and fortune of a prima donna. It was not worth while to continue concert giving in the provinces. Madame Leona felt not a little disappointed at the result, and listened the more willingly to Rashleigh's representations that a large fortune would come to Elodie on her marriage with his son; a marriage that need be but a mere formality, as the young man was rather deficient in mental qualities, and the inferior of Elodie in education. Once married, her claim on the money, which was barred by illegitimate birth, would be united with that of the young man; and she would enter into instant possession. As soon as she reached her majority she would have the sole control of the property.

Rashleigh was to pay Madame Leona very handsomely for her assistance; and by this promise of remuneration she had been induced to remain with her charge. She had been

brought over to consent to aid in the strange marriage, by being convinced that the girl herself, when in possession of independence, would be glad of what she had done. And if dissatisfied—the woman reasoned—what so easy as to procure the annulment of such a marriage, and the equitable division of the money?

But Leona resolved that she would take no active part. She would simply attend to the duties she had undertaken, and be ready with help in case of the girl's need of it. She was so delicate and sensitive, an experienced friend ought to stand by her; and then, in the event of trouble afterward, Leona could shelter herself behind the plea that she had had nothing to do with the matter. In fact, she might manage the affair so as to seem ignorant of all that had occurred!

Bright as the morning looked the fair young girl when she awoke, after a night of unbroken rest. The thought of "going home" had been as new life to her. She walked to the windows of her sitting room and saw the sunlit mists lifting themselves from the marshy waste, and the tall trees on the verge glistening with dew-drops illuminated. She warbled a melody that might have charmed the birds to listen. She threw up the sash, and let the cool, moist air play on her face, and breathed it deeply, as if drinking in health.

When Leona came with the tray of breakfast, she partook heartily of the broiled game, oysters and omelet, and drank the rich coffee with exclamations of approval. When she had finished the meal, she gave directions to complete the packing for their removal.

Leona would not permit her to do anything with her own hands. "You will have need of all your strength," she said. "Any fatigue in your present state is dangerous."

So Elodie merely superintended the work, singing merrily the while, though her voice had nothing of its former power.

"Why have you left out this dress?" she asked, pointing to a white silk laid out on the bed, with its sash and lace berth. "I shall not want to wear it soon in New York."

"But I hoped you would give us the pleasure, on the last evening of your stay here, to see you once more look like yourself."

Elodie laughed.

"Am I to be dressed in all that finery—in such a place as this—for the benefit of the frogs that serenade us every night?"

A laugh echoed her words, and Leona started up, pale as death, and ran to the door. It was only Catherine, the maid of all work, who stood looking at the splendid dress through the open door of the bedroom. Madame Leona frowned, and bade her begone, and not come in that way scaring people.

The girl gave her a significant, searching look as she went down the stairs.

"But, indeed, I shall not want the dress," persisted Elodie. "Put it in that trunk."

With some hesitation she was obeyed.

By the evening everything was in readiness for a journey. The excitement did the invalid good. She ate her meals heartily; she had gained more than in a week before. She talked cheerfully of her anticipations and plans for the future.

Leona became nervous. How was she to delay their departure the next day, the day on which Rashleigh and his son were to arrive? She had gone too far to retreat. The opportunity of retrieving her fortunes and making herself independent for life, might be marred by the willfulness of her charge.

The difficulty was solved for her the next morning. It was raining torrents!

Leona gave an exclamation of joy when she threw open the blinds, and drew aside the curtains. When she found Elodie up and half-dressed, she told her of the state of the weather. They could not possibly set out in such a storm!

The girl went to the window and looked at the clouds, with expressions of chagrin and disappointment.

"It cannot rain at this rate all day," she observed.

"But, my dear, it would be madness, sheer madness, for you to risk health and life, by venturing out in the wet weather, and you so weak! Have patience; to-morrow will come!"

"I cannot wait till to-morrow."

"We have no close carriage; you could never reach the station. Be satisfied to wait. I will promise you we will go to-morrow."

"Even if it rains!"

"I can send and engage a covered wagon; we will set off as early as you please. Only make up your mind to stay indoors to-day. See, how heavy the mists are settling. Be as cheerful as possible; I have some illustrated papers you have not seen."

She brought an armful of these, and then went to ring for breakfast.

"I am going down, madame," said the girl. "I cannot stay in my rooms. I must walk a little; and I want to see if the carryall is ready for use."

"I attended to that yesterday."

"Let me have my own way. I am determined to go down."

The breakfast was eaten in the dining-room of the house; a cheerless room enough. But Elodie did justice to the really excellent repast, and walked about the dwelling, making the inquiries she wished, and watching the driving clouds from the windows. She thought they might set out in the afternoon if it cleared; but of that there was no prospect.

Madame Leona quitted her side scarcely a moment the whole day. She strove to keep up her spirits by conversation, yet her own courage began to fail as the hours passed, bringing nearer the dreaded night.

The storm was swept away by a north-west wind about five o'clock, and the sun set clear in a bank of purple and gold resting upon the wooded hills in the distance.

Elodie had sat by the window of the little sitting-room, watching the shifting clouds, for an hour and more; and when Madame Leona left her for a few minutes, she went out into the veranda for a breath of the moist air. She began to walk up and down, her eyes fixed upon the rich sunset promising "a goodly morrow."

Suddenly she started, hearing her name uttered in an eager whisper. She saw a head put forth from the angle of the building, and recognized that of Catherine, the attendant.

"Hist—whist!" the woman whispered, with a cautious gesture, as Elodie came to the end of the veranda. "I have been thyrin' all day to get a chance to speak to ye, but the madam—"

"What do you wish, Catherine?" asked her young mistress.

"Oh, whist, for the love of heaven!" she whispered, with agonized looks of alarm around her.

"What do you fear? Do you want to see me alone?"

"Yes, indade I do; the heart of me will be clane broke inthirely if I don't tell ye! I've been watchin' all day—"

"Then come to my chamber. No one shall disturb us there. Come after me."

Elodie went indoors and up the stairs to her own apartment. She locked and bolted the door of the sitting-room, and passing into her bedroom, placed the door slightly ajar.

Presently Catherine came up, carrying a tray of caudles. Her steps were noiseless, and she came straight to the door, where Elodie stood to receive her. As she went in the door was closed and bolted behind her.

"Now we shall not be disturbed. Tell me what it is."

The woman set down the tray, clasped her hands, and sunk upon her knees.

"It's thankful I am, Miss, to have the word with ye, late as it is!" she sighed, fervently, though in a whisper.

"But what is it?"

With a fearful glance about her, the woman rose, stooped her head close to Elodie's, and whispered very low, but distinctly:

"It's careful ye must be, honey, not to dhrink the tay they bring ye to-night."

"The tea! Who is to bring me tea?"

"Hush, spake low, honey; it might cost both our lives if she heard us."

"Cost our lives! If who heard us? What do you mean?"

"This, dear: don't dhrink the tay; not a sup; not a dhrup."

"Why not?"

"Bekase—it'll be dhrugged for ye."

"Drugged—my tea! Has any one ever done such a thing?"

"Never yet, honey! sure, I've set it to dhrav wid me own hands; and I'd never have suspected the like, if me own ears hadn't heerd the same."

"What have you heard? When?"

"Only the night before last, when the mather came, and went away on the sly."

"Who came? Not Mr. Rashleigh?"

The woman gave a series of nods, laying her finger on her lip.

"What did he come for? I heard nothing of it."

"No; they wouldn't let you into the say-cret."

"What secret? Tell me, instantly."

"I heard them at their plotting, Miss. I was coming in from the cellar, an' whin I heard the whispering, and a man's voice talking to the madame, I jist bided a bit by the big crack in the flure yonder, where I could hear ivery word. Och! the murtherin' spalpeen!"

"What did you hear?"

"This, darlin': the ould man manes to marry ye to his son."

"He cannot do that!"

"Hist! but he won't go the fair way. He's to put somethin' in the tay to make ye crazy, and not knowin' what ye're about, and to have the praste and groom all ready—bad luck to 'em! and have the ceremony over, and ye in a sound sleep afther, and to carry ye off as a bride!"

The girl's quick perception took in the plot at once.

"When was this to be done?" she asked.

"This very night, me darlint."

Elodie shuddered; a thrill of horror ran through her frame.

"And madame!—she consented to such a foul treachery?"

"Faix, and she did! But she'd not do it wid her own hands! she would have it to say she'd naught to do wid the matther—in case things turned out badly. Millia murther—but it's a deep one she is."

The girl's hands covered her face; but she suppressed the sobs that struggled for outbreak.

"I was to make the tay, and the mather himself—he'll be here shortly—was to put in the dhrug. But we're ahead of them, you and me, honey."

"Oh, what shall I do?" wailed the poor girl, wringing her hands.

"I'll tell you what; jist make believe you've dhrunk the tay, and throw it behind the fire; and then puttin' it's taken effect in puttin' ye to shlape before the praste can begin his pal aver."

"No, no! who can tell what they might do? they might kill me, and sink me in the marsh yonder. Oh, Catherine, I have no friend but you!"

"An' I'll stand by ye, honey! If they touch a hair of your head—"

"We must get away from here—to-night; at once! You must go with me, Catherine."

"Ay, that will I, darlint, to the world's end! But how can we get away?"

"I can walk—I'm sure I can—to the station!"

"An' if ye tire, it's meself that can carry

yees—such a light slip of a thing! But will ye wait for the dark, honey?"

"Do you know the way, Catherine?"

"Indeed'n I do—every inch of it! Couldn't we go to Squire Barber's—it's only three miles—and they wouldn't follow us there."

"They might; we must take the train. We are safe, once at the station. I have money to take us both to New York."

She pulled out a silken purse, half-filled, and then put it back in her pocket.

"But the madame! She'll raise the hue and cry," suggested the Irishwoman.

"She must know nothing! She would intercept us. We must steal out, Catherine."

"And how shall we get away from her?"

"We can get out the back way, while she is at supper."

"The mather will be here before then."

"Then we must look her in her own room, and escape before she can get out."

There seemed in reality no other way. By dusk the men would be in the house; the feeble strength of Elodie could be overpowered readily; it would be scarcely possible to escape unseen. Madame would be deputed to see that she drank the tea prepared for her. There was not a moment to lose.

The young girl felt her presence of mind rise with the emergency. She tossed to Catherine a hat and shawl she had been accustomed to wear when walking on the veranda, and, gliding from the room, went to the door of Leona's, on the opposite side of the narrow hall.

The room was kept locked by the madame, and when she went in to change her dress, she usually left the key on the outside. It was so, fortunately, on the present occasion. Elodie heard her singing inside, as she was trailing a dress from the closet where it had hung.

Quick as thought she turned the key, and drew it out of the lock. The singing went on, and by that she judged that Leona heard nothing.

She ran back to her own room, snatched a mantle and hood from the wardrobe, and seized the hand of Catherine, who was already equipped. Both sped noiselessly down the stairs, and left the house.

"She may not see us," cried the escaped prisoner, "and the turn in the road will hide us directly."

CHAPTER XIV.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

THE two fugitives took the road leading to the railway station. Elodie clung to Catherine's arm, and was thus enabled to walk very fast. She refused the woman's entreaties that she would stop and rest, when they were out of sight of the house by Saltmarsh.

"No, no, we must hurry on!" she cried.

"Madame Leona will soon discover that we are missing, if she has not already; and she will pursue us. What if she does, Catherine? She is stronger than I am!"

"It's meself that would fight for you, Miss, and to the death!" said the sturdy woman.

"You must do so, Catherine, if she does try to drag me back. I have not a weapon to defend myself. Oh, if there were a farm-house, or a cabin, I would beg help of anybody."

"There is none nearer than Squire Barber's, and the mather might come there, and tell his lies, and say you were his son's wife, and a crazy woman, Miss."

"Very true; and they might give me up. The station is nearest. Oh, how I wish it were dark!"

The good woman reassured her by saying they could get at least half way there, before the "madam" could manage to get out of her room.

"She'll spend a quarter of an hour in callin' me, ye see; for she'll think directly that I've locked the door unbeknownst, as she tould me wance to do, if I found it open when she was away from it."

"Did she? I am very glad of that!"

"Surely; and she'll niver suspect any wan else! Her room looks on the road, and she knows my quarters are on t'other side. I must laugh to think how she'll yell for me! I've often wondered what she kept so precious in that room, that she always locked it!"

"Her cosmetics, I suppose," answered Elodie, and then remembering that her faithful attendant would not understand the word, she explained it as well as her failing breath would let her.

They had walked very fast over three-fourths of a mile, when the delicate girl's strength began to give way. She drew her breath gaspingly, and clung closer to her companion's arm; Catherine would have lifted and carried her, but she would not permit that, much as she feared being overtaken. The woman flung one arm around her waist, and half-carried her some rods further; but her limbs failed her. With a groan of despair she sunk upon the ground.

They were sheltered by a clump of bushes growing by the roadside. Catherine removed the young lady's hood, to give her fresh air, and softly drew her head to her own shoulder, bidding her rest. Elodie whispered that she would be able to go on in a few minutes. She had not thought of bringing with her any stimulant, in view of her need of a restorative.

The roll of wheels was heard approaching!

Elodie looked up, terrified, into her protector's face. It was growing dark so rapidly, she had hopes that any carriage might pass without seeing them; but she did not know.

Catherine answered the look by clasping her more closely.

"Lie still, honey!" she whispered. "Make no sound, while I bide listening."

In two or three minutes she released her clasp, and rose to her feet.

The wheels were those of a loaded wagon, and came from a cross-road, just ahead.

Bidding the young lady keep still, Catherine stepped boldly into the road.

In a moment she returned; took up Elodie in her arms, and carried her out to the wagon, which had stopped.

Elodie gave a cry of apprehension.

"Whisht, me darlint! there's room for you, and a nice chance to ride to the station," she whispered.

She had asked the wagoner's hospitality for "a sick leddy," going to her friends in New York, and he had consented to displace one of the boxes with which his wagon was loaded, piling it in front, to make room for her.

The young invalid was lifted to the vacant place, and Catherine took the shawl from her own shoulders to make a pillow for her head.

"But where are you going to sit?" asked Elodie.

"I shall just walk, and take hold of the wagon behind," replied the Irishwoman.

This she did, keeping close to her charge, who held one of her strong hands, part of the time, in her own soft clasp. Thus they went to the station, which proved to be fully three miles from the house on the marsh.

As they drew near, the whistle of a coming train was heard, with the rush of its approach.

Elodie started up in affright. But the lights gleaming like eyes in the darkness showed plainly that the train came from the opposite direction to the one leading to the city. The wagoner comforted the supposed sick passenger by assuring her that the "down train" to the city would not be along for nearly an hour.

"Suppose they should have come by this!" she said, in a faint whisper, to her attendant.

"No danger!" was the response; and presently the stout, strong arms lifted the girl from her perch on the wagon, to carry her into the waiting-room.

Elodie insisted on rewarding the kind wagoner, and did so with a liberal fee, besides her thanks. She objected to being taken to the waiting-room. If by any chance Rashleigh and his party should be on board the up-train, they might come in there.

Catherine assured her there was no chance of that; adding the information that while following the wagon, a few minutes before their arrival, she had distinctly seen the lights of a close carriage, which had passed them, going rapidly in the other direction.

"And what a mercy of Providence it was that you were safe in the wagon, honey!" she said. "They could not see me either, for the long box stickin' out behind."

"Do you think Mr. Rashleigh was in that carriage?" asked Elodie.

"I'm that sure of it that I wouldn't feel safe if he'd seen me!" answered the woman.

"Oh, then, what are we to do? He'll miss me presently, and he will have time to drive back before the train comes. It is not due for forty minutes yet, I heard the porter say!"

For once, Catherine could make no suggestion.

"I dare not stay in the waiting-room, nor on the platform anywhere!" wailed the poor hunted girl. "And I dare not ask protection from the agent. Men always refuse to believe a helpless woman, against a man who will tell any falsehood in claiming her! What shall we do?"

"Bide a minute here, me darlint," Catherine said; and away she flew.

The five minutes or more of her absence were like the interval of hours to the terrified fugitive, who knew there was no safety for her when once her pursuer should have discovered her flight. The distance to the house could be driven over in less than ten minutes, she felt convinced.

"Be 'asy, honey," whispered a comforting voice in her ear. "I've got the wagoner to spake to the baggage-man, and tould him ye were abducted from your friends, and had barely made your escape, with only me to help ye. The baggage-master will have a place for us in his own express-car, and slip ye in unbeknownst. I shall go with you—don't be afraid. But I had to promise a lot of money!"

Elodie uttered an exclamation of grateful joy. If there was not enough in her purse, she said, she would give him the diamond ring she wore upon her forefinger.

The sagacious Catherine had rightly judged as to Leona's conclusions and behavior. When she discovered that her door was locked, she was certain it had been done by the servant, in pursuance of her instructions. She called her loudly, and throwing up the window, shouted till she was hoarse. She called Elodie, and beat desperately at the door.

Then the truth flashed on her brain. She had been duped by the girl. By some means the conspiracy had become known, and the intended victim had fled. What was to be done?

Leona was full of rage. She knew the entire blame would be thrown on her by Rashleigh. Yet it might be possible to overtake the fugitives, if she could pursue them at once. The young girl could not walk far at a rapid pace. She must stop frequently to rest; and as Leona knew the road they would take—invariably the one leading to the station—the pursuer might easily intercept their flight.

It was growing dark fast, however.

With her scissors the captive tried to force the lock of the door; but it had been put on roughly on the other side, and the keyhole resisted her efforts.

She might almost leap from the window to the veranda, there being no roof to it on that side. Quickly as her fingers could work, she knotted a corner of one of the sheets, and tied the other to the bedstead, which she dragged to the window. The sheet was not quite long enough; she was obliged to light a lamp and

tie on the other sheet, and to test the strength of this substitute for a rope-ladder. Luckily it was but a few feet she had to descend; and having ascertained beyond a doubt that it would bear her weight, she stepped out upon the window sill, and drew the bedstead close to it. Grasping the twisted sheet, she tremblingly let herself down, and reached the veranda in safety.

It was now quite dark, and she had to go in the kitchen for another light, and to explore the house. It took her some time to get the lamp lighted, as the wood fire was out, and the match-box mislaid. After a most vexatious delay, she obtained the light, and ran upstairs.

Elodie, she soon discovered, had gone out; her hood and cloak were missing; also the shawl and hat she usually put on when leaving her room. Catherine must have been the companion of her flight.

Seizing another light shawl, Leona hurried down-stairs, and out in the road. It was so dark she could not discern objects at a short distance, and after going a few yards, she stopped, conscious that her pursuit would be utterly hopeless.

The only thing to be done was to watch for the arrival of Rashleigh, and send him after the runaways.

She paced the veranda for what seemed hours to her impatience, before she saw the lights of the carriage-lamps. It came rapidly down the road, and stopped at the gate.

Rashleigh alighted first, and Leona called to him. The alarm was given in her quick, eager tones.

"Hush!" he whispered, as he left the carriage and came through the gate.

"Mr. Rashleigh! for mercy's sake lose no time! She has escaped! She must be at the station by this time!"

"Who—Elodie?"

"Yes—yes; and she has Catherine with her! I had just stepped into my room, and the door was locked on me! It took me such a time to get out that I had lost sight of them!"

A torrent of profane imprecations, in which the outwitted guardian was not spared, came from the disappointed man.

"How came she to know anything?" he asked, when he had vented his rage.

"How can I tell? She learned nothing from me. Aha!" as a light broke on her perceptions—"I have it! Catherine must have been listening when you spoke to me the other night! She heard your words, and repeated them to the girl."

"I will go back at once!" cried Rashleigh. "I have just time! The others will stay; take care of my son!"

He dashed out of the gate, sprung into the carriage, from which three men had just alighted, and called out to the driver:

"To the nearest station—and double fare if you get me there in time for the down train!"

The carriage had been hired at a station some three miles further down, to throw suspicion off the track. The driver wheeled about, and the rapid rolling of the vehicle could be heard after it had vanished in the darkness.

A man in clerical dress, wearing a waterproof cloak, led into the house a youth of about nineteen, who looked about him wonderingly and smiled at everything he saw. They were followed by the attendant who had brought him from the hospital.

Leona, vexed to the heart, and chafing inwardly, was obliged to show these unwelcome guests into the parlor, to replenish the fire, and to light one in the kitchen for the preparation of their supper.

She had sagacity enough to know that it was not at all likely Rashleigh would return. He would pursue the fugitives to the city, unless he were too late for the train.

It was a bitter humiliation to her to have the strangers thrust on her for the night; but there was no help for it. She must play the maid-of-all-work, for the first and last time. Before breakfast, she determined she would be on her own way to New York.

The driver of the carriage was resolved to earn the double fare promised. The whistle of the coming train broke on their ears just as they reached the station. Rashleigh sprang out, paid the fare, and was barely in time to procure his ticket. He asked if two women, one of them a young girl, had taken tickets.

No; the agent had seen nothing of them.

But a man dressed like a coachman, who stood on the platform, heard the question, and called out:

"All right, boss; I see'd 'em myself. The gal was delicate like, and had to be helped to walk, eh?"

"The same, my good fellow; where are they?"

"You'll find 'em forrard! They went ahead of the smoking car. They're on the train."

The cry of "All aboard!" warned Rashleigh that he had not a minute to lose. He hurried into the nearest car.

Thus the fugitives and their pursuer went to New York together.

CHAPTER XV.

CAGED AGAIN.

THE train stopped at Jersey City. Elodie, rested and refreshed, was lifted from the place she had occupied in the express car, and took Catherine's arm to walk to the ferryboat, after profuse thanks and payment to the man who had furnished the accommodation.

Catherine proposed taking her to a hotel in Jersey City for the night; but the young lady objected. She would rest on the other side. Thus she lost the protection of the express-agent, and, without knowing it, ran headlong into the jaws of danger.

Rashleigh's quick eye scanned the passengers as they alighted from the several cars. He

did not see among them those he sought, and was beginning to fear he had been misled, when he caught sight of two female figures helped out of a freight-car ahead of those for passengers. He came close to them, and at once recognized both, notwithstanding the disguise of veil and hood.

He was near enough to hear Elodie say she preferred going over to New York, and would rest there. He stepped back out of view, and followed them as they went on board the boat.

When they reached the other side and landed, Elodie stood a few moments with her companion outside the ferry-house, deliberating where they would direct their steps. The Merchants' Hotel was known to Catherine as a respectable place, and thither they decided to go for the night.

"I have no money left," said Elodie; "but there is my ring. I can leave it in pledge, and Mr. Blount will send for it when he pays the bill. Can we walk? How far is it, Catherine?"

"Only half a block, Miss. If you will lean on me! Step here across the street, Miss."

They gained the other side of the street. Suddenly a man rushed up to them, tore Elodie from Catherine's hold, threw a cloak over her head, and catching her in his arms, bore her swiftly to a carriage he had signaled to stand in waiting.

The Irishwoman's first impulse was to use her strong arms to snatch his prey from the ruffian, and she did not scream. She rushed after Rashleigh, and seized him by the skirt of his coat, with an outcry of Hibernian expressions of indignant amazement.

Rashleigh thrust Elodie into the vehicle, where she fell in a heap, stunned and unable to utter a sound, and then flung off the woman who had laid hold of him. He did this with such violence, that she fell with force upon the paving-stones, holding in her hands the piece of coat-tail which she had torn off in the scuffle.

Stunned and helpless, she lay for a moment, till a policeman, who just then saw a woman lying on the ground, and took her for a drunken vagrant, came and touched her with his staff, ordering her to get up and go on.

The poor woman obeyed with an alacrity that showed her to be no drunkard. Claspings her hands to her head, to see if the bruise she had received had not knocked it off, she broke into shrieks and wild entreaties for help, to catch the villain who had knocked her down and carried off her young mistress.

But the carriage was out of sight long before she could explain the matter to the policeman. Different counsels were given by several individuals whom the noise of the "row" had gathered together, and poor Catherine, unable to decide on what to do, was fain to betake herself to the house of one of her acquaintances, where she bemoaned the outrage and her loss amid sympathizing exclamations.

Rashleigh lifted Elodie upon the seat of the

carriage and removed the cloak from her head. He thought she had fainted; when he found her in possession of her senses, he closed the window; but neither of them spoke a word till the carriage stopped.

It had drawn up—according to instructions—in a lonesome side-street near the East river, before a small two and a half story house of dingy brick, in one of the lower windows of which was a milliner's sign. The mistress of the establishment plied a small trade in bonnets, and kept a lodging-house for laboring men engaged on the wharves. She was an old crony of Rashleigh's, and the sister of his first wife.

He stepped out of the vehicle and told Elodie to follow him, assisting her as she obeyed. The door was opened even before he could ring the bell; he having stopped an instant to pay the driver. An elderly woman stood, holding the door partly open, and peering at the newcomers.

Rashleigh whispered to her, and with a nod, she took the young girl's hand and led her up the narrow, dirty stairs partly covered with rag-carpeting. A lamp was burning on the landing; this she took up, and opened the door of a room looking to the back of the house by a single window. Elodie gazed helplessly in her face as she suffered herself to be led in. Was there a gleam of human kindness to which she could appeal?

The woman was over fifty years old, and had a most forbidding countenance. Her face was gaunt, wrinkled and sallow. The small, sunken gray eyes had an expression of malignant ferocity blended with greed, that froze the very soul of the unhappy girl. Her sinewy frame betokened strength the captive's girlish struggles could never overcome. She saw at a glance that she could hope for nothing from the woman's pity, and sunk with a moan on the low chair placed for her.

The woman asked if she would have supper. The poor girl declined to eat anything. Then her jailer set down the lamp, making a muttered apology for the absence of a fire, as she "had not expected company," and withdrew, locking the door behind her.

Elodie lifted her head to take a brief survey of her prison-cell. It was narrow and close, and a suffocating smell pervaded it. The walls were dingy and begrimed with dust. There were no curtains to the window, but shackling and half-broken blinds excluded the light when it was daylight. The panes were dusty and cracked, but not broken. The bed was a straw mattress, covered with a dirty wadded-calico coverlet; the sheets and pillow-cases were yellow and stained. The aspect of things was dismal beyond imagination; and the courage of the hapless prisoner sunk as she looked on her surroundings.

She had exchanged comparative comfort for the horrors of the vilest den she had ever seen; the society of a woman of culture who might have been won to pity and save her, for the

tyranny of a beldame whose cruel spirit looked out in every hideous feature. What was to become of her? More than ever she was in the power of her persecutor. Would she perforce fall a victim to his diabolical plot?

In an agony she clasped her hands over her forehead, to still the throbbing of her burning brain. She feared she would go mad. A passionate longing for death took possession of her.

Then a better feeling stole over her, as if she heard the whisper of an angel. It prompted her to prayer, in unshaken trust that One lived and reigned whose ears were always open to the cry of the desolate.

Slowly she slid down from the chair to her knees, bowing her head on her folded hands. She prayed fervently; and with the prayer came a sense of security she felt sure was inspired in answer to it. The pressure on her brain was loosed, and she wept; wept abundantly.

When she rose, her self-possession had returned. A calm was on her rebellious spirit, and hope sprung to life again. She would not yield to the abandonment of despair. A way of escape would be opened; God would save her from her cruel enemies. On one thing she determined: to be watchful for an opportunity, and if possible, not to eat or drink what might contain drugs to deprive her of reason.

The key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Rashleigh came in, carrying some stout boards and a hammer and nails. He set those down, locked the door again, picked up the lamp till it gave a better light, and then took the other chair.

He began by an apology for the severity to which his "niece's" obstinacy had driven him. He had no wish to be harsh with her; he regretted the necessity of bringing her to such a place; but she need stay no longer than she chose; she must know that.

"You mean," said the girl, calmly, "that you will release me when I have submitted to your terms?"

"That is it exactly," was the response, with an affirmative nod.

A pause ensued.

"Mr. Rashleigh," Elodie resumed, almost surprised herself at her coolness and self-possession, "I know that it would be of no use to appeal to your pity, or kindness—"

"I am glad you are so rational," he began, interrupting her. She went on:

"Would you set me free, if I were to sign over to you, or your son, all my right and title to the property which you know belongs to me?"

"Certainly not, my dear; for such a transfer you have no right to make. You are not of age. Those who hold the money would laugh at me."

"But if I will give you a written promise—sworn to, if you like—to pay the whole over to you as soon as I come of age?"

"'Twon't do. No such promise would be

binding on you, either legally or morally. 'Duress,' you know, nullifies any pledge. Then I would have to wait four years before your majority."

"But my guardian!—if I write to him, he will secure you."

"He would be more likely to set the police on me, and have me sent to the State prison. No, no, my pretty singing-bird; I've been at no little trouble to cage you; and I don't mean to let you go till I have accomplished the project I have long cherished. My services as your traveling-agent were only the preparation for that."

"For what?"

"A marriage between you and my son."

The girl shuddered from head to foot.

"I grant you he is not a bridegroom to be coveted. Nature has been a niggard to him. But the advantages will not be entirely on his side. He is a cripple as well as defective in intellect. He will be no jealous tyrant, like some husbands I could name. Much of his time may have to be passed in the hospital. You will have unbounded freedom: can come and go as you will. When your claims and his are united, there will be no further opposition to the immediate transfer of the property; and I am the proper custodian, as the nearest relative and natural guardian of both of you."

Elodie turned away her face. She did not wish her enemy to see the expression of disgust and horror she could not repress.

"Come, child; do not be obstinate. Only yield in this, and you may command me in everything else. There is nothing you can ask which I would not do for you. Consent to obey me, and to-morrow you shall go to one of the first hotels in the city, till your own house is ready, or till you go abroad, if you choose rather to do so. Come, Elodie, trust me."

She shrunk from his outstretched hand.

"Mr. Rashleigh, I will never do what you propose. No power on earth can force me to marry your son!"

"You may think better of this!" retorted her captor, gloomily.

"Never; I will die first!"

He glared at her with a terrible meaning in his eyes; but she met his gaze with proud firmness. Then he rose and taking the lamp, with the table on which it stood, to the window, he busied himself with fastening open the blinds, throwing up the sash to get at them.

The cool air refreshed the captive. She asked him timidly, if he would not leave the sash open, as the close and fetid atmosphere oppressed her, dreadfully.

"I do not care if I do," he replied. "I don't want you, child, to suffer any more than is necessary. You will find it impossible to get out or look out through the planks I shall nail up; and all the air and light you want will come through these cracks."

He went on with the work of nailing inside

of the blinds thick planks, with an interval of half an inch between the upper ones, for the admission of air and light.

When the planks were fastened by driving in huge nails, they formed an impregnable barrier. No strength of a frail girl could move them.

Rashleigh drew a breath of satisfaction as he seated himself.

"That will do nicely," he observed. "You can not move one of those planks. You are a prisoner, as safe as you would be in the Tombs, till you agree to my wishes. You had better be reasonable, girl. Liberty and a life of luxury are yours on one simple condition."

"I will not have them on such terms," replied Elodie, resolutely.

"You will not even be compelled to live with your husband, if you prefer not. His state of health will be sufficient excuse."

The determination in the girl's face did not relax.

"You will be tired of this in a few days," said her captor. "It is a dismal hole for a young lady brought up so daintily! You will not go out, nor communicate with any one. Your meals—hard fare—will be brought by the woman you saw; and she is a near relation—my son's aunt—and deeply interested in his good fortune, because she will share in it."

"I shall be starved," wailed the prisoner, "for I will not eat food you may have poisoned."

"Give yourself no uneasiness on that score, girl," said the villain. "You need not fear that either food or drink will be drugged."

"You would have done it this very night."

"I own it; that was my first scheme; but it won't do now. You could prove the attempt by that jade Catherine; and the marriage would be set aside. No—I must have no hitch of that sort. Your full and free consent must be given, and that we shall have, before many days of this den and solitary imprisonment."

"Better life-long imprisonment—better death—than such a fate!" murmured Elodie.

"Take care, girl, how you provoke me," growled her persecutor. "Your death would be as much of a downfall to me as the marriage I mentioned."

"And better for me," she sighed, despairingly.

"If you are obstinate"—with a fierce oath—"I wouldn't mind—" His wolfish glare supplied his horrible meaning.

"You will kill me, then!" cried Elodie. "You dare not! You would be afraid!"

"Who knows you are here? What is to prevent my putting you out of my way, if I choose?"

"God will save me from your power, cruel, wicked man!" sobbed the girl.

"I doubt it. I see no chance for you, but to submit, or perish in your obstinacy. It will come to one or the other; and that very soon. But you shall not be starved or pois-

oned. You will have supper sent up directly. I'll bid you good-night, now. Whenever you make up your mind to be sensible, tell Mrs. Hazel—that is your landlady's name—and she will send word to me. But remember, you never leave this room till you leave it as my daughter—or a corpse!"

He took up the hammer and nails, drew the key from his pocket, unlocked the door and locked it again, and descended the stairs.

Half an hour afterward a plate of cold chicken, bread and rancid butter, was put inside the door, with a glass of beer. Elodie was anxious to keep up her strength and forced herself to eat a little; then threw her shawl over the bed, drew her cloak over her, and sunk into exhausted slumbers.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAVED FROM THE FIRE.

MR. THOMAS WYATT received an early call on the day following the occurrences related in a former chapter. It was from a Southern gentleman; a stranger, who presented a letter.

Tom was hardly astonished to find it was a challenge from General Marsh. The bearer, his friend, was commissioned to make all arrangements as to time, place and weapons.

In addition to an excellent heart, young Wyatt possessed strong common sense, and pride of the right sort enough to prevent a false sense of shame from interfering with his duty. He made a frank confession of his error, fully exonerating the lady from the least shadow of blame, and taking it all to himself.

"I'll perish before suffering any scandal to get afloat to her injury!" he ejaculated, with earnestness. "General Marsh must have heard her words as well as mine; and he knows her truth and goodness."

"He does," replied Colonel Beauchamp, the friend selected to conduct the affair. "He acknowledges it freely, and is full of self-reproach for his previous harsh judgment. But he does not choose that any man shall live to say he insulted his wife with impunity."

"I deserve to be shot," cried Tom, "but I will not stand up to fight with your friend!"

An exclamation of contemptuous incredulity passed over the colonel's face.

"I understand you, sir. You Southerners imagine that we who live north of the Potomac would rather make our quarrels a police affair than take the chances of getting our deserts. You mistake me; I am no coward. I am willing the General shall shoot me down the first time he meets me, and I will leave my affidavit that I deserve it. But I will not fight him because I tried to injure him."

"He demands the reparation at your hands."

"I have been a dead shot from boyhood and should be likely to hit my mark. I would not fire at him and he would not like to take aim at me, knowing that he ran no risk. The law would make it murder."

"If you are a man of honor, sir—"

"I am not, at least in this affair. I behaved like a scamp. The General might kick me, if he would, and I should have no right to object. If you will convey to the lady my humble apology, I shall be obliged to you beyond expression. I am not worthy to speak to her."

"If you are willing to make the apology to her husband, sir, I think he would be satisfied to go no further."

"You may say as much from me."

"Pardon me, but I want the apology in writing."

"As you please."

Tom drew a small escritoir on the table toward him, opened it, and took out writing papers.

"I will do you the justice, sir," remarked Colonel Beauchamp, "to say that I believe you sincerely repentant for your fault; not actuated by any fear of consequences."

Tom dipped his pen, and dashed off his note without heeding these words; he cared not, indeed, for any opinion formed or expressed of his conduct. His own self-respect was all he valued; and that could only be restored by voluntary humiliation and atonement.

The bearer of the challenge read over the note placed in his hands, and declared his conviction that his principal would find it satisfactory.

"Though I would have been torn by wild horses before I would have so humbled myself," he muttered, "unless I had just before mortally wounded my adversary."

"You would be afraid of having mean motives imputed to you; and would risk your life, or take another's, to keep up your reputation for bravery!"

"That is it."

"Who is the coward, then?"

The Southerner could not answer. He had received a lesson; a new one in the code of honor he had learned from boyhood. As he took his leave, he thought young Wyatt a man of true dignity, and resolved to seek his acquaintance.

But he had no opportunity. Tom waited till two or three days had passed, and there was no probability of hearing any more from the General. Then—having had his baggage in readiness some time—he took the train for the West. His friends heard the best accounts of his success and his welfare during a year or two afterward.

"How far the little candle throws its beam!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world,"

said the greatest poet who ever lived.

And the frank self-condemnation of the conscience-stricken Tom, faithfully represented by Colonel Beauchamp, had its salutary effect upon General Marsh. It was like death to him to acknowledge himself in the wrong; but he did not hesitate when convinced that he had done so.

The same evening he admitted himself, by his latch-key, into his own house. There was no servant about, and he went quietly into the library. Olive Weston had just taken a book from one of the alcoves, and was bringing it to the light, to examine it.

She saw the General, and the book fell from her hand. Before he could say a word, she fled from the room and up the stairs like a frightened fawn.

The master of the house felt his courage ebbing, in his consciousness that he had deserved to be shunned like this. If the guest so feared his presence, how would it be with the wife to whom he had caused such sorrow needlessly?

There was a rustle of silken drapery on the stairs; the patter of impetuous feet; and the next instant a pair of tender arms were flung around his neck.

"Arthur! Arthur! I have you at last! You shall not escape me again!"

"Ruhama! my true and noble wife! Can you forgive me?"

The arms clasped him more closely; the soft cheek, now wet with tears, was pressed to his; the voice murmured, "Arthur! my husband!" and could utter no more.

The General did not spare himself. His besetting sin—jealousy cruel as the grave—was brought forth in confession—shamed—and slain before the wife's eyes. Never, never would it again be indulged. It had caused him the tortures of a lost soul; it had brought him to the verge of suicide; but he was freed from its curse forever.

"The chain fell from me," he protested, "when I heard my wronged wife, even in the bitterness of my cruel desertion, say that she loved me!"

"You heard that?" questioned the happy wife. "And was it news to you?"

"I had never dared believe, till then, that I really possessed your love, dearest."

"Then it was a happy mistake—your jealousy—that led you into knowledge of the truth! I am glad you misunderstood me for a while, since the result has cured you, Arthur!"

When mutual explanations were ended, Ruhama called Olive down, and the well-pleased three sat down to a dainty supper together. Visitors came to the door, but the porter was ordered to admit no one.

They were a merry party; and even Olive suppressed her sighs as she witnessed a happiness she never dreamed would fall to her own lot.

One morning Olive descended the stairs, dressed to accompany Ruhama in a drive. She had scarcely joined her, when a letter was brought in on a salver for Miss Weston; the messenger waiting for an answer.

It was from Wyndham Blount—a hurried note—entreating her presence at his mother's house as soon as possible. Leona, disappoint-

ed of her promised share in Rashleigh's spoil, and indignant at his treatment now that she was of no further use to him—especially his contemptuous repudiation of her claims—had taken revenge by informing Elodie's guardian, Mr. Blount, of her flight and probable abduction, and the nefarious plans of her so-called uncle. Bent on taking immediate steps for her rescue, Mr. Blount wanted the assistance of Miss Weston to go and bring her to his mother's as soon as she could be found. He had lost no time in putting a warrant for Rashleigh's arrest in the hands of a detective.

Olive resolved to obey the summons; and told the messenger to say she would be at Mrs. Blount's almost immediately. She begged Mrs. Marsh to excuse her, and was setting out to walk, when Ruhama insisted on driving her to her destination. If the girl were found, she should be brought at once to her house, as the most fitting asylum for her.

More news, meanwhile, had come to Mr. Blount. Catherine, who happened to remember his address—Elodie having told her on their way from the salt marsh, bidding her go to him in case of accident or her illness—came with a piteous complaint against the villain who had knocked her down at the ferry, and carried away the young girl.

Another detective was employed to look after the young man at the Hospital for Imbeciles, it being thought probable that Rashleigh would attempt at once to carry out his plans, and force the girl into a marriage with his son.

Both Ruhama and Olive listened with deep and tearful sympathy to the warm-hearted Irishwoman's story. She received a triple fee in acknowledgment of her help to the desolate fugitive, and Mrs. Marsh undertook to find her a suitable place.

The friends of the abducted girl had a consultation, and agreed on a plan of action, as soon as a clue could be obtained to the place where the captive had been conveyed. It was ascertained that she was not at Mrs. Brill's house, nor did that worthy dame know anything concerning her. She had been anxious a long time—her letter having been unanswered; and her lamentations were voluble that the girl had ever been deluded into trusting such a villain as Rashleigh.

"If she had only been willing to stay with me!" had been her exclamation. "It would not have been so bad a thing if she had married poor Enrico, after all!"

Wyndham did not echo the sentiment.

As nothing could be done till the clue sought could be obtained, Ruhama said she would take Miss Weston home, and that she would remain, awaiting a message, which she would obey on the instant. It was agreed what should be done, the moment there should be any discovery.

While they were speaking together, the ladies having risen to depart, a lad about sixteen years old entered the parlor, and stood

waiting. He was employed in Blount's office as messenger and errand-boy, and frequently brought him papers, as he did on the present occasion; for he had a metallic case full of them in his hand.

Wyndham took the papers from the messenger, while the two ladies were having a few last words with his mother. As Ruhama turned to go out, she saw that Olive had gone across the room to the young messenger, and was examining the box he held, and out of which Wyndham had taken the papers.

"Come, Olive, dear; are you ready?"

"Oh, Ruhama, see here! The name on this box: 'Hall & Reynolds'—and under that the name of Stanley—half effaced! It is exactly like the box Mr. Reynolds had in the court-room!"

"What of that? All lawyers' boxes are alike."

"No, Mrs. Marsh; this is an oddity, not an ordinary deed-box. This is of a peculiar shape," observed Mrs. Blount.

"Where did you get this box?" demanded Olive, her face crimson, her eyes fastened eagerly on the lad.

"Please, Miss, I saved it from the fire," was his modest reply.

"What fire?"

"The fire that burnt the — building in Pine street, a long time ago."

"The office of Hall & Reynolds was burnt then?" questioned the girl, pointing to the names on the box.

"I believe so, Miss. There were many offices burnt," replied the boy.

"You are right; Hall & Reynolds suffered among the rest," said Wyndham. "This box must have belonged to them."

"And it must have contained property or papers of Mrs. Stanley's!" gasped Olive, breathless with excitement.

"Yes, Miss, it had papers in it. I picked it up out of the ruins, and nothing in it was burned; nothing at all."

"The papers—whatever was in it—what did you with them?"

"You should have returned them to the owner, Martin," said Wyndham, reprovingly.

"What have you done with them?" repeated Olive.

The boy looked down, abashed.

"Why, Miss, I did not know they were worth anything. They were not deeds, nor mortgages, nor anything worth money. Only old drafts of law papers, and such like."

"Then you destroyed them!" asked Olive, growing pale.

"No, Miss, they are all safe. My mother took them and put them away in a drawer."

"You must return them at once. Bring them to this lady," said Wyndham.

"No, Mr. Blount, I will go for them; I cannot bear the suspense. Oh, Ruhama! I heard Mr. Reynolds say Mrs. Stanley's will had been destroyed in that fire! If it should have been saved in this box!"

Olive insisted upon going with the boy at once to his mother's house. Ruhama said, if she would go, she would accompany her in the carriage, and the lad, whom Mr. Blount readily excused from his office duty, might have a seat on the box. The friends then separated.

It was a long drive to a remote part of the city; a neat-looking tenement-house in Ninth avenue. The rooms of the woman they wished to see were on the third floor. Olive followed the boy up at once, and her friend came more slowly.

A middle-aged woman, dressed in black cashmere, with a collar of snowy whiteness fastened by a jet brooch, was busy at a sewing-machine. She rose, evidently taking the ladies for customers, and placed chairs for them. She was used to being visited by ladies who wanted sewing done; her occupation being that of seamstress.

The lad, her son, went close to her, and said something in a low tone. She looked puzzled for a minute, then nodded her head, smiled, and went to a bureau at one end of the room. Olive's eyes followed her with burning eagerness, though she forced herself to sit still.

The woman unlocked the lowest drawer, lifted some articles of dress neatly folded in napkins and scented with lavender, and took out a bundle of papers.

"I kept them," she remarked, "though I did not know as they would ever be asked for, or be of any use. Martin said nobody advertised for papers."

Olive, unable to control her impatience, ran to her, and took the papers. One was a large document in an envelope.

The girl seemed hardly able to examine the prize when it was in her hand. She was pale from excess of emotion.

"Be calm, dear friend!" whispered Ruhama, "Shall I take them for you? Let me look! What is this?"

She drew out the large paper; it was labeled "Last Will and Testament of Mrs. Maude Stanley, etc."

Ruhama thought the girl beside her was fainting, and put her arms around her.

"I knew it would be this!" she breathed faintly, and almost suffocated with the intensity of her feelings. "It is a miracle!"

Mrs. Marsh explained to the good woman that a valuable paper had been recovered, supposed to have been destroyed in the fire; and offered a liberal reward for her care in preserving it, adding, that no doubt the lawyers would pay munificently.

But the woman declined receiving anything. She was afraid she had done wrong in not sending the papers at once to their owners; but really, she would not have known where to have found the gentlemen.

Her son added that he had seen the death of Mr. Hall in the newspapers, a short time afterward, and had supposed the firm had broken up. As to a will, it was so easy to make another, etc.

The excuses were received kindly; the visitors took leave, and at once drove down-town to the office of the lawyer.

Answering the coachman's call, Mr. Sherman ran down to the carriage door, and Olive placed the envelope containing the will in his outstretched hand.

"Saved from the fire," was all she could articulate.

Ruhama explained, that by a very strange accident, hardly two hours before, her companion, Miss Weston, had seen and recognized, in the hands of a lawyer's errand-boy, a deed-box bearing the name of her deceased friend. She had questioned the lad, and learned that he had found it uninjured, after the fire in which Messrs. Hall & Reynolds' premises were destroyed. The papers in the box had been preserved almost by a miracle; Miss Weston had gone for them to the boy's mother, and brought them at once to Mr. Sherman.

"Is that the missing will?" asked Mrs. Marsh.

"It is the will I drew up three years ago," the lawyer answered. "This is my own writing—the note and the date. It is a most fortunate thing—its recovery; fortunate, at least, for Mr. Hamilton. This young lady's title to the estate"—nodding to her—"will, I fear, be set aside."

Olive had drawn her veil closely to hide the tears that would flow.

"I hope so. I am so happy—so happy," she murmured.

Mr. Sherman looked at her wonderingly as he lifted his hat to say adieu.

"She must love the young man!" was his judgment, as he went back slowly to his sanctum. "No woman alive, who was not in love, would have done as she has done!"

That same evening Mr. Claude Hamilton called at General Marsh's house, and sent up his card with a request that Miss Weston would favor him with an interview. She returned a message, begging to be excused from appearing, on account of indisposition.

It was no more than civility required, she thought, that he should come to thank her for her agency in restoring his rights; but she could not bear his thanks, so, in spite of Ruhama's remonstrances, she refused to see him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FAITHFUL NEGRESS.

WEARILY enough sped the hours and the days to the forlorn prisoner.

The scanty streaks of light admitted by the crevices in the planks at the windows sufficed to bring out more forcibly the gloom of the noisome den in which she lay; the air was close and suffocating; the sounds that came from rooms below, of coarse oaths and drunken revelry, terrified her. Many times she started from sleep in affright, supposing that the heavy, hurried footsteps on the stairs were those of men who would presently burst into her room. She could only hide her face, and pray for deliverance.

She rose unrefreshed; and her first effort was to move some of the fastenings of the window; not with a view of escape, but to relieve the agonizing pressure on her burning forehead.

Alas! she only exhausted herself in vain efforts. Her fragile strength could accomplish nothing. Then she bathed her head in the small quantity of water placed in a tin basin for her use; and then turned to the plate of breakfast set in the room while she was dozing. The tea was cold; but she managed to swallow part of it; but could not bring herself to touch the uninviting food. Dizzy with the pain in her head, she flung herself again on the bed, protected by her cloak and shawl from the soiled and ill-smelling bedclothing.

When her jailer came in with her dinner, about one o'clock, Elodie besought her, with piteous entreaties, to enlarge the opening at the window that there might be a free circulation of air.

"I feel as if my senses would leave me with this splitting headache," was her complaint.

"And whose fault is it, I'd like to know?" cried the beldame. "You've only to say you'll obey your uncle, and you will be taken away, and have a home as splendid as you can desire! I have no patience with such obstinate pride!"

"It is not pride!" wailed the sufferer.

"You don't think your own cousin good enough for you to marry!"

The girl sobbed out an entreaty to be spared violent words, that cut through her brain. Only a little fresh water, if she could not have air.

The woman, after a volley of abuse, flung out of the room, slamming the door so as to give the poor patient a terrible shock. She brought in a pail of fresh water, but accompanied it with renewed curses on the stubbornness of her charge.

"I thought you'd 'a' been out of this to-day!" she exclaimed, angrily. "If you're like to plague me with the care of ye much longer, you needn't look for much waitin' on, I can tell ye."

"I wish I could die!" sobbed the girl.

"I wish you would, and there would be an end of trouble!" retorted the virago. "I shall tell Rashleigh, if you're to stay longer, he must hire somebody to 'tend on you! What he gave don't half pay me for the room."

Elodie lifted herself up. "You shall be well paid, if you will let me go," she said, with a gleam of hope.

But the woman only laughed.

"You don't come it over me that way," she cried. "I know what you can do, and what you can't."

Finding that her reproaches were answered only by groans, she left the prisoner to her solitude.

But when, each time the meal was removed, she found it wholly untouched, when she heard low moans and mutterings of delirium

—so it seemed to her—instead of articulate speech, from the unfortunate girl, she began to be uneasy.

She did not want her to die in her house. The inquiry that would follow, and the inquest, would involve her in trouble. Nor did she want an illness, perhaps infectious, that would compel her to call in other help.

Rashleigh, strangely enough, had not returned, and a message sent to his lodgings had not found him. On the third day, therefore, the woman took into the captive's room a hatchet for the purpose of enlarging the aperture at the window.

Elodie was lying quiet, apparently in a doze, but was awakened by the noise of splitting the plank. This was done in a few minutes, making an opening as large as one of the panes of glass. The sash was further opened by being drawn down from the top, and the cool, fresh air came in.

The girl's untasted breakfast stood beside the bed. Mrs. Hassel gruffly bade her eat it.

"I cannot, indeed, I cannot!" was the feeble answer. "But I shall feel better, now I can have the air. If you would only give me more cold water!"

With grumbling the woman complied.

She noticed that the girl's cheeks were scarlet, and her eyes bright with fever.

"A pretty business I am like to have," she muttered, as she descended. "She will have a relapse, to a certainty. And a doctor will have to be called in! I will go myself for Rashleigh, and tell him to take her away."

Rashleigh had been arrested and remanded for examination, on the charge of kidnapping a young lady with felonious intent. No bail was admitted, notwithstanding his declaration that the girl had escaped from him, and he knew not where she was.

Elodie rose, and managed, with difficulty, to drag herself to the window, where she could look out at the opening.

It was a sorry view, the dirty, small rear yard, choked with heaps of rubbish, with the grimy walls of yards belonging to houses in the next street. But the sunlight, and the rifts of blue sky seen at a distance, were refreshing.

A woman came out with a basket of wet clothes, and began to hang them on a line. Elodie saw by her hands and bare arms that she was a colored woman.

Two or three times the woman went back and returned with more wet garments, before Elodie caught a glimpse of her face. When she did, she started up wildly, and beat at the window, with a cry of:

"Nelly! Oh, Nelly! Nelly!"

The woman stopped and looked around her, not knowing whence the cry came. Then it occurred to Elodie that to call her in the hearing of her jailer would be to defeat her chance of communicating with her.

She snatched up a cambric handkerchief and waved it from the opening in the win-

dow. Then she rolled it into a ball, and flung it as far as she could in Nelly's direction.

The handkerchief had her full name written in a corner. The girl saw Nelly pick it up, and read the name, then kiss it eagerly, and look toward her.

Elodie's face was at the opening, and she made a gesture of caution by putting her finger on her lips. Nelly answered by a silent signal that she understood her.

In a few minutes the captive heard a stealthy step approaching her door. Applying her ear to the keyhole, she caught the low whisper:

"All right, honey; I'll come to ye directly, when the missis is gone out."

Content with this, and full of new hope, the girl sat down and tried to collect her thoughts sufficiently to decide what should be done.

First, she drew from her pocket a small memorandum-book, with a pencil, and wrote clearly on one of the leaves the address of Wyndham Blount's house and office. On another she scrawled a brief note, imploring him to come and save her, before her reason should be overturned in the dreary discomforts of her captivity. He must not lose a moment; or Rashleigh would hide her away where they could never find her.

Her head ached so fearfully, she could not sit up a moment longer. With a thanksgiving and a prayer, she again threw herself on the couch, holding her forehead, on which she had laid a handkerchief dipped in cold water, and listening for the step of her friend and deliverer.

It was more than an hour and a half before she heard again the stealthy step. This time her name was pronounced in a loud tone.

She started up and staggered to the door. The paroxysm of fever had returned, and she controlled her movements with difficulty.

"Oh, Nelly!" she wailed, in answer to the call; "take me out! I shall die here!"

"I cannot open the door, honey. I have looked for the key; the missus must have taken it when she went to market. No other key opens this door but the one!"

"Oh, Nelly! What shall be done? Cannot you break the door open?"

"I dare not try, Miss Elodie! Miss Hassel may come back any minute! She would strangle me if she knew I was speakin' to ye! She's an awful woman!"

"Nelly, I cannot live long, shut up here! You must bring some one to help me!"

"Shall I call the police, honey? But the missus would tell them her lies! She told me she had a sick niece up-stairs, just come from the country; and said how her fever was catching, and I mustn't go near her. She'd wallop me if she knew I came up-stairs."

"Nelly, I will shove a paper under the door: can you get it?"

"All right, I've got it, Miss."

"You must go to that place; it's my guardian's—"

"Hi—de young gentleman who came to see your aunt Letty—"

"Nelly, please don't lose any time! Take a carriage and drive there! I have no money, but Mr. Blount will pay for it! Bring him back with you! Do be quick! I feel as if I were going to die! I don't want to die in this horrible place!"

"I'll go directly, honey. I'll not wait for the missus to mind the house!"

"Don't wait an instant! I will take care of you, Nelly. You shall go with me."

In five minutes the faithful woman had left the house. Elodie sunk into unconsciousness as the fever rose.

Mrs. Hassel was furious, on her return, to find the house deserted. After calling Nelly at the top of her voice, she ran to the door of the room where her prisoner lay, and turned the key in no little trepidation.

The sick girl lay on the couch burning with fever, and drawing her panting breath like sobs. The woman gave no heed to her sad condition, in her relief to find she had not escaped during her absence. She spoke to her, but received no answer. Then she went out again, and locked the door, muttering threats against her servant, who had gone out without leave, not for the first time.

Not more than two hours afterward, when the virago's rage was beginning to give way to serious alarm, she saw a carriage stop at the front door. A young gentleman descended, followed by two police officers. The door-bell rung violently.

The woman was obliged to open the door.

"Where is the young lady you have a prisoner here?" demanded Wyndham Blount.

"A young lady! How you frightened me! There's no young lady here."

Blount made a signal to the officers, one of whom arrested Mrs. Hassel, calling her by name.

"You will see, madam, the game is up. Where is the girl who was kidnapped by Benet Rashleigh, and brought here on Friday night?"

"Rashleigh!" The woman began with abuse of him; she would not answer for any of his dirty practices; not she!

"The young lady was here two hours ago. Show the room where she is, or it will be worse for you!"

"There is only Mr. Rashleigh's niece; he brought her here sick, and asked me to board her till he could take her home. She is not a young lady; but a poor girl!"

"Show us the room!"

The beldame was compelled to obey.

"Do you commonly lock your boarders in their rooms, madam?" asked one of the officers, as the woman reluctantly produced the key.

She muttered something about being afraid the sick girl would walk out in her delirium and fall down the stairs.

"Or throw herself out of the window, I sup-

pose?" mocked the man—noticing the barricaded window, as the door was thrown open.

"She'll have to go under lock and key for this, herself," observed the other officer, with a sneer.

The beldame broke into the violent execrations and abuse such women use when driven to bay. She threatened to tear out the eyes of her captors.

The officer answered by quietly slipping a pair of handcuffs over her wrists.

Meanwhile Wyndham had lifted in his arms the insensible form on the couch.

Elodie opened her glazed eyes, and looked in his face; but she knew him not. She spoke, but her utterance was only the low moaning of delirium.

Wyndham bade one of the officers help him carry her, wrapped in her cloak and shawl, down-stairs and out to the carriage. He placed her tenderly within it, supporting her in his arms, and ordered the driver to go to his mother's house.

The two officers, who held the warrant for Mrs. Hassel's arrest, led her to the police-court, from which she was consigned to a lodging in the Tombs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE'S MAZES CLEARED.

FOR many days and nights lay Elodie unconscious of all around her, while the brain-fever that had seized upon her ran its fearful course.

Olive Weston obeyed the summons to her bedside, and took up her abode in Mrs. Blount's house. It was her only comfort to be useful to others.

Ruhama came every day to inquire after the invalid. And more than once Emily St. Clare came to watch at night over the poor girl she learned to love, pitying her so profoundly.

One evening Ruhama came later than usual, and it was nearly dusk when Olive went into the parlor to meet her.

"I have the doctor's permission," whispered Mrs. Marsh, "to take a look at poor Elodie. I will run up to her room for a few minutes."

She vanished as she spoke.

As Olive turned, she found both her hands seized by a gentleman who had come in with her friend, but whom she had not at first seen.

It was Claude Hamilton.

Olive had carefully avoided him, and they had not met since the will had been found and restored to Sherman.

He led the trembling girl to a seat at one end of the room, still retaining her hand.

She drew it away gently, as she tried to utter a congratulation, which she felt to be his due.

"I owe everything to you, Olive," he began; "but—"

"It was my rash act that brought trouble on you," she faltered; "I was bound to seek a remedy when the opportunity occurred so providentially."

"I owe you heartfelt gratitude; for *all* you did was for my benefit. But—Olive—I cannot avail myself of a will which is not Mrs. Stanley's latest one; which does not express her last wishes."

It thrilled her to the heart to be called "Olive" by him; but she answered, with such forced calmness as to appear cold:

"Mr. Hamilton, you must not carry too far your chivalric notions. Mrs. Stanley meant you, and you alone, to be her heir."

"Not me alone; you know she did not."

"Why will you pain me by allusions—"

Again he caught her hand.

"Would to Heaven," he exclaimed, impetuously, "you would let me shield you from all pain, Olive. I can only accept this fortune if you will share it with me!"

"Mr. Hamilton! I had never the slightest claim on Mrs. Stanley's bounty! You know I had not. It was a mistake that caused her last—"

Claude interrupted her, clasping her hand warmly, and speaking in tones that went to her very soul.

"She made no mistake, Olive, in thinking that I loved you with all my heart! I do love you! I have always loved you—you only—and my life will be wretched if you refuse to bless it with your love!"

By an effort the girl released her hand, and hid the starting tears.

"Mr. Hamilton, how can this be?"

"I have been a fool, dearest! I own it! I fled from the sight of you so many months since because I thought you despised me! When I returned, I interpreted your coldness to mean utter aversion. It was only within a day or two that I learned by how gross a blunder I had been deprived of the chance of receiving your answer to my letter. Olive, my love! I have suffered for it! Can you not forgive me?"

She lifted her face.

"Is it possible? Are you not engaged to Miss Monelle?"

"I have never been engaged to any one. I have never loved any one but you, Olive! I have feared that you disliked me! I have been most unhappy! Tell me you have not avoided me as you have done, because you disliked me!"

"I never disliked you!"

"Can you love me, Olive? May I hope to gain your love, if I have never had it? Will you pardon all my folly and stupidity?"

The girl could not speak; but she put her hand in her lover's. It was answer enough.

This time Claude not only imprisoned her hand, but clasped her to his breast, and pressed the kiss of betrothal on her lips.

For an hour they sat together, and the twilight deepened into night. Olive started as the door was opened, letting in a flood of light from the hall.

Ruhama entered, came up to them, and, seeing how it was, kissed Olive, with tears in her eyes. "May you be happy!" she murmured.

She went out with Claude; and Olive sought her own room, to vent her emotion in happy tears. In an hour she went to resume her watch by Elodie's bedside.

The suffering girl had the attendance of the best physicians in the city; but their skill availed little in the struggle with disease. Life and death battled for her; and that life won the victory, was owing, under God's blessing, to her vigorous youthful constitution.

Wyndham took his share in the night-watches, and he was with her when the crisis came. The morning sun sent its first golden shimmer to play on the wall, and the fresh morning breeze came in caressingly, when Elodie opened her eyes, to which intelligence had returned, and fixed them on the face bending over her. Olive had come in and stood beside Wyndham.

"Dear guardian!" the patient murmured.

"You must not talk!" he answered, pressing her hand. "We are so thankful that you will be spared to us."

Elodie closed her eyes in a peaceful sleep, and he stole softly from the room.

When strength returned, the invalid begged to know how she came there; she remembered only the horrible prison in which she had been immured.

What need to prolong the details of our story? The usurper, Richard Lumley, was speedily dispossessed, and Claude Hamilton put the house through a course of cleansing before it was ready for his occupancy. Olive did not refuse his petition for a speedy marriage, and her pupil, Elodie, was permitted to be her bridesmaid at a quiet and simple wedding in — church.

Nelly was cared for by the friends of the girl she had aided to rescue. And she had saved more, for inside a silken sacque given the woman by the late Mrs. Rashleigh, she had found, stitched carefully, the long missing certificate of the marriage of Elodie's parents. Her aunt had taken this means of saving it from her brutal husband, and had forgotten it, supposing it in the box she gave Wyndham. Thus her title to the property was undisputed.

Rashleigh and his sister-in-law were tried and punished, their crime being proved. The man served out a term in State Prison.

Elodie completed her education under the best private tutors; but never cherished her former dreams of musical celebrity. Her voice had lost something of its power, but she retained sufficient to charm the domestic circle, and the friends who gathered round them. As the wife of Wyndham Blount, she never again wished to figure as a candidate for public applause.

THE END