

MY HUSBAND'S CRIME.

BY M. R. HOUSEKEEPER.



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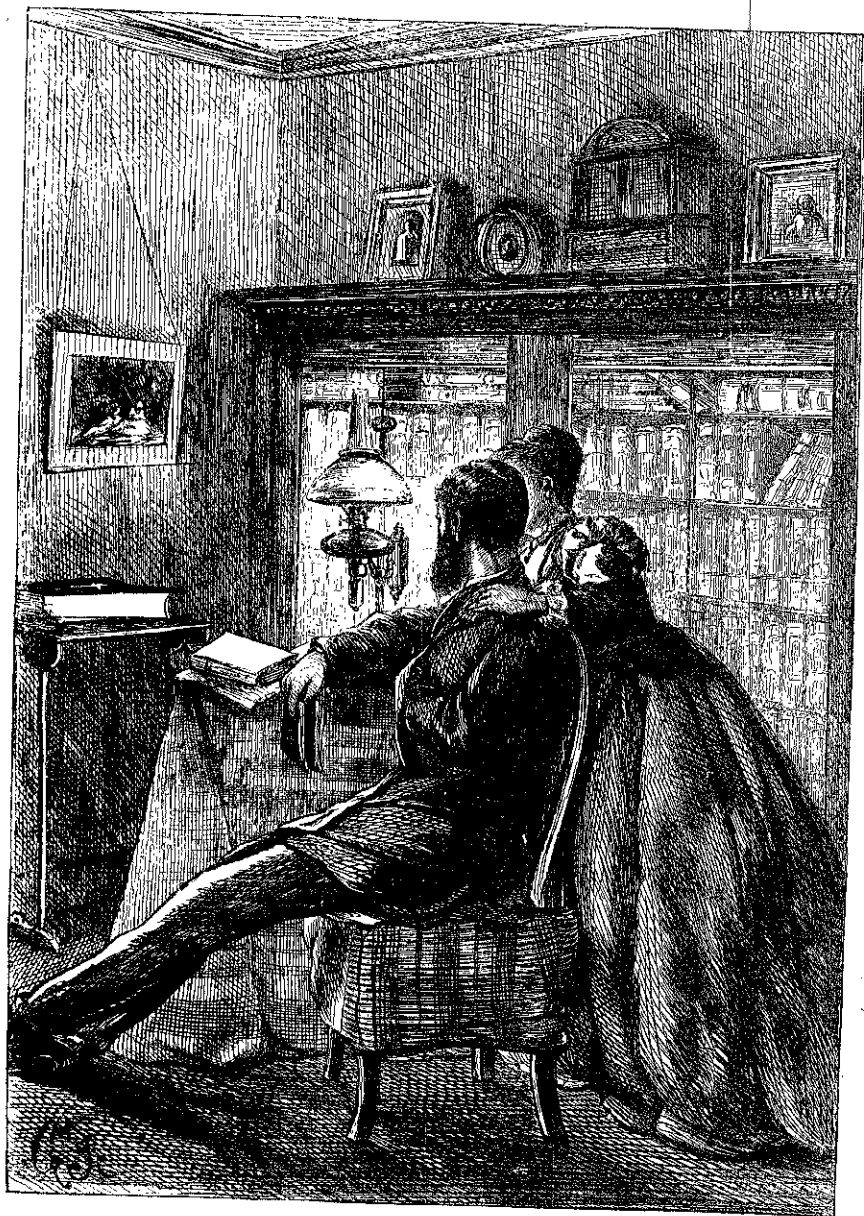
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"GUESS WHO IT IS?"—PAGE 66.

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MY HUSBAND'S CRIME.

CHAPTER I.

A PURITAN FAMILY.

ONE pleasant evening last summer I sat by the open window of my chamber, a large and airy room in the comfortable farm-house in which I and my family, and my sister with hers, had been located as boarders during the summer months, by our respective husbands. I gazed with loving eyes upon the merry group that were assembled in the orchard beneath: my husband, with his huge bulk extended lazily upon the grass, playfully shielding my sister's little Caroline from the fierce attack of a belligerent band of wild Indians, composed of my own two little urchins, Jamie and Frank; and at a little distance from them, upon a rustic bench, was seated white-robed Agnes, her baby in her arms, with her handsome husband leaning upon the back of the bench, whispering tender nonsense into her well-pleased ear as, devoted and lover-like a couple now, as when, five years before, they had first taken upon themselves the bonds of matrimony.

The picture was a pleasant one to my loving eyes, though I did not care just then to join the party. I had been reading, as long as the waning light had permitted, and now, still regardless of the cries both from father and children, which summoned me to partake in their noisy sport, I leaned back indolently in my chair, content, in my present pensive mood, to enjoy the society of my domestic treasures at a peaceable distance. So I sat rocking to and fro in the languid summer twilight, almost unconsciously enjoying the beauties of the scene before me; watching the light flying clouds, as the stars singly and in clusters came timidly peering forth; watching the martins, as they darted with sharp, piercing chirp in and out of sight beneath the overhanging roof that sheltered my head; watching the lazy cows, homeward plodding up the dusty winding road; the busy bees, swarming at the entrance of their hives,

eager apparently to be done with the tumult of the day: I sat by the window listening to the joyous voices of my dear ones, hearing all the charming, dreamy sounds that the evening air bore to my listless ears, yet scarce knowing that I did so, for my thoughts were busy with the book which I had just finished reading, and which lay in my lap now, still open at the last page. It was the autobiography of a woman; one who had lived, and loved, and suffered. Alas! how often does the first verb, when woman is the subject, involve all that the other two express! The story was a simple one, the whole interest of the tale centering in the surmounting of the trials which were brought upon the woman by the selfishness of the man she loved. But the story had been one of thrilling interest to me; I had pored over it every moment of the long summer day that I could spare from my light domestic duties; and now, as night had drawn on, I had brought my book to the window, and had sat there straining my eyes in the uncertain light, too eager to get through to brook even the temporary delay that procuring a lamp would occasion. And now, the story concluded, and my mind relieved from the tension in which it had been held during the last few hours, I sat, swinging lazily back and forth in my rocking-chair, musing upon the book, and wondering why it was that the joys and sorrows it portrayed should be so deeply interesting to one who neither knew nor cared for the individuals concerned in the narration. And then my mind wandered back over the years of my own life; a life that had been shadowed by misfortune and lightened by success; a life into which a great misery had once crept, and yet which was now thankfully at rest; drifting peacefully and contentedly toward the great ocean of Eternity toward which all mortality is tending.

Why should not the story of my joys and sorrows prove as interesting to others as those of this woman have proved to me? was the thought

that then and there occurred to me; and then, almost trembling at the audacity of the idea, I said, "I will commit to paper the story of my life as I remember it; its trials and temptations, its struggles and contentions, its defeats and victories; and see if there be not in them an element as interesting to other human hearts as the story of the woman of whom I have just been reading contains for me." And thus my resolution once formed, without stopping to consider the expediency of the matter, I started with eager enterprise upon my task. Concisely and unpretendingly, in as straightforward a manner as I could command, I have told the history of my life; the work of many a long summer day is at length accomplished, and the result, be it good or bad, is now before you.

My father's name was Manvers—James B. Manvers. He was a Bostonian born and bred, and I doubt not there are many still living in that great city who remember him well, some perhaps with only too good a cause, for he failed in business there, failed very badly, and though—but of that by and by; I wish to tell the whole story, for sorrowful as it is, it is not one that I have any cause to be ashamed of. James B. Manvers then was my father's name. He was the descendant of an English family of great antiquity, and he had a genealogical table or book of some sort of which he was very proud, by which he could trace his origin far back into the times of which history tells us. I do not know that there were any titles or distinctions of any sort marking the descent; indeed, I rather think there were not, for I remember hearing my father say that the "best blood in England was not to be found among her aristocracy, but among her yeomanry; and we," he would add, "come of the best blood." One fact, however, did he earnestly impress upon my youthful mind, and that was, that through all the centuries through which our family can travel back, there could be discovered no individual of the name, in the direct line, who had been guilty of crime, or who had borne a tarnished reputation. Poverty, sorrow, trouble there had been plenty of, but never dishonor. Need I say how proud my father was of this glorious truth? scarcely prouder than I am myself, though. My pride my life has bitterly tested, yet still it survives; and spite of all the misery it has caused me, I verily believe it reigns to-day, scarce humbler than of yore, the ruling passion within my breast.

My mother was a Winthrop, and she too was very proud of the fact of being connected, though very distantly, with the family of the great Puritan governor; and certainly she deserved to

have been his own near blood relation, for a stauncher little Puritan than she, I ween, came not over in the Mayflower. A truly good and pious woman she was; and yet if I, her loving daughter, may dare to criticise her revered character, I must confess that she was almost too strict a sectarian, and a little, just a little, uncharitable; one who was too apt in indignation for the crime to forget to pity the criminal; one who, strong in her own integrity, could not sympathize with the frailties of natures less fitted for resistance than her own. We children were all dreadfully afraid of her, and I believe even my dear father himself stood a little in awe of her severe judgments; and yet a more dutiful wife, a more loving mother, never blessed a home with her presence.

My father was a merchant in Boston, doing a fine business in partnership with a brother of my mother's, Charles Winthrop by name, a man older than father by many years, and one who had always borne an unblemished reputation; a pillar of the church to which my mother belonged, and looked up to by her as a being as near perfection as fallible humanity could possibly come. And yet this stern, upright deacon, this pattern Pharisee of the straightest sect of Pharisees, proved false to all the teachings of his life, and succumbed at last to that insidious vice which so often stealthily assails the self-righteous; I mean the love of lucre. He was enticed into unlawful speculations; and once within the vortex, he had no strength to withdraw. He toyed and trifled with this legalized gambling until his own means became involved, and then from rashness he stepped into criminality, and dared to risk the money of the firm. He was so much revered, so much respected; no one dreamed of watching or suspecting Charles Winthrop; the honor of the firm was in his hands, and he managed matters just as he pleased. Poor father was naturally rather of an indolent temperament, and he had always been content to leave all active charge of the business in the hands of his brother-in-law, who had been as ready to accept the supervision as my father to resign it. At last the crash came, the more terrible because so entirely unlooked for. Uncle Charles, having involved the firm in inextricable embarrassments, absconded in the night, carrying with him all the available funds he could lay his hands on; he fled to Europe, and was never heard of again by any of us.

Oh! such a terrible time there was when the discovery of his wickedness was made! I was but eight years old, and yet I remember many particulars of that dreadful time as if they had

occurred but yesterday. My father, aroused from his easy, indolent life to the terrible realities of poverty and disgrace, remained for a time in a state of bewildered inaction, scarce knowing what to do, or to whom to turn; perhaps his very brain would have suffered from the shock had it not been for the grievous domestic afflictions which also fell upon us about this time, serving to divert his mind from his business troubles in a manner effectual though severe.

My sister Sophy, then twelve years of age, was taken ill with scarlet fever; within a few days little Maggie, the one next younger than myself, also sickened with the same fearful disorder. The sickness terminated fatally in both cases; the little one went first, she only suffered three days, but Sophy lingered as many weeks, and then she, too, was borne to the church-yard. Mother never held her head up after her return from Sophy's funeral. Between sorrow, caused by the loss of her children, and the mortification springing from Uncle Charles's conduct, her heart was broken; she sank into a rapid decline, and three months after the children's death, she too was taken away from us, and father and we three desolate girls were left helpless and despairing, tempted to believe that we certainly had been guilty of some great evil, and God's judgments were visiting us with inexorable atonements.

I believe father would have followed mother to heaven very shortly, had it not been for a means apparently the most unlikely to have been attended with a beneficial effect upon his health. Some weeks after mother's death, while suffering most deeply from the effects of his affliction, his attention was casually arrested by the sight of his own name in a newspaper paragraph. He read the article in which it occurred almost involuntarily. It was a reprehensibly sharp stricture upon his failure in business, and his present inaction, written, it is to be hoped, by some one entirely ignorant of the great domestic afflictions which had fallen upon him. It gave a brief *exposé* of Charles Winthrop's conduct, detailed the dishonorable position in which the once prosperous firm now stood, gave a list of those creditors who would certainly be heavy losers by the failure of the house to pay its honest debts, and finally wound up with a harsh rebuke of my father for his inactivity and seeming indifference to the business troubles which encompassed him.

"He is the cause," thus read the article, "even though the innocent cause, of undeserved misery to hundreds, perhaps to thousands, for

in a failure so extensive as this has been, the consequences of one man's crime shoot through innumerable ramifications into the hearts alike of rich and poor; yet Mr. Manvers, now the only responsible member of the firm, takes no measures whatever to secure to his creditors even the poor percentage of his debts which he is able to give them; he is living in luxury, surrounded by affluence and comfort, while those whom he, or others in his name, have so bitterly wronged are suffering the pangs of poverty which, if he were the man of honor he has always been considered to be, he would at least share, if he could not alleviate."

"The man is right, whoever he be!" cried my father, springing to his feet and crushing the cruel paper in his hands. "Sharp though the words may be, they are not uncalled for nor undeserved. I had thought myself done with life, but a Manvers can not die with a dishonored name."

From that day my father roused himself to take an active part in the business which his faithful clerks had been endeavoring to hold together during the time of his tribulation. Though indolent he was energetic, and now with such an incentive to exertion before him as the preservation of the unsullied honor of his name, he applied himself to the settlement of his affairs with a resolution and concentrateness which almost worked miracles. The failure was a very heavy one, that fact could not be got over; but he gave up all to meet his liabilities; my mother's little fortune, which by will she had bequeathed exclusively to him; our fine house and its costly adornments; plate, jewelry, books, all went, and by his good management and prompt action, a far better percentage of the liabilities was met than outsiders had believed possible. His actual debt was thus brought down to a sum less terrible than he had ventured to anticipate. Then his old establishment fairly off his hands, his clerks discharged, himself homeless and destitute of all resources, with barely sufficient funds reserved to keep himself and his children for a few months from actual want, he next turned his attention to obtaining the employment necessary for his future support.

The business talents and sterling integrity of James B. Manvers, I say it proudly, were too well known among the leading merchants of the city for him long to lack occupation. Some of his old friends offered to advance him capital sufficient to start him in business again, but with proud humility he refused to avail himself of their kindness.

"My constitution has been much enfeebled by the troubles of the past year," he said, "and my life is too precarious to allow me to venture into the vortex of profit and loss on borrowed capital. Were I certain of ten years of life, I would thankfully, gladly avail myself of the kind offers of my friends; as it is, fearing as I sometimes do, that scarce as many months are left to me, money now taken by me to be involved in the slow and uncertain channels of trade, would almost surely be lost were I to die before being able to realize by it." Finding him immovable in this resolution, his friends then procured for him a situation as book-keeper in one of the leading houses in Boston. They gave him a splendid salary for his services, and had he chosen so to do, we could have lived almost as luxuriously as before; but far different were my father's intentions. Renting a small house in an obscure street, furnishing it as humbly as decency would permit, and with the necessity of the strictest economy ever before his mind and in his language to his family, there did my father retire with us children, and there commenced a life of toil and self-sacrifice which any of the ancestors he was so fond of talking about might have been proud to acknowledge. Every year the small sum actually necessary for our support was drawn from his salary, and the balance was given to defray the debts which Charles Winthrop's villainy had brought upon him; and as time sped by, and every New Year found the balance against him growing rapidly smaller, my father toiled proudly on, his legitimate business occupying his days, while extra work in the shape of book-keeping, copying, etc., which he seldom found any difficulty in procuring, filled his evenings sometimes until far in the night with wearisome labor. Yet steadily he persevered, scorning deprivations, glorying in sacrifice, and yearning, oh! how eagerly, for the day to come when he could once more call himself an honorable man—a Manvers, worthy of the name.

There were three children of us, all girls; father never had a son, and it had been no slight trial to him to think that our family name must become extinct with him, for he himself had been an only son, and had not a relation in the world that he knew of bearing his own name. However, he was proud and fond enough of us girls, and if he had had a son I do not think he could have loved him more than he did us. Susan was the eldest; she was about fifteen when we moved to our little home in Willow Street; she was mother's own child, she bore

her name and looked very much like her; an active, bustling little creature, a great worker, and scrupulously conscientious; as ready as father himself to starve and pinch in every possible way, that we might the sooner be rid of those terrible debts. We kept no servant, and Sue, with such help as my nine year old hands could give her, did all the work of our tiny establishment. She worked a great deal harder than father had any idea of, harder in fact than was at all necessary, but she was so nice and dainty, and had inherited all mother's cleanly, tidy ways, so that between her dread of spending a cent more than we could actually avoid, and her determination to have every thing about the house as mother herself would have liked it, the poor little thing worked herself to death; literally worked herself to death, for though she did not die for a good many years, yet the too great burdens borne by her at this tender period of her life, sapped her constitution, and cut her off at three-and-twenty a prematurely old woman. Of course father did not see this; he was out of the house all day, and whenever he was home he found every thing neat and comfortable as hands could make it, while Sue, active labor all finished in his absence, would be sitting at her sewing; as tidy and composed a little housekeeper as ever man was blessed with. Our house was so tiny and compact, our family so small, and he, poor man, so entirely and utterly ignorant of the nature and amount of the work which the care of a house produces, that I suppose he thought, if he thought about the matter at all, that there was no more to do than would serve to keep Sue and myself healthily employed. To be sure he hated bitterly that our time should be occupied so much with the drudgery of the domestic work, but then he very seldom saw us so occupied, and if he did, to his regretful complaints Sue had always his own answer ready, "Wait until we are out of debt." Poor thing! she did not live to see the day, but father never knew what killed her.

He was very proud of Sue; she was so active and energetic, reminding him, as he often said, so much of mother, that he grew to rely upon her, to refer to and consult with her as he would have done with his wife, and when she was taken from us, it was to the full as great a blow as mother's death had been.

I was the second daughter. Caroline is my name, and I believe I was more like father in temperament and appearance than were either of his other children, at least he always said so himself. Sue and the little one were small and fair, with light hair and blue eyes; they were

each active and industrious, great talkers, and possessed of gentle, even tempers. I grew to be much taller than they did, I am now, as a woman, considerably above the middle height, while they were below it; Sue particularly, like mother, was very small. I am dark too, with black hair, and eyes which every body told me were just like father's, and I was honestly glad of that, for a handsomer pair of grey eyes than he possessed I never saw. In disposition, too, I resemble father. I am naturally quiet and reserved; indolently averse to exertion, with a quick temper, and a jealous, suspicious nature that I come by naturally, I suppose, for that was not one of father's characteristics by any means.

The fourth and last member of our tiny home circle was baby Agnes, but two years old when mother died, and the dearest, loveliest creature God ever sent to earth; we all united in trying to spoil her, and we should certainly have succeeded, had it been possible to pervert her lovely disposition; she was a very beautiful child, and grew up to be as fair a flower as ever blossomed in a home garden. As I said, she was fair and small, like Sue, with blue eyes and light hair; but while Sue's thin tresses were combed back in plain flaxen braids, Agnes's luxuriant hair drooped around her sunny face in a shower of golden ringlets. While Sue's complexion was unhealthy and colorless, Agnes's displayed every shade of the lily and the rose. Sue's slight frame was thin and angular; but Agnes, though petite, was so exquisitely shaped, that it seemed, were an inch added to her stature, the beautiful proportion would have been disturbed.

This then was our family; and a very loving, happy home was ours, during the eight years first following mother's death. Working hard and living plainly it is true, but yet so happy in ourselves and each other, that all hardships were easily borne, and the time slipped quickly and uneventfully by. I, and Aggie when she became old enough, attended the public schools of the city, and surely one need only have the capacity and the inclination, to be able to obtain a really good education at the Boston free schools; however, even had they been deficient, the constant supervision which father maintained over our studies during the evenings at home, would have more than compensated for any thing that was lacking in the school. I was naturally fond of my books, and as Agnes was almost too young to need any instruction save that which she received at school, and Sue had neither the time nor the inclination to devote to mental culture, farther than father actually insisted upon, it so happened that I received almost the unshared

benefit of father's advice and assistance, and as the teacher was patient and loving, and the scholar diligent and ambitious, my progress was rapid enough to satisfy even my proud father. It is true I had none of the accomplishments now deemed almost essential to the education of a lady; my father could not bestow them upon me himself, and the expense of hiring teachers could not even be thought of, but a solid, thorough English education I did receive, and it was a blessing fully appreciated by me, though I longed for still higher advantages with a longing that I would not have had my father know for worlds.

Thus eight years sped away; then came the first break in our happy home. Poor Sue began to droop; she had one little cold after another, and it seemed as though before she could fairly recover from one she would be attacked by a severer one; then she began to cough continually, and so it went on from bad to worse, until her worn-out frame gave way, and she sank into her early grave, the most unselfish, uncomplaining little martyr that ever sacrificed herself for the welfare of others.

Her death was a great blow to father, as indeed it was to all of us; every thing seemed to go wrong with us after that. I did my best to fill her place, God knows I did, but even had I been able to toil as she had done, I did not know how to do it. Sue had been one of those women who seem born to rule and conduct a household. From the time, when a mere child, she had taken control of father's family, until within a very few weeks of her death, not the most trifling matter had been transacted in the house without her immediate supervision and control, and now that she, the head, the mistress, was gone, every thing was in confusion. I was but a girl of seventeen, just taken from school, and ignorant and helpless as a child, now that she was not there to counsel and direct me. Father fretted, and I worked myself almost sick, to keep every thing as he had been used to having it, but it was very long before I could succeed in getting the domestic machinery into respectable running order.

At last father's health began to fail. I saw him daily growing feebler, and my fainting heart predicted the trouble that was fast coming upon me. I had watched the progress of the ill destroyer before, and I was as certain that my father was soon to be taken from me, as if a prophetic tongue had given me warning. Father's task was not yet finished; there still existed unsatisfied claims against him, and that knowledge I think sustained him. He toiled on throughout

that last winter of his life with a desperate energy that I and I only could understand. His friends, his employers, besought him to rest; to recruit his health, which all saw was fast failing him, in vain; he would give but one answer to all such entreaties—"Next year I will rest." At last the end came. On the evening of the New Year he came home, later than usual, and seeming more utterly exhausted than he had ever yet confessed himself to be. Before he took off either hat or coat, he gave to me the bundle of papers he was grasping in his hands. "I am a free man at last, Caroline," he said; "now I can die in peace." I scarcely needed a glance at the papers to know what were their contents; they were the receipts given to him that day by the last of his creditors; he no longer owed any man a farthing. The struggle was over now; the powerful incentive that had so long sustained his failing strength was gone; and he succumbed at once. He never left the house after New Year's Day, and before the spring violets were ready to bloom for the second time upon Susan's grave, we had made a place beside her for father, and Agnes and I were alone in the world.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING FOR WORK.

I do not suppose any one—no man, certainly, and no woman who has not known from personal experience our desolate situation—can fully understand the appalling sense of helplessness that settled upon me after my father's death, and I was left to myself to look around me and settle upon some mode of procedure for the future. Upon me, I say, for Agnes in no degree shared with me my anxiety. She was but twelve years old, and was remarkably childish even for her age. She had been accustomed from her infancy to depend upon others for the most trifling of her daily needs, and this fact, added to her unusually sanguine temperament, gave her that perfect freedom from care for the morrow which is seldom seen save in those who have always been taken care of by others. I do not suppose the child ever once asked herself the question of how we were to live in the future; so long as her food, shelter and clothing were provided for her, she rested content. A few floods of childish tears after the funeral was over, and then, in less than a week's time she was her old, merry self again, seeming to have no more care or trouble upon her mind than had the bird that warbled in his cage in our lonely

parlor. I allowed her to start to school again as soon as possible, for I thought there was no use in chaining her bright young spirit down to the dull companionship which was all my aching heart would let me give her, and so she studied and romped with her light-hearted school-mates, as thoughtless and unconcerned as though she had been the heiress of thousands, with no possible shade of care clouding her future prospects.

So I was alone, utterly alone; and oh! how helpless did I feel! Bitterly did I bewail my sex; had I only been a man, I thought, all would have been very different; I could easily have obtained employment of one kind or another, had it only been actual manual labor, by which I could have earned sufficient to support myself and my little sister; but now, even if there were work to be had, how could I, a friendless girl of nineteen, seek it out myself? Of course I ran over in my mind the few pitiful occupations which a woman, claiming to be considered a lady, is allowed to engage in; sewing or teaching being the only ones that I could settle upon as practicable, and even such occupation I had no more idea how to obtain than had Agnes herself. I had no near relations, and very few acquaintances; the summer friends who had crowded around us in the days of our prosperity, had long since fluttered away, and my father in his proud seclusion had sought no new ones. Neighbors we had, kind, sympathizing people, who came to us before and after the funeral, wondering, I suppose, many of them, how we girls were going to get along, but none of them were sufficiently intimate with us to ask the question, and most assuredly I would not broach the subject myself. So a month glided by after the funeral, and I sat alone, day after day, feeling as if apprehension and distress would drive me wild, for I saw how rapidly our little stock of money was dwindling away, and I was ignorant as ever of any possible means of replenishing my purse. The doctor's and the undertaker's bills had been settled; we had not now a debt in the world, but a new quarter's rent was running on, which I saw no earthly means of settling when due. Was not my situation pitiable? Bad enough it would have been for any woman, had she been ever so capable or energetic, but when to my friendless, penniless situation was added the fact of my shy, indolent temperament, the case was doubly hard.

At last, nerved to a desperate courage by the knowledge that something *must* be done, I determined to write to Mr. Henderson, the gentleman in whose employ my father had spent

the last ten years of his life. He was a wealthy old bachelor, fifty or sixty years of age, a good-hearted gentlemanly person, who had proved himself a faithful friend to my father, and who would, I doubted not, be ready to assist and counsel me; yet how I hated to ask him for help! I suppose it was the Manvers blood boiling in my veins, for I do truly think that had it not been for Agnes, I would have starved before asking of any one, even the small assistance I requested of him.

I wrote to him briefly, stating that I found it necessary to obtain some employment by which I could maintain myself and sister, and I requested him, if he knew of any occupation suitable for me, that he would for my father's sake assist me in procuring it; or, if he could not do this, that he would at least point out to me the proper course to take in procuring such employment for myself.

Anxiously I waited the answer; I did not much apprehend a rebuff, for I felt every confidence in Mr. Henderson's good-will toward us. Though suspicious by nature, I had not yet learned distrust from experience of the world, and I was still too young, too child-like to dream of the cold-heartedness which after-years revealed to me in selfish humanity. Mr. Henderson had called upon us twice after the funeral; it was he who, at my request, had settled the bills which were due against me, and I had paid him without hesitation from the ready money remaining in my hands. The last time he had called he had seemed desirous of ascertaining something of my intentions for the future, but, between my natural reserve and the violent grief which at that time rendered me indifferent to all worldly affairs, he could not, without point-blank inquiry, have ascertained anything about our circumstances. He did not feel authorized, I suppose, to venture questions that might have been deemed impertinent, so he departed as he had come, entirely unacquainted with the state of our finances, or our intentions with respect to the future.

He answered my letter in person. He called one morning a day or two after I had written, when Agnes was at school, and I was alone in the house. I answered the door myself, of course; he shook hands with me warmly, apologizing as he did so for not having responded to my appeal sooner.

"The fact is," he said, "I had intended coming that same evening to see you about it, but I was called away from town unexpectedly that afternoon, and I only returned late last evening. I was too anxious to see you personally in the

matter to satisfy myself by merely writing, and I hope that my delay has occasioned you no inconvenience."

Of course I told him that it had not, hypocrite that I was, when I had been fretting myself sick over the delay for the last twenty-four hours. I invited him into the little parlor and saw him comfortably seated in father's chair before I ventured to recur to the subject of my letter.

"I am afraid you will think me very troublesome, Mr. Henderson," I said. "I have no right to impose upon you the task of providing employment for a very useless girl, but as employment must be had, and I am very destitute of friends, I have ventured upon the liberty of applying to you."

"No apologies, Miss Manvers," he responded good-humoredly, "no apologies, I beg of you. If any are needed they should come from me, for it was my place to have saved you the necessity of making this application by proffering to you long ago such assistance as I might be able to render. I was to blame from the start, and I do not know how I ever happened to neglect so plain a duty; the only excuse I can offer now is that I had not the slightest idea, until I received your letter, that you were in any need of such assistance as you there request." He hesitated a moment, glanced inquiringly at me, and then finding that I did not speak, continued: "I suppose, since you have done me the honor of calling upon me as a friend, that I may without offense speak frankly to you?"

I bowed my head in assent, but made no further reply.

"Then explain to me, I beg of you, how it is that your father's daughters are driven to the necessity of supporting themselves by their own exertions. Your father has been in the receipt of a comfortable income for years back, and I know that he has not lived up to it, at least by any visible expenditure. I have never been surprised at his habits of economy, for I knew that he always considered his hold upon life as very precarious; I supposed of course that he was trying to save sufficient from his income to provide for his girls an independence against the time he should be taken from them; and yet you say he has not succeeded in doing this?"

"The little furniture this house contains, our small personal property, and two hundred dollars in cash, was the entire worldly amount of which my father died possessed," I answered, as anxious as himself that no farther misunderstandings should exist, and feeling so gloriously

proud of the revelation I was about to make, that I quite forgot for a few moments the suppliant position that I was then occupying. "You are quite right, sir, in thinking that he did not live up to the income he received while in your employ; scarce one-fifth of his salary was expended for his family's use; how the balance was employed during the ten years in which we have lived so humbly, these papers may perhaps inform you;" and unlocking a secretary that stood in the room, I took from a drawer therein the package of receipts, given to my father at various times by those persons to whom he had been indebted at the time of his failure. At that moment my trials and humiliations were nothing compared to the pride I felt in knowing myself to be the daughter of James Manvers.

Mr. Henderson took the papers and glanced over them, at first carelessly, then more attentively, and finally eagerly and thoroughly. His face and voice expressed unmingled astonishment as he turned to me at length. "And is it really possible," he said, "that the amounts referred to in these papers are the former liabilities of the firm of 'Winthrop & Manvers?'"

"They are," I answered, "and their sum, I think, you will find completely covers the indebtedness with which that firm was charged. There is no man living this day who can justly say that my father ever wronged him of a cent."

Mr. Henderson glanced sharply at me from under his spectacles as I stood haughtily before him, my cheeks flushed, my eyes flashing, my habitual reserve quite deserting me, and it was in a tone of bitter significance very galling to my pride that he added—"And meanwhile, his orphan children are thrown destitute upon the world! High-minded, honorable, Quixotic man!" Then noticing the color that angrily mounted in my cheeks, he went on hastily: "But there, there; I will not intimate a word of censure; people regard such things very differently, I know; though I should myself have been very unlikely to act as he has done, I yet can feel and appreciate the disinterested and peculiar magnanimity of his conduct; conduct of which I do not believe another man in Boston would have been capable. Yet, after all, Miss Manvers, you see yourself that his honorable conduct does not alter the fact that his children are left destitute."

"No," I answered, with indignant pride; "but it very much lightens the suffering of that destitution. Believe me or not, sir, had I this day in my possession the money of which those re-

ceipts are the token, I would expend it precisely as my father has done; nay, more; if he had died, leaving his task incomplete, it should have proved my duty, helpless woman though I am, to have fulfilled his design; and to its accomplishment, had it been necessary, I would have devoted the labor of my life."

"Oh! I believe you, I believe you!" cried Mr. Henderson hastily; "there is enough of your father shining in your eyes this moment to make me credit you, had you asserted your determination to pay his debts twice over, just for the glory of the thing. But come, let us proceed to rational business; you and I must be good friends, Miss Caroline, for I loved your father, and you are his own child, verily. Pardon my bluntness of speech, and tell me frankly what you wish me to do for you."

The kind allusion to my father melted my pride at once; for I had sufficient penetration to see that the old gentleman's implied censure was more than balanced by the genuine admiration which I knew that he felt. I conquered the choking in my throat and the tremor in my voice sufficiently to say, "I must have employment, sir; something by which I can earn three or four hundred dollars a year—or less if I can not get that much; if you can find this for me, I shall never forget to be grateful to you."

Mr. Henderson sat silent for a few moments, meditating, evidently upon what I had said. At last he turned toward the table upon which he had deposited my precious papers, and commenced turning them rapidly over. "An idea has just occurred to me," he said briskly, "and one that I think likely will prove advantageous to you. I see upon these papers the signatures of your father's former creditors, many of them very wealthy men; with several of these I am personally acquainted, and I have no doubt that if I speak to them, and acquaint them with the facts of the case, that there will be not a few who will so far appreciate the high-toned honor of your father's conduct, as to feel it a duty as pleasant as it would be binding, to provide for those whom the payment of their claims has left destitute."

Unable to control the indignation his words excited, I started to my feet, crying passionately, "Destitute, perhaps, yet still not objects of charity, Mr. Henderson! Little do you understand my father's daughter, and sadly indeed have you misinterpreted the spirit of my appeal to you, if you can imagine that pecuniary assistance from strangers is either desired or would be accepted by me."

"There need be no question of charity in the

matter," he began, a little sharply; "you have a right to their good offices, and they—"

But I interrupted him haughtily. "I can not for a moment listen to you upon this subject, Mr. Henderson; regard for my father's memory would render your idea an impracticable one, even did not my own self-respect lead me to protest against it most vehemently, as I do."

He looked very uncomfortable; he would only have been punishing my insolent temper properly, had he left me to my own devices then and there, but such summary vengeance his kind heart forbade, and, much more kindly than I deserved, he continued to expostulate with me. "You take a wrong view of the matter, entirely, my dear young lady; put the question to yourself; suppose that by some obligation conferred upon you, another party had been grievously wronged; should you not feel yourself called upon to remedy that wrong when it was made known to you? more especially, when you could do so at no loss or trouble to yourself?"

"My father conferred no obligation upon his creditors, sir, in paying his just debts, nor did he wrong his children because he had no worldly goods to leave them. The priceless treasure of his honorable name he *did* leave us, and that, by God's help, shall never be tarnished by word or deed of mine. Do not urge me farther, sir," I said, seeing that he still seemed disposed to continue the argument; "your intention is kind, I know, and for that I most sincerely thank you; but my resolution is immovable; independent of all save the advice and sympathy which I trust to obtain from you, I must and will remain."

Mr. Henderson rose from his chair and slowly paced the room; he said nothing farther to me for some moments, and I, tired and uneasy, sat watching his restless movements, longing for the interview to terminate, yet not courageous enough to disturb his cogitations by word or movement of mine. At last he halted abruptly in his walk and stood before me. "I am a lonely old man, Miss Manvers," he said, "homeless, wifeless, childless, I had almost said friendless, for though there are plenty of folks who invite me to their houses, and receive my presents, I fear were the balance at my banker's to lose the significant figures on the left of the ciphers, I should find but few of my many acquaintances left to love me. Were I a married man, had I a wife and home of my own, I should say to you now, come home with me, you two little girls; be my guests until you can find for yourselves a more congenial home, or as long as

you can feel contented and happy in remaining with me; but I can not do this now, for I reside at a hotel and have no home to which I can invite you. But I like you, young lady, I like you, and that little flaxen-headed one I saw with you when I visited you before; I liked your father before you, I trusted him, and I respected him as I never did another man in my life; I see his features in your face; I hear his voice when you speak; I recognize his spirit and his ways of thinking in every sentiment you utter. I am tired of my lonely, aimless life; let me claim you and the little one as my daughters, Miss Caroline; let me provide a home for you and myself too, and bring you to it, to comfort and to cheer me in my old age."

He paused, and gazed earnestly at me, his kind face beaming with benevolence, his manly voice husky with ill-repressed emotion. I was so overpowered with astonishment at this unlooked-for speech that for a time I was quite unable to reply; at last I managed to stammer forth, "You are very, very kind, Mr. Henderson; I can not thank you as I ought."

"Then you accept my offer?" he said eagerly; "you will let me provide for you as if you were my own children?"

But I shook my head, though the tears stood in my eyes as I answered, "It must not be, sir; I have no words to thank you for your generosity, but I shall be grateful for it while I live; do not think me insensible to your kindness, even though I must at once and decidedly check all such schemes in the start. I *must* maintain my independence, sir; could I once be persuaded to relinquish it, I should be miserable ever after; and you know as well as I do, that only by earning my own livelihood by my daily toil, *can* I maintain it. I were blind indeed, could I not see that your motives for this proposal are my benefit, rather than your own comfort, and I *must* decline it; nay! do not urge me, I beseech you! farther discussion of the subject will only be painful both to you and to me—my decision is immovable."

Again he turned from me, and walked up and down the room as if to gain time to conquer the angry words that I could see had risen to his lips; at length he stood before me again, still a little flushed and excited.

"What *do* you want me to do for you then?" he said bluntly. "Tell me what you require and what assistance you *will* receive, and I will do my best to oblige you."

Tears rushed to my eyes. "Find me something to do, sir; that is all I ask. I am a friendless, inexperienced girl, not good for much, I

know, but I am young and healthy, have been pretty well educated, and I am a good plain sewer. I am willing and anxious to work, but I no more know where or how to find employment than does little Agnes herself. If you could only help me to getting a situation in a school; or would recommend me to some of your lady acquaintances who would be likely to provide me with sewing; in either way you would be doing me a far greater service than by persuading me to lead a life of idleness."

He sat musingly for a few moments. "There is not much chance in the schools, I fear, at present. Spring is a bad time to seek employment there; the teachers, you know, are engaged in the fall, and generally for the year, unless a vacancy should happen to occur, and you could secure it. I do not know much about how these things are managed; I have never had anything to do with the school management, but I will see what I can do for you. Sewing, needle-work of any kind, is utterly out of the question. I might as well recommend you to go hang yourself as to take to that for a living. You could not keep soul and body together on a seamstress's wages. What do you say to going into a store as saleswoman?"

"Any thing, sir; I shall not be particular as to the manner of the employment if I may only be able to get at it immediately." Yet my heart sank within me as I answered, for there was not another respectable occupation imaginable, it seemed to me then, that I would not rather have accepted than this. Not for worlds, however, would I have uttered an objection to any reasonable plan Mr. Henderson chose to propose.

"Well, I will see about it," he said, rising and drawing on his gloves; "this will be rather more in my line than any thing else I can at present think of. I have a pretty extensive acquaintance among the larger retail merchants of the city, and I think I may safely venture to promise you a situation with some pleasant, reliable man, who will be willing to pay you living wages. You shall hear from me shortly. Good-bye!" and my kind friend departed, leaving me really uncertain whether to be pleased or vexed at the result of the interview.

Two days later the expected note from Mr. Henderson arrived. He stated that he had procured for me a situation as saleswoman in a large wholesale and retail dry goods establishment on — Street, and that I would receive during the first six months the sum of five dollars per week, with the prospect of increased wages at the termination of that period, if my services

gave satisfaction. It was too late now to draw back even if I had felt the desire to do so; but really, all minor emotions were so completely swallowed up in the one great fact that I had a sure and independent method of making a living at once laid out before me, that, in the great relief I felt in my new prospects, I forgot to shrink and tremble at the manner in which the relief was to be obtained. The public life which my new occupation would force upon me would have been repugnant to any girl young and inexperienced as I was, but to one of my shy, indolent temperament it was absolutely terrible. Nothing but stern necessity could have forced me to accept the life thus offered me; but I well knew that I had no alternative; and resolving, with all the will and energy my desperate circumstances inspired, that I would bravely and faithfully accept the duties thus forced upon me, I cast pride to the winds, and armed with Mr. Henderson's letter of introduction, sought the scene of my future labors, and enjoyed my first interview with my future employer. It was fortunate indeed for my self-satisfied feeling of independence, that I did not know that the wages offered to me were nearly double those usually given to beginners like myself, and that it was to Mr. Henderson's generosity, after all, that I was indebted for so much of the comfort of my future life. I never knew it until after his death, yet I can not resist paying to his memory the tribute of this passing acknowledgment. A noble gentleman and a faithful friend he proved himself then and always, to others no less than to myself.

My new employer proved kind and gentlemanly; he seemed interested in me, and asked me many questions, some of which, I thought, savored strongly of impertinence. He introduced me to several of the older ladies in his employ, and finally handed me over to one of them to be initiated into the duties of my new office, and to make myself at home among the acquaintances thus formed with what celerity I might.

"Nettleby & Son" was the name of the firm (of course I disguise names, for the house of which I speak is still a flourishing one in Boston); the "son," Mr. Frank Nettleby, was seldom at home, and was known to but few of the employés, as he was always absent in Europe half of the year, sometimes much longer, attending to the foreign business of the house, and his own pleasures. It was a large establishment, doing a vast business, and employing upward of a hundred hands, about one-half of whom were women. There was a foreman who

superintended the male employés, and a forewoman who controlled the girls, and over all there was a "governor," a Mr. Harrington, who kept a general supervision over the whole establishment, and walked about among the various counters, in and out, all day, with a pencil and note-book in his hand, his keen eyes noting every thing that transpired within the building. He was accountable only to Mr. Nettleby, the head of the establishment, and that gentleman, having perfect confidence in him, was content to leave the whole management of the internal arrangements of the store entirely in Mr. Harrington's hands, who by this means came to be considered as the most influential person in the establishment.

This is a brief description of "the store" in which a very important period of my life was destined to be passed; and there, upon the Monday following my interview with Mr. Henderson, did I, nervous and heavy-hearted, repair; and there and then did I enter upon the eagerly anticipated task of "earning my own living."

CHAPTER III.

THE CLOAK DEPARTMENT.

THE various commodities in which the firm of Nettleby & Son professed to deal, were disposed of at various counters, presided over, each, by as many hands as the particular branch of the business seemed to require. My province was the cloak and shawl room, and in that department I found three ladies beside myself engaged; two of them were new-comers, and scarcely more experienced in the business than I; the third was the forewoman, who was principal in this department as well as general overseer over all the other counters; that is, though she had nothing at all to do with the business of the other counters, she was compelled, by virtue of her office, to see that they were kept in proper order, that the saleswomen conducted themselves properly toward their customers and each other, and to be arbitress in all the petty disputes that necessarily arose daily among so many young and flighty aspirants to commercial honors. She was a sister of "the governor," Miss Jenny Harrington by name, a woman from forty to forty-five years of age, active, energetic, talkative, and quick-tempered. She had been employed in the firm for twenty years of her life, and was now regarded by her employers as an almost indispensable assistant in carrying on the business. To her were intrusted always

the "new hands" as they entered the establishment, and all were required to submit to a preliminary training at her hands, ere they were allowed to take charge of any really responsible part of the business. She was shrewd and keen; a little cross and domineering sometimes with the poor, frightened creatures she was expected to tutor, though often so sadly tried by their carelessness and stupidity, that I really could scarcely wonder that her temper had become hasty and impatient. She had a kind heart though, and a generous affectionate disposition, and I never had any thing to complain of at her hands. She was evidently, from some unknown cause, favorably disposed toward me from the first, and bore with my ignorance much more patiently than I had any right to expect. I soon learned to appreciate the sterling worth of her character, and to look upon her as a reliable friend and adviser.

The shawl-room was an enclosure rather apart from the main space devoted to the public, and was, from its comparative retirement, a very desirable place for beginners. Though as accessible to all customers, of course, as the rest of the store, it was seldom entered save by those who wished to purchase the articles of which we were in charge, and thus I was spared much of the publicity I had so much dreaded. Oddly enough, however, the very fact that made the situation so pleasant a one to me, was the objection which the other girls continually urged against it. It was "so lonely," "so quiet," "so tiresome," was the invariable cry; and these causes, combined with the terror which Miss Harrington's sharp eyes and still sharper tongue universally inspired among them, made it impossible, without a great amount of grumbling and dissatisfaction, to fill any vacancies which occurred in the shawl-room, except by new-comers.

Miss Harrington called my attention to this fact one day, about a month after I had entered the store. I had been telling her how delighted I was at being kept free from the tumult and publicity of the main departments.

"Ah!" said she, "you will get bravely over that, by and by. You green hands are all glad enough at first to get rid of being stared at by every body, but your bashfulness soon wears off, and in three months' time you are all as eager to see and to be seen as you at first are to get out of sight. You will be pestering 'the governor' in a little while, as well as the rest of them, to give you a livelier stand."

"Indeed no!" said I decidedly. "If I never leave the shawl-room except by my own request,

you may depend upon being bothered with me for an indefinite time to come."

"I wish I could be certain that you knew your own mind," she said eagerly; then adding abruptly, "but I know you girls better by far than you know yourselves, so I will take no advantage of you in your present mood."

"You don't know me, Miss Harrington," I answered, a little indignantly, "if you think me so changeable or so whimsical as that. Believe me or not, I do assure you that I had rather work in here with you, than for double wages in any other part of the store."

"You are sure of that now, are you?" she cried. "If I secure you this place, you won't be fretting and fidgeting for a change before three months are gone? You are certain enough of your own mind to be willing to retain the situation you now hold permanently, even though the prospect of rising to the head of a counter, which would be before you in any other department, will be quite denied you here? for I need hardly tell you that no one can become my superior here, and I shall never leave the store as long as I am able to work. Take time to think, and don't decide hastily."

"I should cheerfully accept all the conditions you name for the privilege of keeping as I now am, in the background," I said, laughing. "I assure you, Miss Harrington, my only terror now is that I should be ousted from my position whether I will or not, by Mr. Nettleby wishing to place new-comers under your superintendence, and to do that he will have to remove me to make room for them."

"He shan't do it," she cried in her quick, positive way. "It is none of his business, anyhow; 'the governor' attends to all such matters as that, and I will have the matter definitely settled before I am a day older." And just then catching sight of "the governor" passing by the entrance to our department, she hailed him: "John! let me speak to you a moment when you can spare the time, will you?" He nodded and passed on, and she resumed speaking to me. "You see I have been complaining for a good while back, both to John and to Mr. Nettleby, that I have too much responsibility upon my hands. Together with my duties as forewoman and the constant watching which the green hands of my own department require, I am fairly worried to death sometimes. Mr. Nettleby thinks, I suppose, because I am the oldest hand in the store, that I can work miracles; so I am expected to sell as much as any other counter does, and keep every thing in flourishing order, though every other department in the store has, beside

the head, two and sometimes three or four experienced saleswomen to manage it. Now I must do every thing myself, as you know by this time, or let every thing go half done, and the mistakes that the green hands are continually making is all cast up to my account in the long run, I know. I have just made up my mind that I won't stand it. I am going to have an assistant here that I can place some dependence upon; some one who has sense enough to sell a shawl to one customer and a cloak to another, without sending the bill for the shawl to the person who bought the cloak, and *vice versa*, as Sarah Conway did yesterday; or who knows enough of arithmetic not to insist that three shawls at nine, fourteen, and twenty dollars respectively, amount to forty-five dollars, as Josephine Hoyle did last week. You don't know much yet, to be sure, but you always have your wits about you, and understand addition and subtraction; and as you never lose your temper when I tell you of your faults, I really think that in the course of a few months you will be able to do very nicely with me; and if we do learn to get along comfortably together, I am determined that you shall not be removed against your will, particularly to make room for—"

"What do you want with me, Jenny?" said the voice of "the governor" at the entrance, interrupting his sister's harangue at this interesting point. "Be quick, please, for I am wanted at the book-keeper's desk."

"I only wanted to tell you that I had found at last the assistant I had been looking for so long," said she. "This is Caroline Manvers, who has been with me for about a month. I do not know whether or not you have ever particularly noticed her before;" and, as if to make up for past negligence, Mr. Harrington then noticed me to such an extent that I felt the color rushing to my cheeks beneath the keen glance of his eyes.

"What can I do for you and Miss Manvers?" he said at length.

"Just this," answered his sister. "Miss Manvers likes her present situation, and I like her, so it is our mutual wish that she should remain here permanently, and I want you to let the arrangement be an understood thing, to draw up a written agreement to that effect if it is necessary."

"I do not suppose that it will be, but it shall be just as you please," said Mr. Harrington, and then as he walked away his sister added—

"Mr. Nettleby never interferes with any of John's arrangements if they are serious ones, so you may consider yourself a fixture here now."

Thus the conversation terminated, and my position was thenceforth regarded by all as definitely settled, and every day made it a pleasanter and an easier one for me. I learned to like Miss Harrington very much, and with the other girls in the store I was thrown very little in contact. Those in our own department were continually being changed, one set rarely continuing with us more than a month at a time, and thus I formed no intimate acquaintance with any of them. With the young men engaged in the store I was even less associated, scarcely having acquaintance enough with any of them to warrant more than an occasional passing word of salutation. With Mr. Harrington, however, I could not help but become better acquainted; associated as I was with his sister, this could scarcely be avoided, for he frequently stopped in his circuit of the store as he passed the shawl-room, and when he found us alone he would often tarry to chat awhile with her, and naturally with me also. She was very fond of him, and he apparently of her. Though she was at least ten years his senior, yet she seemed to look up to him with unbounded respect; and all that "John" said or did was lawful and right in her sight. All her hopes and affections seemed to be centred in him and a younger brother, "Eddie" she called him, of whom she often talked to me as we became better acquainted; but though she spoke of the latter affectionately, it was not with the same tone of proud deference which she used in speaking of "the governor."

Mr. Nettleby I seldom saw, yet I heard him, much more frequently, I suppose, than he had any idea of. His desk was situated immediately in front of the shawl-room, which, by the bye, was not a regularly lathed and plastered apartment; it was merely one end of the store separated from the principal department by a frame-work some eight feet in height, curtained on one side by cloaks and shawls, on the opposite by the curtains, etc., of the upholstering department. Of course all that transpired upon the one side could be plainly heard upon the other, and I had the benefit of many a conversation between Mr. Nettleby and the various personages who frequented his desk, which I should have been much better pleased could I have escaped from hearing. This, however, was hardly possible. When Miss Harrington was in the cloak-room, she with her brace of pupils was usually stationed at that side of it nearest to the entrance, and, except when we were overrun with customers, it was my duty to remain at the opposite side, where I took charge of the

clerical labors of the department, Miss Harrington having, by degrees, as she found my knowledge of addition and subtraction warranted it, submitted to my hands the entire superintendence of the bills and payments, and all the business transactions requiring the attention of an educated person.

Thus it happened that, as I sat at my counter with pencil and memoranda before me, day after day, I was perforce obliged to hear all that went on at the desk which was separated from mine only by a silken curtain and a cashmere shawl.

I do not remember having yet said any thing about the personal appearance of my employer. He was a man upward of fifty, I suppose, for Miss Harrington told me that his son, Mr. Frank Nettleby, was five-and-twenty; but he did not look a day over forty; he was tall, finely formed, a little inclined to corpulence, with bright blue eyes, brown curly hair, and heavy side-whiskers; both hair and whiskers being as yet quite guiltless of grey. To his dentist he was indebted for a faultless set of teeth; to his tailor for costume irreproachable in cut and texture; and to nature for a dashing gentlemanly air, and the gift of language in perfection. Such a talker as he was! and so inquisitive! Upon my first interview with him, as I intimated, I had been inclined to consider his questions and himself as rather impertinent; but as I learned to know him better, I found that this questioning habit had become second nature to him, and that all strangers who came under his notice were submitted to it, as far as they would stand it, without respect of sex or station. He was a good-humored, charitable man, easily imposed upon, and unable to say "no" to any of the scores of petitioners who daily beset his desk. Had it not been for the stricter discipline of Mr. Harrington, chaos must soon have reigned in the now orderly precincts of the store. Mr. Nettleby was a widower, and his son Frank was his only child; he was a man of fashion and of pleasure; not addicted to any particular vice, that I ever heard of, but fond of racing, boating, billiards, theatricals, and with all such tastes as mark the man of the world. Many a bet was booked; many a doubtful bargain concluded; many not over-pleasant anecdotes related by him or some of the many fashionable gentlemen who visited his desk during the hours in which I sat at my counter behind him; and at last, really dreading that I might thus inadvertently overhear something that Mr. Nettleby would not wish to have known, I spoke to Miss Harrington about it,

and asked whether I had better not inform Mr. Nettleby of my vicinity.

"You will be laughed at for your pains, if you do, my dear," she replied; "I formerly occupied your position, and was annoyed in the same manner; so I one day told Mr. Nettleby of the circumstance, showing him just how the screen between us was arranged, and how impossible it was that I should avoid overhearing all that was said. 'Overhear as much as you like, he said, laughing; 'if you can stand it, I am sure I can;' and that was all the satisfaction I could get out of him."

Thus I was compelled to let the matter rest; but if I had any remaining doubts about the light in which Mr. Nettleby regarded my vicinity, they were settled definitely by an incident which occurred a few weeks after my conversation with Miss Harrington.

It was a stormy morning; there had not been a dozen customers in since we opened the store. Miss Harrington taking advantage of this lull of business, as was her custom, had had hauled down a vast quantity of goods at the end of the apartment farthest from me, and with the aid of her two assistants, was rearranging them according to her ideas of right and convenience. I was busily engaged copying a paper containing an account of stock, taken in Miss Harrington's crabbed, angular handwriting, a writing that now seldom emerged from our domains, since she had made the discovery that I was a tolerably fair penman.

Outside sat Mr. Nettleby, with his chair pushed so far back against the screen that divided him from me, that I expected momentarily to see it thrown down. He was engaged in an exciting conversation with a dog-fancier, concerning a choice litter of pups of which the latter was anxious to dispose.

"And I don't want the cursed things at any price," was the elegant peroration with which Mr. Nettleby wound up a long and disparaging harangue concerning the animals in question.

"Come, now! really, Mr. Nettleby, you mustn't expect me to believe that," rejoined the coarse voice of the man with whom he was conversing. "No gentleman who knows what's what, as well as you does, can see them hani-mals and not want them. I know you, sir, better than you know yourself. When that white and tan opened his eyes, the first thing I says was 'Mr. Nettleby's the man for that chap!' I had 'em all laid out in my mind, you see, for different customers; but when that tother tan growed so amazing purty, thinks I 'It's a sin to

part 'em.' I had laid him out, you see, for George Le Grange, and he's the man that could appreciate him too; but I haint yet said nothing to him about it, and if so be you'd like to have the pair on 'em, Mr. Nettleby, I will try what else I can do for Mr. Le Grange. Come, now! let's strike a bargain; if you're for taking the critters, I aint the man to let the matter of a V more or less cross your fancy."

"The black and tan you say is marked like Flora?" queried Mr. Nettleby, evidently reluctant.

"Eggsactly!" rejoined the other with animation; "two fore-legs and tip of the tail black—"

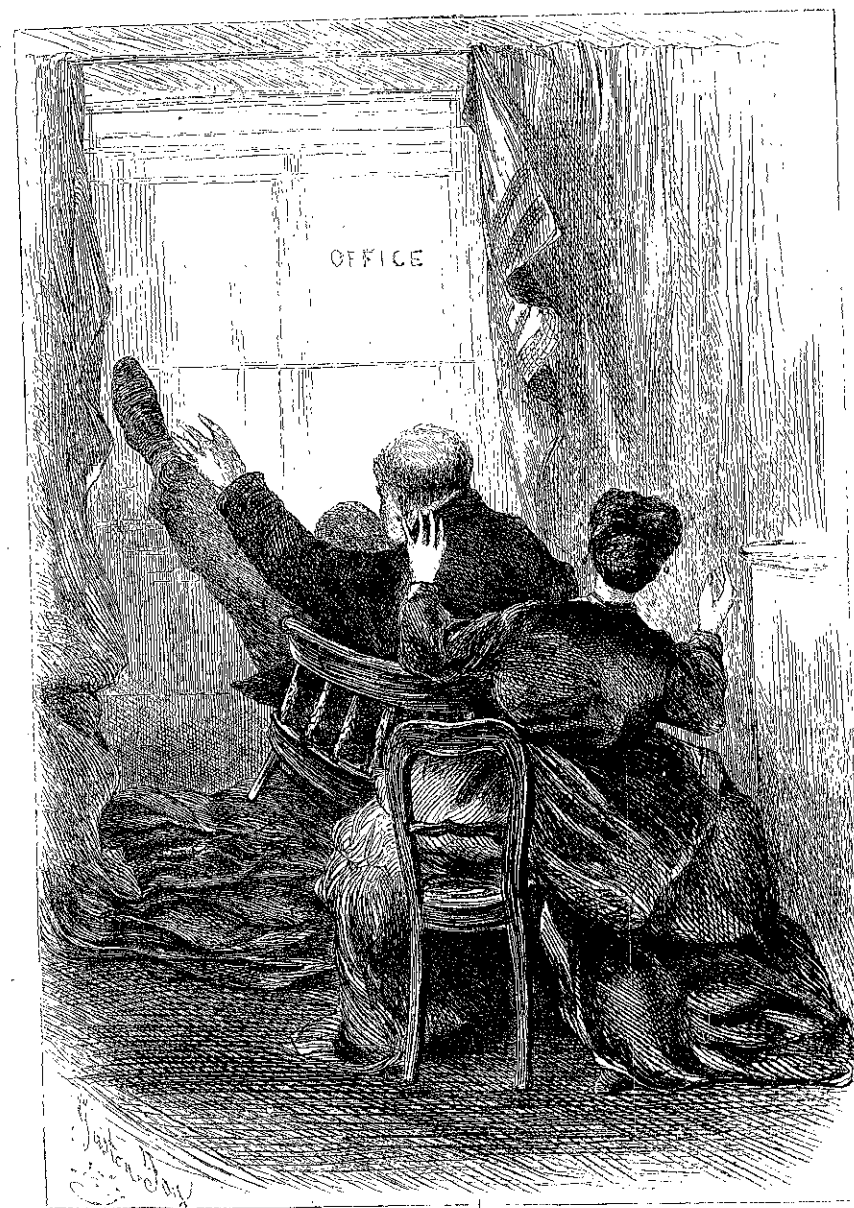
"No!" interrupted the gentleman; "only one of Flora's fore-legs was black."

"Not wishing to contradict, sir, you're teetotally out there. Lord! I've handled the critter enough to know the color of every hair on her body. Her two fore-legs was black, sir, one to the knee, tother to the shoulder."

"I tell you no, man! the left leg was tan; I could swear to it," again interrupted Mr. Nettleby, and in the excitement of the interesting discussion he gave his chair the final hitch which I had so long been dreading, and down came curtains and shawls upon our heads, enveloping us both in the ruins. We could not help but laugh, for the situation was certainly a ludicrous one; however, extricating ourselves from our superfluous drapery as gracefully as might be, we started to repair damages—Mr. Nettleby first dismissing his trading friend, the innocent cause of our present embarrassment, with language more decisive than refined.

"Don't let us interrupt you in your necessary avocations, Miss Jeuny," he said, gracefully waving that lady back, as she started to come to our assistance; "I will attend to this upholstery business myself; I have nothing better to do, and I am perfectly competent to the task, I assure you. Hallo! you, sir," hailing one of the innumerable small boys that were appurtenances of the store, and who now stood gaping with open eyes and mouths at the destruction wrought by their employer; "go you and hunt up a hammer and some nails. I will nail this damask up myself this time, and I know that then I shall not be able again to invade so unceremoniously the privacy of your domains. By the bye, Miss Manvers, if I may venture the question, what is your opinion of the color of that dog's leg?"

I laughed in spite of my vexation, and Mr. Nettleby seemed to enjoy the joke vastly, so in high good-humor he proceeded to gather up the scattered drapery.



"HE GAVE HIS CHAIR THE FINAL HITCH."—PAGE 22.

Just then "the governor" came along, and without asking any questions, seemed to understand at once what had happened. "Had you not better allow me to attend to that, Mr. Nettleby?" he said.

"Certainly not," briskly returned that gentleman; "but you may watch and see how it ought to have been done in the first place. I will have no assistance except what Miss Manvers I dare say will benevolently afford me. If you will be good enough to hold this corner of the damask, Miss Manvers, I will keep the other side in its place until the hammer comes.

So, obedient to his directions, I held the fold of crimson on a level with my head upon a bar of the frame to which he designed to nail it.

"What a pretty hand you have!" he said, checking his operations abruptly and gazing admiringly upon the hand and arm thus conspicuously forced into notice. "I beg your pardon, but really I could not avoid speaking of it; small, well-shaped and white—we do not often see those three combinations—and with rounded wrist, tapering fingers, and filbert nails, too; really you have every reason to be proud of such a hand." And thus he went on with cool impertinence, criticising and commenting until I was ready to cry with vexation. Fortunately the boy arrived with the hammer just then, so I hoped that I should be tormented with no farther remarks. He nailed his own corner of the damask and proceeded leisurely toward my end, driving a tack every few inches. Half way down, however, he stopped and recommenced his attack.

"From which side of the house do you inherit that hand, Miss Manvers? Did you not know that fine hands and feet are always hereditary? Do you get yours from your father's or mother's family?"

"From my father's, I believe; please, Mr. Nettleby, don't talk about it any more. Do you think it is necessary to put those tacks so close together?" I said, desperately endeavoring, if not to check his loquacity, at least to change its direction. But the distraction was but temporary, and he instantly resumed, driving another tack as he spoke.

"On the contrary, I was just thinking that I had not driven them quite close enough; but I can easily put a few more in if it is necessary. So you inherited your pretty hand from your father's family, did you? I thought so; I have an acquaintance whose hand resembles yours very much; that is, it is similarly shaped, and I think as white, though by no means so small as yours. She inherits hers from her father; she

is a Wilberforce, comes of a fine old family, you see; a faultless hand is an indubitable sign of good blood, Miss Manvers, did you know that?"

Even while he was speaking a low voice sounded in my ear, "I do not believe the task Mr. Nettleby has imposed upon you is an agreeable one; may I not relieve you?" And turning, I saw Mr. Harrington standing by my side, ready to take from my hand the damask I had just mentally resolved to drop, at the risk of discomposing all Mr. Nettleby's arrangements.

"Oh! thank you, yes sir!" I cried, and flushed and excited, I resigned to him my position and turned thankfully away; yet vexed as I was, I could not help noticing that Mr. Harrington seemed scarcely less indignant at his principal's want of delicacy than I was myself.

Mr. Nettleby made no effort to detain me, and never afterward alluded to the incident in any way, but it was long ere I heard the last of "The Wilberforce Hand" from the girls in the store, and the whole affair was a subject of annoyance to me for weeks after.

Time rolled on, and I believe no event of sufficient importance to record transpired during the first year of my employment in the firm of Nettleby & Son; unless perhaps it was the arrival, toward the close of the year, of Mr. Frank Nettleby.

This gentleman was a younger duplicate of his father, and not much younger either, if looks were to be believed, for while Mr. Nettleby, senior, was a very young-looking man for his age, his son was decidedly the reverse. No person glancing casually at him would have thought him less than thirty; he was about his father's height, not quite so broad, however, with the same brown curly hair, side-whiskers, and bright blue eyes; of much the same temperament too, I thought, for a more jovial, light-hearted, good-tempered fellow could scarcely be found than our junior partner. He and his father would have anywhere been mistaken for brothers, and this was a relationship that the older gentleman was quite disposed to countenance. It was an odd connection that existed between them, and yet no one doubted but that they were sincerely and warmly attached to each other; but they had very queer ways of expressing themselves, notwithstanding. While Mr. Nettleby almost always addressed his son as "F. N.," that worthy as universally spoke of and to his father by the title of "Partner." I overheard once from my station behind the curtain a conversation which illustrated the relationship of my two employers better than any mere description of mine can do.

Mr. Harrington had been remonstrating with Mr. Nettleby, senior, concerning some of his son's delinquencies. "Do exert your authority over Frank, Mr. Nettleby," said "the governor," "and at least find out for me whether he has brought with him copies of the bills for the goods that were received last week; the bills that were forwarded are evidently incorrect, and I can not persuade him to compare them with those he holds, or ought to hold. If you would just prevail upon him to take a search among his papers, and find out at least if he has the duplicates, it would save us all an amazing amount of labor and vexation."

"Now, Harrington! where is the use in making such an appeal to me!" returned Mr. Nettleby in an injured tone. "If you chose to talk about my junior's exerting his authority over me, there would be some sense in what you are saying. You know very well F. N. does as he pleases; always did, and always will. He was an older man than I when he left school, and the idea of me prevailing upon a fellow who has spent six months out of each of the last six years of his life in Paris, to do any thing he has not a mind to do, is absolutely preposterous. The error in the bills is as much his affair as it is mine, and he knows it; if there is a loss, he will suffer by it; and if the fear of loss won't make him observe the proper precautions with his bills and receipts, it is really absurd to expect that the remonstrances of his partner would be more effectual."

The odd argument here closed, and I regret to add that I never found out whether Mr. Frank produced the missing duplicates or not.

My home life had proved throughout this passing year still more uneventful than my public one. Agnes had attended school steadily, and I really saw but little of the child except at meal-time. She was always a sleepy-headed little thing, and found it hard work to stay awake in the evenings long enough to prepare her lessons for the next day's school; so she always gave me her good-night kiss, and ran off to bed long before I was able to retire, for I had the sewing to attend to in the evening, both hers and my own, and this generally kept me busy until a pretty late bed-time.

I became terribly lonely during those long, dull, wearisome evenings at home; I often would read over in the newspapers the advertised amusements of the day, longing with all the eager curiosity of youth for the opportunity to see and to hear the wonderful things I read of. I was always fond of theatricals, though the number of plays I had seen I could have counted

on the fingers of one hand; perhaps it was because they were such a novelty to me that I longed so ardently to behold them, and bitter feelings of repining would rise in my heart, when I thought how utterly impossible it was that I should ever have any opportunity of enjoying that which would have been such a source of delight to me. Very, very hard it seemed to me that all joy, all pleasure, natural to my age, should have been denied to me, and I grew morose and low-spirited, brooding over my deprivations until I was almost shocked at the extent of the discontent which had grown upon me. The lonely, quiet evenings did not tend to lessen the reserve of my disposition; this living upon my own thoughts, ever mourning over the past, ever hopeless of the future, was likely to prove pregnant with serious results for me. I began to grow morbid; I dreamed at night of father and Sue continually, and finally I began to fancy that their frequent appearance in my visions was a token of my own approaching death, and my health really began to give way beneath the influence of such presentiments. I wrote a long letter to Mr. Henderson, accepting for Agnes the favors I had declined for myself, and this letter I laid carefully by in the secretary, along with those sacred receipts, my father's legacy to his children, to be given to Agnes after my death.

It was with these feelings of hopeless despondency, these presentiments of impending death, that my twentieth birthday found me engrossed; and in one particular at least, these presentiments were destined to be realized, for the ensuing year proved to be, as I had foreboded, the most important of my life.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENING AT HOME.

My first interview with Mr. Frank Nettleby was after this wise: I think it was the second day after his return he went the round of the store, stopping to chat at each counter with such of the employes as he remembered, claiming introductions to the new hands, and winning for himself golden opinions from all.

In his rounds he stopped, of course, at the shawl-room, and leaning his handsome head against the door-way, he stood looking in upon us, with good-humored face and laughing eyes.

"Still there! Miss Jenny," he cried; "so none of your many admirers have yet persuaded you to leave us, and you are Miss Jenny still?"

"I am still sane," she retorted dryly, and he

went on laughingly. "Yes, yes! I have not forgotten what a sworn man-hater you are. I know of old that 'the governor' is all that redeems the sex from total depravity in your eyes. Who have you with you now? I believe these young ladies are all strangers to me."

"The two nearest to you are sisters, Misses Margaret and Mary Leigh; the lady at the desk is Miss Manvers."

He shook hands with the two girls nearest to him, timid little creatures both of them, scarcely knowing whether to be most pleased or frightened at their employer's condescension, then he advanced toward me to accord me the same honor. I rose as he approached, of course, and gave him my hand, as he extended his. He had hardly looked at us while speaking, but as he clasped my hand he glanced first at it, and then at me, with rather more interest than he had exhibited in speaking to the other girls.

"Hope you find things pleasant with us," he said. "If I can be of any service to you at any time, don't hesitate to call upon me;" and scarce listening to my words of thanks for his civil speech, he dropped my hand and was turning away, when his eye fell upon the sheet of paper upon which I had been writing.

"Your writing, ma'am?" he said, catching up the sheet; "of course it is, though. A very pretty hand; really, a beautiful hand; I noticed the same writing yesterday in looking over the shawl-department accounts; I was about to inquire then of what writing-master Miss Jenny had been taking lessons during my absence, for I remember her chirography of old as being remarkable for many other peculiarities rather than legibility or beauty. No offense, Miss Jenny, I hope?" and he cast a laughing glance at her, the pleasant familiarity of his tone divesting his words of any taint of rudeness.

"None at all," she answered, in the same spirit; "honor to whom honor is due;" penmanship never was my forte, I freely confess, and since Miss Manvers has relieved me of the care of the accounts, I can see as plainly as any body that they are much more creditably managed than in my day. I am not at all jealous of your praise, Mr. Frank."

He still examined the paper which he held, and took up others from the table, comparing and admiring as he did so. "An uncommonly pretty manuscript!" he repeated. "Miss Manvers, would you object, if you can spare the time, to doing some copying for me?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Well, I will bring you in then, to-morrow, if I think of it, some accounts handed in from

the other departments; I have never heretofore paid much attention to the style in which they were gotten up, provided they tallied correctly with the book-keeper's balance-sheet; but I think, now that I have seen yours, that it would be a decided improvement if the records which are filed for preservation could be handed in in uniform style." And then he left us; but I need not have distressed myself about the additional amount of work which was thus ordered, for it did not arrive; I suppose Mr. Frank forgot all about it, or else came to the conclusion that it was a matter of less consequence than he had at first considered it, for, though he saw me every day or two, he said no more upon the subject for many weeks afterward.

Both Miss Harrington and I were very thankful for this forgetfulness just at this time, for the close of the year was coming on, and our yearly account of stock and many other heavy duties which the season brought were weighing heavily upon our shoulders. Of course the praises which my penmanship had received stimulated me to fresh endeavors, and I would allow no accounts to be forwarded from our department which I had not smoothly and carefully copied. In making out the first draft of these accounts, Miss Harrington's assistance was indispensable, and the work went on very slowly, except when we could engage at it together. As we happened to be uncommonly busy this year, it was generally a very difficult thing for her to be spared long enough from her other duties to make any thing like satisfactory progress with our accounts. Even when we could work at them we were so frequently interrupted that serious mistakes more than once occurred, and finally Miss Harrington ceased her efforts in despair.

"There is no use in trying to accomplish any thing in this way," she cried one day, after finding that the work of hours had been rendered useless by a mistake she had made in some calculations at the start. "If we can not get a chance to work together uninterruptedly, we may as well give up the task at once, for we shall never succeed at the present rate. What do you do of evenings? would you mind taking the books home with you some night and having me come around in the evening and working at them with you? Or you can bring them to me at my boarding-house, if you prefer it, and we will work at them there—I will see that you have company home any time."

I was pleased with the suggestion, for any break in the monotony of my long, lonely evenings was welcome to me. On account of Ag-

nes, it was better that Miss Harrington should come to me, and so I told her.

"Well, then, shut up the books; we will not worry over them any longer now. Let me see, to-night is our prayer-meeting; it will not do for me to miss it, but I will come to-morrow night early, and I know we can do more in one hour quietly at home, than we can accomplish by a day's work here," and thus the matter was disposed of.

Now that I look back upon that time, I can scarcely credit myself the excitement with which so unimportant an event as this visit was anticipated by me—my first expected visitor since Mr. Henderson's call more than a year before; and perhaps the simple announcement of this fact may better enable the reader to understand how lonely and isolated a life I had been leading than could any other assertion.

I hurried home from the store earlier than usual that night, that I might embellish my parlor with a little extra attention in honor of the expected guests. So long had it been since I had entertained company, that the unusual circumstance awakened in me a pleasurable excitement to which I had long been a stranger. My parlor swept and dusted, and my own simple toilet completed, I then tacked fresh laces to the sleeves and neck of Agnes's little black dress, and arranged with more than ordinary care the long golden ringlets that adorned her beautiful head, and then, with my table drawn in front of the fire, with the store books and papers conveniently disposed upon it, with Agnes settled industriously at her school-books, I waited in patient expectation the arrival of my guest. I was not long detained; soon there came a ring at the bell which sounded like Miss Jenny's veritable self, and when I opened the door she stood before me, lively, active, and talkative as ever.

"Yes, I am alone, child," she said, seeing my look of surprise that she was unaccompanied, for though early, it was quite dark. "John has just left me; he brought me to the step, but he had business down town yet this evening, so he was obliged to leave me. He will call for me at ten."

I ushered her into the parlor, and soon saw her comfortably seated in an arm-chair by the table. "Why!" she exclaimed, upon seeing Agnes, "is this little one the sister of whom you have so often spoken? I had thought of her as being an older child than she evidently is."

"Agnes is thirteen, though she looks so young and childish," I said, smiling. "She

has always been our pet and baby, and I am not sorry to keep her a child as long as possible;" and then as my little girl put her hand in Miss Jenny's and raised her beautiful blue eyes timidly to the lady's face, she could not resist stooping and kissing affectionately the sweet mouth thus turned toward her.

"She is a dear little girl and a great comfort to you, I have no doubt," she said. "It has always been a matter of regret with me that I have had no sister; it would have been great company for me during my lonely life. The boys have been as good and kind to me as boys could be, but I have often wished that Eddie had been a girl."

After a little more chat we set to work with our accounts, and worked at them so industriously that when the door-bell rang, announcing the arrival of Mr. Harrington, his sister glanced at her watch, scarcely able to believe that the evening had so far advanced.

"Half past nine!" said she; "I had no idea it was so late, though John is rather earlier than I told him to be."

I escorted Mr. Harrington to the parlor; he paused a moment in the door-way, his tall head almost touching the humble lintel.

"And this is your home?" he said almost unconsciously, glancing first over the room and then at me, with that kind, cordial expression in his eyes that made him at times so much resemble his sister.

"It looks much more like home than our boarding-house rooms do, don't you think so, John?" said Miss Harrington; and then, without waiting for an answer, she went on impulsively, "But, poor fellow! he does not even know what home ought to look like! He has lived in a boarding-house ever since he was ten years old."

"I have my ideas on the subject, notwithstanding," he said quietly. "This little maid is your sister, I suppose, Miss Harrington?" and as Agnes rose to return his greetings, he took her rosy face between his hands and gazed at her with a look in his eyes that few would have imagined those stern, quiet orbs capable of expressing. And Agnes seemed to understand it too, for with that peculiar freemasonry which children possess in common with the other orders of the brute creation, she recognized in him a friend; and drawing her low chair close to his, before he had been in the house half an hour, she was nestled cosily to his side, with his arm around her, and her hand clasped in his; an unprecedented piece of condescension in my shy, wild little sister.

I brought in a plate of apples and passed them around, and as Miss Harrington sat munching hers, she said to me somewhat abruptly, "What do you do with yourself here of evenings, Caroline? Do you have much company or go out much?"

"I have not spent an evening from home since my father's death," said I sadly, "and you are the first friends I have received here since before I entered the store."

"But, good heavens, child!" she cried, quite aghast at my announcement, "how can you possibly lead such a life? I should think you would die of loneliness."

"If it is a fatal disease I certainly shall," I said bitterly, "for I believe that I am often afflicted with it in its severest forms."

"Tut, tut! this will never do," she cried, her kind eyes filling with tears as she spoke. "We shall have you ere long a hopeless victim of that 'green and yellow melancholy' that Shakespeare tells us of. Now we are too much troubled with society for our own good, for we never can be alone in a boarding-house; I think an exchange of visits once in a while will be good for all of us, don't you, John?"

"I think we will try the experiment, at all events," he said, in a voice so gentle and tender that my heart throbbed, I knew not why, with a feeling of grateful joy that was almost painful. "If Miss Manvers will only allow us to be her friends, I think we shall henceforth take the friendly privilege of inflicting our company upon her very frequently."

I faltered my thanks as best I could for kindness and sympathy so unexpected and sincere, and in the same voice, so expressive of considerate affection, Mr. Harrington continued—

"I have noticed for some time past the gloomy, cheerless expression your face has been growing to wear, an expression totally different from the easily understood sadness that clouded it when first you came among us, and I have often wondered what terrible domestic trials could be harassing your young spirit to bring that terrible look into your face. The mystery is explained now; so desolate a life as you have evidently been leading would account for even the extent of dejection which has afflicted you. There must be a change here, or the shawl department of Nettleby & Son will have to find another clerk before a year is out."

I was so utterly astonished by the intelligence that my face and its expressions had been noticed by our quiet "governor," that I forgot to repeat my thanks for his sympathy.

"You like music, do you not?" he said, after

a moment's pause; "yet I need not ask the question, for the shape of your forehead is sufficient proof of that. You must allow us to introduce to you some of the inmates of what we call our home. We have some fine musicians among them, and can get up impromptu concerts almost any evening. Have you finished your accounts?" turning abruptly to his sister.

"Bless you, no!" cried she; "we have work enough there for a week."

"Then, Miss Caroline, I shall do myself the honor of calling upon you to-morrow evening for the purpose of taking you to spend an evening with Jenny. Such industrious folks as you are can accomplish a good deal in the early part of the evening, and we will wind up the programme with a little music. Is the proposal an agreeable one?"

Miss Harrington cordially seconded her brother's invitation, and I, scarce knowing whether I was pleased or not, finally accepted it, and then the subject changed. We chatted long and pleasantly on many themes, our mutual acquaintances in the store, and the many incidents that daily occurred there, forming endless themes for discussion, and it was past eleven o'clock when Miss Harrington rose to take leave.

She kissed me cordially as she bade me good-bye, the first time she had ever done so, and my eyes grew dim with unshed tears as I remembered that it was the first caress I had exchanged with any one but Agnes since my father's death. Then I caught Mr. Harrington's gaze fixed upon my face, and blushing, I dashed my tears aside, feeling intuitively, as I did so, that he had guessed the reason of my emotion.

I accompanied my new friends to the door, and with Agnes clinging to my side, I gazed wistfully after them in the darkness as long as I could distinguish their forms. Twice I perceived that Mr. Harrington turned to look back at me, and the action awakened again that wild fluttering in my breast that I knew not whether to interpret as joy or sorrow.

From that night the dark fiend of *ennui* which had so long tormented me vanished with the retreating forms of my new-found ties, and a golden halo, shed from some mysterious radiance within my own bosom, was cast upon the monotonous pathway that still lay unchanged before me. My prospects were the same; it was I that was changed; and in vague but delightful perplexity as to the cause of my mental phenomena, I yielded myself to the guidance offered to me, quite forgetting to be proud or reserved in the grateful affection I was learning to feel for Miss Jenny and her brother.

The next evening, arrayed in the plain black silk which was the only attempt at dress of which my mourning wardrobe could boast, I received Mr. Harrington again beneath my roof. Agnes had gone to stay with a school-mate, the daughter of a kind neighbor, with whom she intended to remain until I returned, and was much more delighted in expectation with her visit than I was with mine—for my old shyness was creeping back upon me quite overpoweringly at the idea of appearing so soon in the presence of so many strangers. However, I had no time for faltering, for Mr. Harrington bore to me his sister's injunction that I should lose no time, and soon, hooded and shawled, I left the house under his protection.

It had been so long since I had been in the street after night, that this sensation alone was quite a novelty to me, and so I told my companion.

"You poor little hermit!" he said, almost involuntarily, "no wonder you are becoming so shadow-like! At least you shall have a good look at the streets to-night, if so trivial a circumstance can give you pleasure." And choosing the principal thoroughfares in our progress, we walked slowly and leisurely along, I feeling really delighted at the bright spectacle of the gas-lighted streets and showily-decorated shop-windows, clinging timidly to the arm of my escort, and feeling momentarily a growing sense of comfort and protection in his companionship that was not the least delightful of all the novel sensations of that memorable evening.

Arrived at last, decidedly to my regret, at our destination, Mr. Harrington escorted me at once to his sister's room. She was reading when we entered, but laying aside her book, greeted me very kindly, and after relieving me of my wrappings, introduced me to her young brother, Edwin Harrington, a boy apparently of eighteen or twenty, who had been seated by the table reading as we entered.

I glanced rather curiously at this new acquaintance, for I felt really interested in the boy, having heard his sister speak of him so frequently and so affectionately. He was tall, but slightly built, and seemed to be in very delicate health. He had a fair, beardless face, high white forehead, light hair and blue eyes. By many persons I dare say he would have been regarded as strikingly handsome, but his was by no means a style of beauty that I admired; he in no respect resembled either Miss Jenny or "the governor," a fact which is less remarkable when it is explained that he was only a half-brother, his mother having been Dr. Harring-

ton's second wife. He shook hands with me, and his hands seemed as soft and slender as my own, and his voice, when he spoke to me, fairly startled me, so musically feminine were its tones; upon the whole, I could but agree with Miss Jenny in thinking that it was a pity Eddie had not been a girl. How little could I then guess the feelings of respect and admiration I was afterward destined to feel for that seemingly effeminate boy!

The first two hours of my visit were devoted to the inevitable accounts; but with "the governor's" assistance we made such rapid headway with them that I declared my ability to finish the rest of the work without any farther assistance.

Work finished, Mr. Harrington escorted his sister and myself to the parlor, Eddie still choosing to remain with the book to which he had devoted his undivided attention throughout the evening. In the parlor I was introduced to many persons, both ladies and gentlemen, and at last, overpowered by the many strange faces, I shrank timidly to Miss Harrington's side, scarcely able to raise my eyes, or to respond with more than monosyllables to all the civil speeches that were made to me. "The governor" was evidently a man of mark in his own circle, and his conversation was as eagerly listened to by the gay crowd around him as by unsophisticated me. Hopeless of drawing me from the shy reserve in which I had involuntarily clothed myself, one by one the strangers who had been introduced to me wandered away, and to my great relief I was allowed to sit by Miss Jenny's side unnoticed and untalked to. I was not allowed to feel myself neglected though, at any time, for when the company generally consented to worry me no more with civilities that only frightened me, and I was left sitting in my quiet insignificance, listening to the gay chatter around me, and watching all that occurred with eager, happy eyes, I not unfrequently caught Mr. Harrington's glance directed toward me, and often, during the evening, he would leave the gay circle of which he seemed to be the centre, and would come to where I sat so quietly by his sister's side, questioning me kindly concerning my comfort and enjoyment.

At last the music which I had been promised was introduced. The performers were several ladies who played upon the piano, and a gentleman, proficient upon the violin; and then after a general cry for Eddie Harrington, that young gentleman appeared with a flute in his hand upon which he certainly "discoursed most excellent music."

It is only by remembering how entirely I had been deprived of any pleasures of this kind, that the extent of my present enjoyment can be understood. I forgot the time, the place, the company by whom I was surrounded; I listened like one entranced, drinking in the harmony of sweet sounds that so ravished my senses with a ravenous appetite that seemed as if it could never be satisfied; at times the tears sprang uncontrollably to my eyes, and I would have given almost any thing I possessed for the privilege of weeping; it was at such a moment as this, daring a brief lull in the music, that Mr. Harrington stood by my side.

"How dearly you love music!" he said, gazing almost wonderingly into my excited face.

"And do not you like it, then?" I asked, with still more amazement than he had shown.

"Like it! of course," he said, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "in an easy, indifferent sort of a way; I think it is generally rather pleasant to listen to; to be sure it all sounds alike to me, but I don't mind that, so long as the sound is an agreeable one. There are thousands of things I like better, though," he added, laughing; "watching your horror-struck countenance at this moment, for instance; I am sure you are mentally convicting me to be fit only 'for treason, stratagem, and spoils?'" And just then the music recommencing, he left me again to the undisturbed enjoyment of it.

This evening proved to be only the first of many as pleasant ones which followed during the ensuing spring. I never again had reason to complain of the loneliness which had occasioned me such bitter misery. One or two evenings every week I spent in the society of the Harringtons, and their kindness secured to me even greater pleasure than I found in visiting and being visited by them. Learning by accident my fondness for dramatic performances, Mr. Harrington introduced me under his sister's guardianship to the hitherto forbidden paradise of the theatre, and very frequently did he escort there not only his sister and me, but little Agnes, between whom and himself a wonderful friendship had sprung up; and though Miss Jenny almost invariably fell asleep during the performances, she as invariably protested afterward that she enjoyed it quite as much as I did, and was too thoroughly good-natured to mar my enjoyment by declining to accompany us whenever her brother invited us to go.

Marvelous indeed was the change which the kindness of these dear friends had succeeded in bringing upon my life. My health and spirits both improved under their benign influence, and

I was daily growing more hopeful and unserved; while the hidden happiness that was springing up in my heart so brightened my eyes and quickened my tongue that Miss Harrington was wont to declare that I was becoming as merry and heedless as was Agnes herself. I had learned very quickly the lesson which happiness had taught me—and with the daily prayer that my past repinings might be forgotten, I thankfully acknowledged that there was always something worth living for in life, while earth was blessed with such generous, unselfish spirits as those of John Harrington and his sister Jenny.

CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT IN THE SHAWL-ROOM.

THAT spring an incident occurred at the store which exercised a marked influence upon my future life, so I trust I may not be considered unnecessarily tedious if I relate the affair at length.

One afternoon, after one of the busiest days of the season, Miss Harrington, who had been complaining of a headache all day, came to me, white and faint, saying, "I believe I shall have to go home, Caroline; I feel really very sick. I hate to leave you when there is so much to do, especially as Margaret Leigh is away, and you will have no one to help you but that little girl who has just come to us; but I am afraid I shall not be able to stay any longer."

"Do not think of doing so, dear Miss Harrington," I cried, feeling quite uneasy at her haggard looks. "I do not know what I can have been thinking of, that I did not send you home long ago. Get your bonnet on instantly, and I will go and find 'the governor,' for you really are not able to go home alone;" and without waiting for an answer, I ran to do as I had said.

I presently returned, followed by her brother, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing Miss Jenny fairly on her homeward way.

"Do not overwork yourself, Caroline," she had said as she left me; "what you can not get through with by the time the store closes, leave undone, and I will come a little earlier than usual to-morrow morning, to make up for lost time."

"You shall do no such thing," cried 'the governor' and I with one accord, and he added gravely, "You will not be able to come at all, if you do not get home pretty soon." And so they left me, and I ran back to my work and my

customers, and was kept busily employed until nearly dark.

Then we commenced the tiresome task of folding up and putting away the innumerable articles which had been hauled down from their shelves and boxes, to gratify the whims and fancies of the public. An endless task it appeared to me, tired as I already was, and I looked almost despairingly upon the piles of shawls of every size and material which were lying unfolded and disordered upon the counter before me. Before we had fairly commenced our task the girls at the other counters had finished their work and were preparing to leave.

I had noticed that my assistant, a girl of sixteen or seventeen, who had been with us only a few days, had seemed very uneasy during the last hour or so, and now, just while we were in the heaviest of the work, she was called away from her duties by the appearance of a little boy who came to the door of the shawl-room and called her by name. They talked together very earnestly for a while, and she seemed so much distressed at what he was saying that I could not avoid asking her what it was that troubled her.

"I'm sure I don't know what I ought to do, Miss Manvers," she said, bursting into tears. "Mother is very sick, and there has been no one at home with her all the afternoon but Sammy here. I wanted to get home earlier to-day than usual on that account, but I know I could not leave you here alone, so I said nothing about it. But about an hour ago, Sammy tells me, mother was taken worse, and he was so frightened that he called in one of our neighbors to stay with her while he came for me; and I *must* go home, Miss Manvers, right away."

"Of course you must," said I. "I am sorry all this trouble has happened the same day, but it can not be helped. I will do the best I can alone, and do you hurry home as fast as possible to your mother."

She started to obey me, evidently much relieved, but paused again in dismay as she looked upon the confusion reigning around her. "But you, Miss Manvers, what will you do? You surely can not finish all this work by yourself? Is it not possible to leave it? I will be back as soon as the store is opened in the morning, if mother is so that I can leave her, and we can get put to rights then before the customers commence coming in."

"Oh, no!" said I, "that will never do. 'The governor' is away to-night, you know, and Mr. Frank Nettleby will go the rounds of the store, I would not upon any account have him find our department in such a condition. Do not

worry yourself though about me; I can stay here an hour or so later without any inconvenience, and if you will let your little brother carry a note to my sister on his way home, I shall not mind staying at all."

So I scribbled a few lines to Agnes, telling her the cause of my detention, and bidding her not to be uneasy if I should not be home until quite late; and then I hurried the frightened uneasy creature off. She had scarcely reached the door ere she came hurrying back.

"Oh! my goodness, Miss Manvers, I had completely forgotten! Here is an order for a white crêpe shawl just like the one Mrs. McDonough bought yesterday. Her sister ordered it, and said it must be sent home to-night, because she was going to leave the city early to-morrow morning. I was busy waiting on some other persons when the order was given to me, and thinking there was no particular hurry about it, I put it in my pocket and had completely forgotten it until this minute. What *would* Mr. Nettleby say if he knew of my negligence? I have been in so much trouble about mother that it has made me quite incapable of attending to my duties here."

"There is no harm done, thus far," I said good-humoredly, for she looked very much frightened, and I was anxious to soothe her. "It is not yet too late, so I will attend to sending it, and Mr. Nettleby need know nothing about it." So she hurried away quite satisfied, and I turned to find the desired article, and have it sent before the store closed.

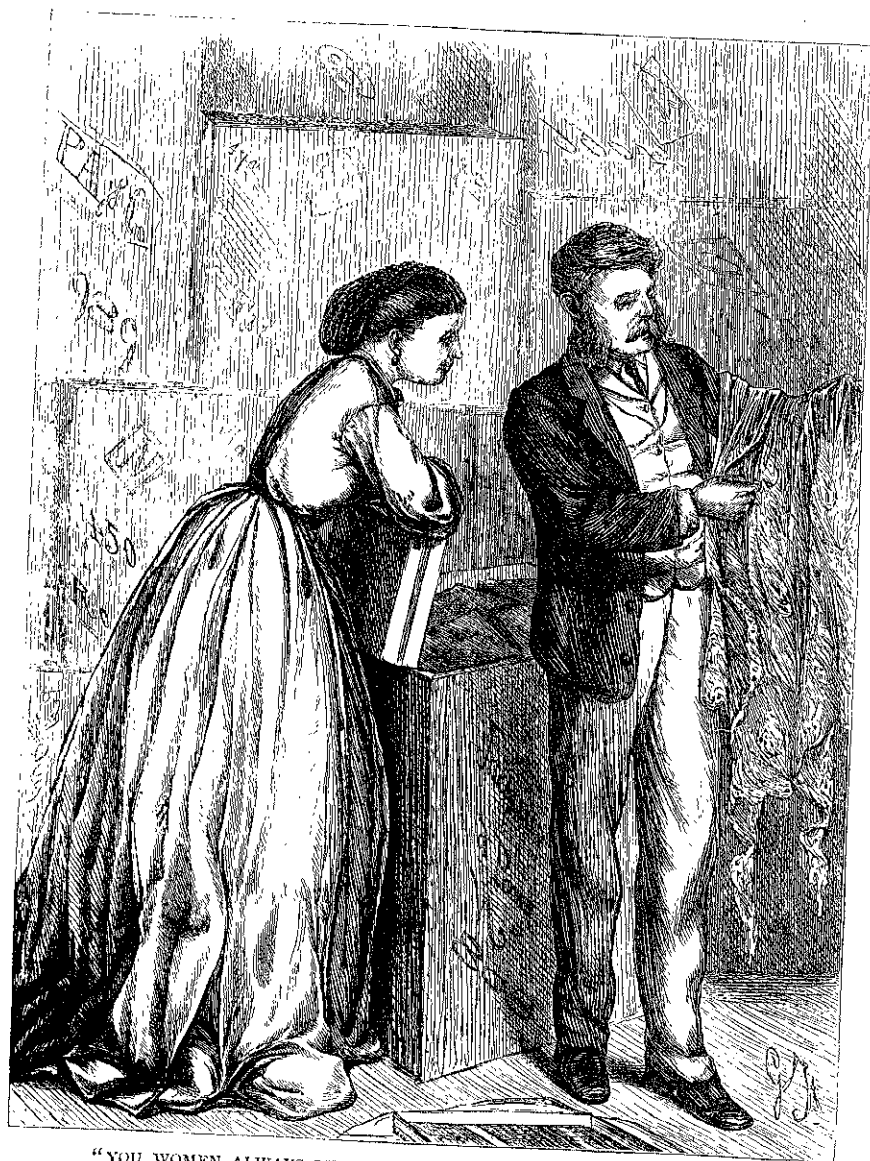
Of course when one is in a hurry every thing happens to cause detention. Upon going to look for a shawl of the kind required, I found that there were none upon the shelves, and that it would be necessary for me to repair to the wareroom in an upper story to obtain one. I was provoked enough, but there was no help for it, so I ran through the almost deserted store, and ascending the stairs to the fourth story, I entered the room in which the supply of shawls was stored.

To my surprise the room had already an occupant, in the form of no less a person than Mr. Frank Nettleby, who was unpacking a box of fine laces which had been brought up there that afternoon. I was glad he was there, for the shawls were troublesome to get at, and I knew he would not mind helping me.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, turning his head as I entered, apparently yet more astonished at seeing me than I had been at seeing him.

"What brings you up here, Miss—Miss—"

"Manvers," I suggested.



"YOU WOMEN ALWAYS LIKE TO LOOK AT PRETTY THINGS."—PAGE 31.

"Miss Manvers, I beg your pardon; my memory is very treacherous. I thought you girls had all gone home. Did you wish to see me? is there any thing I can do for you?"

I explained the object of my visit, and he immediately arose and assisted me in obtaining the desired articles. I turned to go then, but he called me to come and look at the goods he was unpacking.

"You women always like to look at pretty things," he said, "and here is some finery, the very sight of which will make you die of envy."

"Hardly charitable to show it to me, then, Mr. Nettleby," said I, laughing, but I tarried nevertheless, in spite of my hurry, for I was neither more nor less than woman, and possessed as great a fondness for pretty things as Mr. Frank had credited me with.

"It is part of the wedding paraphernalia of Judge Home's daughter," Mr. Nettleby went on to say. "I received the commission to get them when I was in Paris, and I ordered them at head-quarters. I tried my hand at a little designing for some of the lace patterns myself, and I am rather anxious to have a lady's opinion of them before they are submitted to Miss Home's inspection."

He shook open cloud after cloud of soft fleecy lace, and thin gauzy muslin, veils, sleeves, collars, handkerchiefs, embroideries of all kinds, each article more beautiful than its predecessor. I had just taken from his hand a lovely cobweb which he called a handkerchief, proclaiming himself designer of the pattern which embellished it, when a man's foot approached the closed door of the apartment which we were occupying. Just then there was a great noise raised in the room below us, caused by the drawing of some heavy crates across the floor, and when that noise had subsided, the sound of retreating footsteps was heard in the distance descending the stairs, and Mr. Nettleby remarked carelessly, in answer to my inquiring look, "One of the porters, I suppose, sent up stairs for something he had forgotten. They are getting in a lot of domestics and such like heavy goods down below there, which is the cause of that confounded clatter. I guess they are through now. Come, look at that handkerchief, and tell me honestly how you like it."

"It is pretty, very pretty; but I think there are some of the others I liked better: this one, for instance, with the thistle and lily border; but they are all beautiful. Did they cost much?"

"What a truly feminine question!" laughed Mr. Frank. "I suppose you will value them

according to the amount of filthy lucre the judge expends on them. Well, for your satisfaction be it known then, that the thistle and lily border was the most expensive one of the lot, though any one of them cost more than you can earn in a year. Stop! don't go yet! you have not seen the gem of the collection, the wedding-dress;" and hurried as I was, I could not resist the temptation, but sat lingering on, quite breathless with delight, as he opened a box that was in itself a gem of art, and from the folds of silver paper which enshrouded it, drew forth into the light of day a fabric so exquisite that even my inexperienced eyes knew it to be worth a fortune.

"None of my handiwork there," he said, opening the robe and throwing it over my black dress that the pattern might be fully displayed. "One of the first artists of the day was called upon to furnish that design, and I guess he found it a better paying job than many of his more dignified studies. Look at those clusters in each corner! They are what I call superb." And having admired the beautiful cobweb until I had expended upon it all the adjectives in my vocabulary, I rose again to depart.

"I must go, Mr. Nettleby," I said; "I shall not get through my work down stairs until ten o'clock if I linger here any longer;" and I hurried to the door, quite worried to see how late it was growing.

"I have rather more of a task here myself than I had bargained for," he said, as he commenced refolding the dress. "I shall have my hands full in getting these 'airy nothings' back to the shape I found them."

Meanwhile I had been trying to open the door, but found that it resisted my efforts, from some cause or other. "You will have to come and open this door for me, I believe, Mr. Nettleby," I said at last; "something seems to be the matter with it."

He tarried a moment to deposit out of harm's way the laces he had been holding, and then hastened to comply with my request. He gave the door a forcible jerk, but an ineffectual one, then he shook it with all his strength; all in vain; the handle turned readily, but the door would not open.

"Upon my soul!" he cried in dismay, "I believe we are locked in. Could that fellow who disturbed us awhile since have been the watchman of the night? If it was, he has passed the room, and thinking it empty, has locked it for the night, as it was his duty to do, the careless scoundrel!" with which rather contradictory conclusion, Mr. Nettleby rattled at the

door with all his might, and exerted his lungs to the utmost in calling for help.

In vain; I knew, and he knew too, that if the men from the story beneath us had departed, and the night-watchman had gone his rounds, there was not a human being in the building, for the latter, although he remained in the building all night, went home to his supper first, and did not return until late in the evening. Even had he still been in the store, however, he was completely out of hearing of the combined voices of half a dozen men exerted in the fourth story.

Mr. Nettleby, seeing that it was quite impossible that he should make himself heard at the door, next turned his attention to the windows, and flinging one open, again shouted as loud as he was able, in hopes of attracting the attention of some one below. Alas! this hope was no less vain than the other. The room was in the back of the building, and the windows opened only on a deserted yard and tightly-barred back buildings belonging to our own and adjoining stores. Not a human being evidently was within sight or hearing, and at last, relinquishing his hopeless task, and hoarse from the exertions he had made, Mr. Nettleby turned to me as I sat pallid with apprehension upon one of the boxes that filled the room.

"Well, ma'am, I am afraid we shall have to make up our minds to pass the night here," he said, adding, with a forced laugh, "I am sure if you can endure my society for that length of time, I ought not to be discontented with yours." And then the dreadful predicament in which I was placed I could no longer refrain from realizing.

I started to my feet, sick and faint. I turned so white that I suppose he thought I was about to faint, for he sprang quickly to my side as if to support me. "My God! what will become of me!" I cried; then clinging to his arm, I gazed into his face with agonized, imploring eyes. "Oh, Mr. Nettleby! do something! please do something! don't stop trying to make them hear you! Think, think, what a dreadful thing this will be for me!"

He passed his arm around me, for I was trembling so that I could hardly stand, and at the time I was quite unconscious of his action; he looked down into my pallid face with a kind, grave glance that would have reassured me if any thing could, and seating me gently upon the box again, he spoke to me in a quiet, soothing tone.

"You are alarming yourself unnecessarily; I have confidence in me; I will allow no shadow

of blame to fall upon you from the unfortunate conjuncture of circumstances that has forced us into this unpleasant predicament. That you will perhaps be obliged to pass a very uncomfortable, wearisome night I am afraid I can not deny, but rest assured that I will permit no farther annoyance to result from it.

"You could not help it," I murmured almost inarticulately. "There is not an employe about the establishment that will not know of this affair to-morrow, and oh! the cruel, terrible things they will say of me!" and I wrung my hands in agony.

Mr. Nettleby's kind face wore a sterner frown than I had thought it could possibly have assumed. "If there is one of them, man, woman, or child, who dares by word or insinuation to cast a slur upon my honor or your delicacy, he or she shall leave my employ that moment. Fear not; my thoughtlessness has involved you in this difficulty, and I promise you most solemnly that no endeavor upon my part shall be lacking to screen you from its ill effects. Rely upon me."

I felt his kindness, and I knew that all he promised he would perform, but he could not soothe the agony that was battling with my heart. He could not even understand it. How should he? How could he dream that the poor, commonplace shop-girl who heretofore had received from him so little attention that her very name had been forgotten, the obscure, friendless woman, dependent upon her daily toil for her daily bread; how could he dream that so insignificant a creature should prize above all worldly advantages and station, nay, even above life itself, the stainless purity of a name more honorable than his own! How could he imagine the cruel torture I endured when forced to the belief that the name my father had so gloriously maintained unsullied, should now, by my most sorrowful misfortune, become the theme of thoughtless jests, perhaps of malicious scandal! And with look and voice of agony I could only reiterate my cry, "Do try again to make them hear you, Mr. Nettleby! Do not cease your efforts, I implore you, while there is a shadow of a chance to escape!"

So, obedient to my entreaties, again he called from the window and rattled at the door, and finally, with an empty goods-box thumped upon the floor, making din enough, I thought, to have aroused the whole neighborhood. All in vain; no sound responsive to his own broke the silence when his futile labors ceased.

"You see," he said, "it is all useless. I do not suppose there is a soul in the building ex-

cept ourselves. It is abominable, this being shut up like a rat in a trap! A prisoner in one's own house! If I had but a crow-bar!" and he gazed helplessly around; "but no! deuce a bit of steel is there within these four walls stronger than my pen-knife. There is no help for it, Miss Manvers. Let us make the best of a very disagreeable business: endure the night as best we may; and believe me, in the course of a few days we shall come to look upon our adventure actually in the light of a good joke."

A glance at my white, despairing face checked his light speech; he came and stood by my side, looking down pityingly upon me. "Do you really then anticipate so much trouble from this foolish affair?" he said gently.

The kind words and pitying tone vanquished completely the little fortitude I yet had managed to preserve. Bowing my head upon my hands, my long-repressed agony found relief in convulsive sobs and tears. "God pity me," I cried; "how shall I ever bear it! Oh, my father! my father! little did I ever think that the day would come when I should be thankful you were in your grave!"

"Hush, my dear girl, do not weep so, I beg of you!" he said, scarcely less agitated than myself. "Surely your imagination is inflicting upon you needless suffering. Your fears are exaggerating the evils you apprehend."

"I can not exaggerate them," I said, almost fiercely. "There can be no worse, save actual crime, than the evil that has befallen me. You are a gentleman in position and breeding, and, I doubt not, value highly the honor of your name; if you were poor, helpless, friendless as I am, with that good name your only treasure, in beholding it imperiled you could perhaps appreciate my feelings now. Yet, no! you could not even then, for you are a man, and in no circumstances could you realize the horrible misfortune that a sullied reputation is to a woman. I am no coward, but I could meet the assassin's knife with far more fortitude than I can the jeers and innuendoes of those girls below, to-morrow morning."

"Is it indeed so?" he said sorrowfully; and then he turned away from me and paced up and down the room in thoughtful silence, while I, the violence of my grief exhausted, sat with bowed head in the passive quiet of despair. Presently he stopped in his walk, and again came and stood by my side. With gentle violence he removed my hands from my face, and retaining them in his clasp, he said softly, "Miss Manvers, look at me!"

Mechanically I obeyed, and raised my eyes, dull and glazed with suffering, to his face. He looked very much agitated, and there were actually tears in the bright blue eyes that gazed pityingly into my own. He looked at me with peculiar fixedness ere he spoke, and when he did, his words at first seemed more in answer to his own thoughts than intended as an address to me. "You are a good, virtuous girl, I do believe, and one whom any man might learn to love; your manner and speech show that your education and breeding have been superior to the circumstances in which I find you." He paused a moment, and continued gazing into my face with an eager, searching look that seemed as if it defied deceit—then with more decision, he continued, "The same vile slanderers, whose malicious misconstructions would sully your womanly fame, would, at the same time, asperse my honor as a gentleman. I may be able to save you from unjust suspicion in the store, but outside of it my power fails, and all I can do is to suffer with you. I see but one mode of escape for you. Our misfortune is mutual, let us meet it together. My heart and hand are free; I offer them to you now in all sincerity; and in making you my wife, I can safely promise to shield you from all the scandal you so much dread, and to raise you at once to a position so far above the power of the malicious, that you may safely venture to defy them."

He paused again, but I could not speak; my tongue was palsied with surprise and consternation at his unexpected words. He waited a moment or so, and then gently repeated, "Have I not made myself sufficiently plain? I ask you to become my wife, Miss Manvers; may I not hope for a favorable answer?"

At last I cried, "You are an honorable and a generous man, Mr. Nettleby; a true and loyal gentleman; and miserable though I am, I can understand and appreciate the magnanimity of your conduct, though God forbid that I should take advantage of it! You are in no way responsible for the misfortune which has befallen me, and I am not so selfish as to wish to save myself by dragging you into an alliance with a woman whose worldly station is so far below your own, and in whom, save from compassion, your feelings are in no way interested."

"I am not so sure of that," he said, in a low tone, and then in his natural voice he resumed, "I will not agitate you farther, by dwelling upon this subject; think over what I have said; I will ask you again for an answer to my appeal when we are both in a calmer

mood. "That I sincerely hope your reply may be in the affirmative, let this attest;" and bending over, he pressed his lips upon my hand with a fervor that left me in no doubt of the sincerity of his speech. Then he left me, and walked away to the window, where, in the gathering darkness, I could just distinguish the outlines of his form as he leaned against the casement.

Meanwhile I sat, stunned almost into apathy by the sudden and violent emotions which had racked my frame during the past hour. I did not think of the morrow, for my mind was becoming too unsettled to appreciate its terrors. I did not think of the offer with which Mr. Nettleby had honored me, nor did I think of him at all; a vague confused idea that his position toward me had vastly altered, indeed struggled within my mind; yet any active sentiment either of like or dislike toward him, I felt none. I did not think of the discomforts which were likely to fall to my lot during the long, long, tedious night now rapidly coming on; I sat with folded hands, my head leaning back upon a rough box that stood behind me, a dull, heavy feeling of distress weighing upon my heart and brain; with but one thought, one idea, at all clearly defined amid the host of shadows that beset me, and that was, "What would 'the governor' say, when he heard what had happened?"

I do not know how long I sat thus; the time seemed interminable to me. Twice Mr. Nettleby came to me from his station by the window; once he brought a couple of heavy shawls he had taken from one of the boxes, and throwing one over the box behind me, to serve as a sort of pillow for my head, he wrapped the other around my shoulders, and then silently withdrew again. A little later, a heavy sigh, which escaped from me almost unconsciously, as I slightly changed my position, brought him to my side again. He stood beside me in the darkness, motionless and silent for a moment; at last bending over me so that I felt his breath upon my forehead, he said gently, "I hoped you were sleeping; are you comfortable? Can I do any thing more for you?"

"Nothing, I thank you."

Still he lingered, and I could distinctly hear his quick breathing as he stood over me. A vague feeling of terror crept over me, as I remembered how completely I was in this man's power; my womanly delicacy took the alarm, and I shrank back from him, faint and trembling, as far as I was able. He seemed instinctively to comprehend my feeling; he sighed heavily, and passed his hand caressingly over my head as if to reassure me, and then he stole from my

side again to some distant part of the room; where, I could scarcely tell.

Again a long, unbroken silence, interrupted only by a restless motion occasionally from him. Sleep came not near my eyes, and I knew that Mr. Nettleby was quite as wakeful as I. At last there came a sound; I could not credit my ears; I leaned forward, and listened breathlessly; it came nearer; I was not deceived. "Mr. Nettleby!" I cried. "Quick! call for help; there's a man's foot upon the stairs."

He needed no second bidding, for my fellow-prisoner had caught the sound as well as I. He sprang to the door, and pounded lustily upon it, shouting vigorously at the same time.

"Where are you? Who calls for help?" said a voice outside.

"It is I—Frank Nettleby. We have been locked in this room, through mistake, by that infernal watchman. The keys are kept in the chest at the end of the passage; for Heaven's sake get them, and let us out."

The step retreated as directed, but presently returned; then came the welcome sound of the key rattling in the lock, the door was thrown open, and the light of a lantern streamed into the room.

"Caroline, are you here?" cried a familiar voice. With a wild cry I sprang forward; a strong arm was thrown around me, and the next moment I was sobbing upon the bosom of Mr. Harrington.

He clasped me in a close embrace, and I felt his heart beat heavily beneath my head, yet he asked me no questions, and indeed I could have answered none then had my life depended on it. But Mr. Nettleby's tongue ran fast enough.

"Curse that watchman!" he was saying; "he has got us into a pretty predicament; turned the key on us while we were looking at Miss Homo's wedding finery, and was out of hearing before we discovered what had happened. I have shouted myself hoarse, and Miss Manvers has almost cried her eyes out, but all to no purpose. I supposed we were in for the night, of course. What lucky star sent you here, Harrington, just in the nick of time?"

"No idea of finding *you*, Mr. Nettleby, I assure you. My sister sent me with a message to Miss Manvers, this evening, and when I arrived at her house, I found her little sister becoming very uneasy about her lengthened absence, though a note that she had received told her that Caroline would be detained at the store later than usual. I thought it very improbable that she should still be here, but I concluded I had better come and ascertain for myself.

When I reached the store, finding it closed and dark, I imagined, Caroline, that you had left, of course, and was about retracing my steps; but acting upon second thoughts, I aroused the watchman, and determined upon taking a look at the shawl department, thinking that I could tell somewhat from its condition of the time you had left the building. I found it in utter disorder, and you may imagine my surprise when I saw your bonnet and shawl lying upon the counter. I knew from their presence that you must be in the building, so I determined to visit every part of it, in hopes of finding you. This explains my fortunate appearance. The whole affair has given me inexpressible anxiety, but I am well contented now, since it has had so harmless a denouement." And Mr. Harrington looked upon me with an expression that was evidently not entirely satisfactory to Mr. Nettleby.

"We are very thoughtless in keeping Miss Manvers here so long," he said, advancing toward me. "Harrington, if you will add to the favor you have already done us the additional one of summoning a carriage from the nearest stand, I will have the honor of seeing Miss Manvers safely home. I know she is anxious enough to be there."

I clung apprehensively to "the governor's" arm. I could not bear that he should leave me, even for a moment; he understood my feelings readily, and answered, "I think, Frank, I had better take charge of Miss Manvers myself; she has been sadly terrified, and as she has seen enough of Jenny and me to make us seem to her like old friends, I think she will perhaps be better pleased with my company than with yours just now."

"Yes! yes!" I cried. "Do not leave me, Mr. Harrington; I want no carriage, the distance is not great, and I can easily walk; only please take me home as soon as possible."

Mr. Nettleby looked very angry; agitated as I was, I could see that. "Come along, then!" he said crossly; "I must get a lantern and come back here to put away these cursed trumperies; it will never do to leave those laces lie around all night. By the bye, what time is it, Harrington?"

"The governor" consulted his watch. "Ten minutes of ten," he said, and both Mr. Nettleby and I gave an ejaculation of surprise.

"Thought it was most morning, didn't you?" he said; "I am sure I did."

When Mr. Harrington and I were clear of the store, and on our homeward way, he asked and obtained of me a full account of the manner in which the accidental detention had occurred.

When he had listened to all that I thought best to tell him of the evening's adventures, he said to me, "Why were you so terrified at the idea of having Mr. Nettleby escort you home? surely during the forced companionship into which you were thrown with him, he did not dare to forget that he was a gentleman?"

"Oh, no! no! no!" I cried, almost indignantly; "how could you think it? The delicacy and respect with which he treated me could not have been greater had I been the noblest lady in the land. When I declined his escort now, it was not that I objected to his accompanying me, but that I dreaded to have you leave me."

"You were very glad when you saw me, then?"

"Glad!" I said tearfully, "the word does not begin to express my feelings; in fact, they are inexpressible. When I heard your voice, I knew that my troubles were over."

We reached home, and I found Agnes still awake, and anxiously awaiting my return; of course I did not tell her of the events which had detained me, and she unquestioningly accepted my late return as a mere matter of business. Mr. Harrington only stayed with us a few minutes. "You had better not come to the store to-morrow," he said, as he took his leave. "Jennie is much better since supper, and will be at her post as usual. I will tell her to stop and see you on her way to the store to-morrow morning. Get yourself to bed as speedily as possible, for rest is the best restorative for you now."

He took my hand, which I extended to him at parting, and holding it for a moment in a hesitating sort of a way, before he relinquished it he raised it quickly to his lips and kissed it. Then while the hot blood which the act called up still burned my cheek, he turned from me, and walked rapidly down the street.

The caresses of those two men yet lingered on my hand; their voices still sounded in my ears; and their faces mingled strangely and grotesquely in my dreams when slumber finally sealed my eyes after the troubles of that eventful day.

CHAPTER VI.

F. N. AND "THE GOVERNOR."

I DID not obey Mr. Harrington's injunction to stay at home next day, and I was just ready to start for the store when Miss Jenny entered. "Well! you have come pretty near being a

heroine!" was her first salutation. "I fully expected to have found you in bed this morning, from the effects of your fright. Seriously, though, it was very fortunate that John was inspired to hunt for you; the consequences might have been awkward enough had you remained locked up all night. Tell me now, I beg of you, how it all happened, for John's account of the matter was very unsatisfactory."

Accordingly, I gave her as full an account of the events of the preceding evening as I could do without revealing the proposal with which Mr. Nettleby had honored me; my account of that gentleman's conduct pleased her greatly.

"I always knew Frank was a real gentleman; if it had been possible to spoil him, he must certainly have been ruined ere this, for he has had his own way all his life, and his whole career has been one of uninterrupted prosperity. His father has never pretended to exercise much more authority over him than he now does, and how much that is, you can see for yourself. His mother, I suppose, he does not even remember, and, save the loss of her, he has never met with a misfortune in his life. He was quite a little fellow, not more than five or six years of age, when I first entered the store, and I have seen a good deal of him ever since; out of school he was always in the store, and I cannot realize yet that he is any thing but a boy. He was seventeen or eighteen when John entered his father's employ, and the young gentleman took quite a fancy to my quiet brother; he took lessons in book-keeping from him, and used to spend many of his evenings with us at our boarding-house. Then his father sent him on a trip to Europe, and he did not return until he was one-and-twenty, and he was then formally instituted a member of the firm; not altogether a disinterested proceeding on the part of Mr. Nettleby, either, for Frank had quite a handsome property of his own, inherited from his mother, and when he came into the firm he invested his money in it, and extended the business considerably. The perfect freedom from restraint in which he has lived since he has attained his majority, his free and easy life in the European cities, and his unlimited control of money, would certainly have proved the destruction of almost any other man of his age, but I do not see that these circumstances have had any worse effect upon him than to make him a little headstrong and selfish."

All this, and a great deal more concerning my young employer, did Miss Jenny tell me as we proceeded together on our way to the store; and I had scarcely entered the building ere I

was encountered by that individual himself, who sprang from his desk as he saw me, and walked quickly forward. He extended his hand to me, and very unwillingly I placed mine within it; unwillingly, I say, because there were twenty pairs of curious eyes turned in surprise upon me, as the young gentleman's unusual cordiality was thus manifested.

"You are feeling none the worse for your fright, I trust?" he said, in a voice audible only to me. "I dreamed about you all night, and always as being in some distress or trouble, and I should not have been at all astonished had I heard this morning that you were ill." He pressed my hand warmly as he spoke, and fixed his eyes upon me with an expression that made me feel very hot and uncomfortable; so I drew my hand impatiently away, and answered coldly, "I have nothing to complain of, Mr. Nettleby;" and without waiting for him to speak again, I passed on.

Mr. Harrington shook his head reprovingly when he saw me. "You have disobeyed my orders, I see, so you must not hold me responsible for any ill effects that may follow your adventure," he said, half in jest, half in earnest; and indeed, now that I was fairly at work, I was tempted to wish that I had followed his advice and stayed at home, for my head ached sadly, and my nerves were terribly unstrung.

Both of the girls were at their posts this morning, and so my help as saleswoman was not needed, and I sat down to my books to try to make some headway with the yesterday's neglected work; but my mind wandered, and I made mistakes by the score, until I felt ready to give up my task in despair. I worried on for several hours, but at last I threw down my pen, and resting my head between my hands, I gazed with a sort of blank apathy upon the sheet of figures before me. While sitting thus, a hand lightly touched my shoulder, and I looked up, with a nervous start, to see Mr. Frank standing beside me.

"I had come to see about that copying, which so long ago you promised to do for me," he said, "but I see that you do not feel in the mood for any extra exertion, so I will not trouble you with it to-day."

"On the contrary," I cried, starting up with animation—for I was really pleased at the prospect of doing any thing for him which could show my sense of his kindness—"On the contrary, I shall be delighted to undertake the task, and at once. Simple copying requires no mental exertion, and it will be a relief to me to quit these figures and computations, which, I fear,

are becoming almost hopelessly confused under my present efforts."

"What is it that troubles you?" he said, looking over my shoulder at the paper upon which I had been employed; "transcribing bills of sales, eh! from the girls' memoranda, calculating percentage, etc.? Well, I will tell you how we can manage. I had no design of giving you an extra amount of work to do, without relieving you of some of your present duties; so it shall be understood that when you are engaged for me on the copying of which I have spoken, I am to be responsible for the proper rendering of your department accounts; let me see, if you will show me a little what you want done, I think I can help you, give me the memoranda, and I will relieve you at once."

As he spoke very positively, I had, of course, no alternative but to obey; and before I was well aware of his intentions, Mr. Nettleby had brought his books and papers to my table, and seating himself opposite to me, prepared to continue the work which I had just resigned.

"I will work at them here, if you have no objections," he said coolly; "it is quieter here, and then, too, I shall be able to show you exactly how I wish those bills copied;" and to my great disgust the gentleman opened before me the first pages of a large blank book, and, handing me the first of a vast bundle of folded papers he had placed upon the table, waited with imperturbable gravity for me to commence my task.

There was no help for it I saw; so seizing my pen, I dashed rapidly into the business before me; and after seeing me fairly started, with all imaginable solemnity he commenced his own labors, and throughout the whole day was I thus honored, my gentleman keeping his seat undisturbedly, though at times the little enclosure was thronged with customers, and became a perfect Babel of noise and confusion, and at all hours it was dark and close, and very inconvenient for clerical labors. Sometimes he worked quite industriously, with a few rapid calculations arriving at conclusions over which I should have puzzled for hours; but by far the greater part of the time he sat leaning back in his chair stroking his long beard, and watching me so attentively with his keen blue eyes, that I grew so nervous I could hardly write. Then, noticing my disturbance, he would relieve me temporarily, by bandying lively repartee with Miss Harrington, whom he took a mischievous delight in teasing. She watched the whole performance very suspiciously, and evidently was completely at a loss to know what interpretation

to put upon the unaccountable fit of industry her employer was evincing. She was too busy, however, to bestow upon us much of her attention, and the perfect gravity of the gentleman cast such a business-like appearance over the whole affair, that she did not dare venture to imagine any impropriety in it.

Heartily thankful was I, though, when at last, toward the middle of the afternoon, Mr. Frank saw fit to gather up his books, and release me from the pursuance of my labors. "Go home now, Miss Mauvers," he said authoritatively; "you have worked enough for one day, and I do not wish to tire you too much at the start; to-morrow, if you have no objection, we will resume our labors, and I think, as we proceed, we shall find them quite interesting;" and as he spoke in the manner of one who intended to be obeyed, and waited to see me start for home, I meekly donned my bonnet and shawl, and left the store two hours earlier than usual, too astonished to venture upon any remonstrance.

This day was but the first of many such that followed. When not prevented by really unavoidable business, every morning, about two hours after I arrived at the store, Mr. Frank would make his appearance in the shawl-room, and seating himself at my table, would spread before me the inevitable blank book, upon which I must forthwith resume my labors, no matter how much all other business was neglected on account of it. The clerical labors of our department he assumed himself, and with his rapid business-like habits was able, with an hour's application, to accomplish what had formerly occupied me three times as long. The rest of the time he occupied chiefly in staring at me, and in sketching caricatures of the customers on scraps of paper, which, as soon as finished, he would toss over to me for my edification; and comical enough they were, too; much as he annoyed me, I was amused in spite of myself, for his sketches were full of genius, and all that he said was so witty and original, that I listened and laughed, notwithstanding my vexation. Miss Jenny often scolded at being deprived so entirely of my services, and I could see that she was much annoyed by the odd turn which affairs had taken, but he never would release me, no matter how hurried she was. "If you want another clerk," he would say, "I'll engage one for you, though I really do not think you will find one more thorough and disinterested than I am; if the department needs another saleswoman, call one in from one of the other counters. There are always plenty to spare out

there; but my transcript I must have, and I must have it in Miss Manvers's handwriting. You have no idea, Miss Jenny, of the value I place upon that copy she is making." And all this he said with the gravest air imaginable, so serious that even sharp-sighted Miss Jenny was partially blinded, and in view of his solemnity and my undisguisable discontent, dared raise no farther objections.

Oh! how he vexed me! At times, when he bent over me to point out some trifling error in my manuscript, or to suggest some improvement which he would argue about as gravely as if he were really interested in the useless thing; when he would question me in such a way that in replying I was obliged to lift my eyes to his; or when, to point out some word or letter referred to, he would touch my hand to guide the pen to the place designated; at such times I felt provoked enough to have thrown the book at him, and to have boxed his ears into the bargain; for I knew, as well as if he had told me, that the whole affair had been gotten up by him for no earthly motive but to enable him to linger unsuspected in my society, and that, save to carry on what I supposed he considered an interesting flirtation, he placed no more value upon that abominable book of bills than I did myself. Not only was the whole affair an annoyance to me in itself, but it began to attract the attention of the employes in the store, and I found myself very frequently the subject of witticisms more pointed than delicate. These, however, strong in my consciousness of indifference, I could have laughed at, and perhaps disregarded, but I found that my employer's condescension was bringing upon me a still heavier punishment: "the governor" was noticeably growing cold and reserved in his demeanor toward me; though always quiet and undemonstrative, he had yet hitherto had the faculty of making me perceive that he cared for my comfort, and was interested in all that I said and did; in short, that he was my friend. Now all was changed; he never spoke to me save when compelled to by common civility; though Miss Harrington had several times spent an evening with me during the few weeks of which I am writing, her younger brother had ever been her escort; and upon two occasions when I visited her, "the governor" was called down town by unavoidable business, and Master Edwin had been obliged to gallant me home in his brother's stead. For two weeks he had not once happened in upon us during his rounds, as it was formerly his custom so frequently to do. Only once do I remember his entering the shawl-room while Mr.

Frank honored it with his daily presence; it was one day about a week after my daily humbug of copying was instituted. Mr. Frank had been in an unusually merry mood that morning, and had exerted himself to the utmost to dispel the gravity which I always endeavored to maintain in his society; he had just handed me a most extravagant caricature of a stout country-woman to whom Miss Harrington was trying to sell a velvet cloak; the *quadré* figure in her cotton delaine dress, gloveless hands, and coarse straw bonnet, decked out in the costly garment which had evidently made a great impression upon her, and striving frantically to obtain a view of her own back in the tall mirror before which she was posturing, was laughable enough in itself, but when depicted by Mr. Frank's clever pencil, its salient points exaggerated, so like, yet so unlike, I should have been more than mortal could I have repressed my mirth while viewing it; and yet I was so ashamed of my weakness, so fearful that Miss Harrington would see me. One glance at my companion's face, and I was almost undone; the curves and dimples around the handsome mouth, the blue eyes absolutely dancing with merriment; I covered my eyes with my hand and leaned upon the table before me, my face scarlet with the effort to refrain from laughing.

Just then "the governor's" voice sounded by my side, quick and angry. "Miss Manvers, was this bill made out by you?"

I looked up, and all disposition to laugh fled from me as I met the glance of those stern grey eyes. Trembling and alarmed, I took the paper he handed to me. "I copied it, sir," I said, humbly enough, "but Mr. Frank made out the bill."

"Mr. Frank, then, will doubtless not complain, when I tell him there is an error in it of fifty dollars from uncharged goods, which it is too late now to rectify, as the goods themselves and a receipted duplicate of this bill have been forwarded to their destination."

Mr. Frank made a comical grimace, and shrugged his shoulders. "Don't look so savage, Harrington, and don't let our partner know, and I guess I can survive the damage. Charge the loss to my account, and I'll bear it like a martyr. But just let me tell you, Mademoiselle Caroline, the next time you make me laugh when I am writing out bills, I shall divide the consequences of the errors between us—charge the losses to your account and the profits to my own."

But I was in no humor to laugh now; almost before the light speech was concluded, "the gov-

ernor" had disappeared, angry and displeased, I knew, at what he must consider my levity and heedlessness; and guiltless though I knew myself to be, I was as wretched as though I had deserved his wrath, when I felt that he must think me ungrateful and insolent, even if he was charitable enough to deem me no worse.

I was cross enough to Mr. Frank the next day, but my conduct seemed to have but little effect upon him; and it was quite powerless to rid me either of himself or his accounts. I saw nothing of "the governor" for a week afterward; except at a distance, that is; for of course he was on duty in the store as usual; but all the little friendly chats we had formerly had, seemed to be entirely a thing of the past. I had never been conscious of how much I had been thrown into his society, until now that I was so entirely deprived of it; and sadly enough I now remembered how often we had formerly met and conversed during the routine of our daily duties. Now it had been some errand from his sister to him which I was sent to fulfill; then some trifling instruction which he had chosen to give me about my accounts, which would bring him to my table in the shawl-room. On arriving at the store in the morning and on leaving it at night, the first and last face I saw had been his, and he had never allowed me to pass him without a few kind words, which often, when time permitted, were lengthened into conversations. These and many other instances recurred to me, now that they all had vanished, of the intercourse I had had with Mr. Harrington; pleasant little episodes, enlightening my daily toil, making me ever leave my labors with regret, and return to them with pleasure.

Miss Jenny also noticed the change, for she said grumblingly one day that "it seemed to her John's business lately lay in any part of the store rather than the shawl department."

One evening Eddie Harrington came to me with a note from Miss Jenny, bidding me return with her brother, as she had some special business to transact with me, which demanded my immediate presence, and pleading a headache as an excuse for not coming to me. Of course I went to her; I had no alternative, though sensible as I was of the displeasure of "the governor," I should much have preferred not to go. But I went; found the business affair upon which she had summoned me of a nature so trifling that it could easily have been deferred until the morrow, and came to the conclusion that my dear Miss Jenny must have been threatened with a fit of the blues, which she was

ashamed to acknowledge, and which she had sent for me to dissipate. "The governor" was sitting in Miss Jenny's room when I entered, and looked vastly astonished, and, I thought, a little annoyed when he saw me; evidently I had not been an expected guest to him. There was no need of his leaving the house this time to avoid me, for as his brother had brought me there, his brother of course would take me home again. So, after fidgeting (I really can express his behavior by no other word) around the room for a while, Mr. Harrington murmured some almost inaudible excuses, and retreated to his own apartment. Eddie, too, soon after quitted the room, and Miss Jenny and I were left to ourselves. The business part of the visit was soon transacted, and the rest of the evening passed in quiet friendly chat, which I should have enjoyed very much had my mind been as undisturbed as usual.

At length ten o'clock came, and I rose to depart. When I was hooded and shawled, Miss Harrington stepped to the door which connected her brother's apartment with her own, and opening it, said, "John, you will have the pleasure of escorting Caroline home to-night; Jim Rivers is sick, and has sent for Eddie to stay all night with him."

I heard a book dashed impatiently down, and an angry ejaculation; then the door was closed, and Miss Jenny returned to where I stood dismayed at the prospect of forcing my unwelcome company upon Mr. Harrington. "Oh! Miss Harrington," I cried, "why did you not let me know a little earlier, and I could have gone by myself! I am sure I am disturbing 'the governor.'"

"Oh! no, my dear, not at all;" and Miss Jenny's placid face looked as unconscious of the white lie she was telling as if she had not known that I was perfectly aware of her breach of veracity; no time for farther comment was permitted, however, for the door opened, and Mr. Harrington, hat in hand, made his appearance.

I bade adieu to Miss Jenny at the door of her room, and then ran hastily down the staircase, followed more deliberately by my escort. I had to pause for him to throw open the door, but when I stepped out into the air, and found it to be a beautiful bright moonlight night, I no longer hesitated to say the words that had been upon my lips ever since he had put on his hat. "Mr. Harrington, there is really no need of your going all the way home with me to-night; the moon shines so brightly that I am not at all afraid, and I can just as well go home by myself as not. Good-night!" and I started off the steps, half frightened at my own temerity.

Before I had gone half a dozen paces, however, he was by my side. Catching my hand, he drew my arm within his, still retaining his hold of my hand. "Are you crazy?" he cried sharply, "or has your dislike for me become so strong that you can not endure my company, even during this fifteen minutes' walk?"

This was a new view of the question to me, and the query certainly staggered me a little, but I managed to answer meekly, "I beg your pardon; I thought you did not want to go."

"Nonsense!" he said crossly; and then we walked on for a while in grim silence.

With all my bravado I was feeling very miserable; the remembrance of that beautiful past in which "the governor" had been to me all that was kind and considerate, honored and beloved by me beyond all created beings, haunted me like the ghost of a dead friend; I could not realize the change that two short weeks had wrought in the pleasant relations which had existed between us; as I walked by his side in the cold moonlight, silent and unhappy, I could not resist stealing a glance at his face, half expecting that it would seem as unnatural as were the circumstances which surrounded me. It was changed, indeed; stern and moody in expression, the eyes downcast, the brow clouded, the mouth rigidly compressed; unlike, in all but mere feature and coloring, the kind genial face which had become so dear to me; and yet, in spite of the sternness, or rather, I should say, mingled with the sternness, there was a look of deep despondency, of trouble and anxiety, which made my heart ache for him, and inspired me with sudden courage to carry out a resolution which for some days past I had been forming—the resolve to remove, if words of mine could do so, the dark shadows of reserve and suspicion which had so mysteriously sprung up between us.

Without pausing to select appropriate words with which to make my appeal, I broke forth abruptly—"Mr. Harrington, why are you angry with me? What have I done? I am quite ready to promise beforehand, like the children, that whatever may have been my offense, I will 'never do so again,' if you will only be friends with me once more; you have been so very kind to me, and I have so few friends, that I can not bear to lose your esteem; and I am sure if you knew how much I have suffered from your changed manner to me, you would overlook my unconscious offense, and be kind to me as you used to be." And then my faltering voice quite deserted me, and I could only look beseechingly in his face, and tremble at my own daring words.

As he gazed into my flushed face, and saw my tearful eyes and quivering lips, his face relaxed from its stern intensity, and the old look of reassuring kindness crept into it. I turned away my head to hide the fast-falling tears. He clasped with a firmer pressure the hand that was trembling in his. "My poor little girl!" he said almost involuntarily. "I have been very unkind, as well as very unjust to you, I fear."

Something in the tone of his voice, and in the pressure of his hand, even more than the few words he had uttered, reassured me so much that I ventured again to raise my eyes to his face; there was a gleam of something deeper and tenderer than kindness in the eyes that met my own, that caused my heart to beat tumultuously, and my cheeks to color hotly beneath his glance. "What did I do? why were you angry?" again I ventured to ask.

"You have done nothing that I have any right to reproach you with," he said, in a low agitated voice; "and if your own conscience does not acquaint you with the cause of my anger, I shall have no hesitation in pronouncing it as unreasonable as it certainly was unjust."

"Is it because I have been doing that writing for Mr. Frank, instead of attending to my own duties?" I asked timidly, after a moment's pause, finding that my conscience refused to submit any evidence of a more satisfactory nature.

"You know it is not that!" he cried vehemently. "What difference do you suppose Mr. Frank's whims could make in my feelings toward you, unless you yourself invested them with importance. Give me a downright negative to one question, and I will admit myself to be the most unreasonable, suspicious fool that ever strove to understand a woman." He paused for a moment, but kept his eyes upon my face eagerly, searchingly, as if he would read my very soul. "Caroline, do you love Frank Nettleby?"

An indignant negative sprang to my lips, but just at that instant the remembrance of the scene in the waretroom flashed upon my mind, and it suddenly occurred to me that Mr. Harrington had by some means become aware of the proposal which Mr. Nettleby had made to me, and perhaps he, too, thought, as I felt certain Mr. Frank himself did, that I was only waiting for the renewal of the offer to accept it. It was this idea which had caused the change in his manner toward me. The knowledge that Mr. Harrington should have had cause to think thus of me, so overpowered me with mortification that I could find no words with which to

answer him. The blood rushed to my face until my very temples were crimsoned with shame, and my eyes filled with tears of vexation, and sunk confusedly to the ground.

"I am answered," he said, dropping my hand hastily as he spoke; "there is not an honest woman in the world, so truth it is vain to expect from you; but that tell-tale blush is more eloquent than words; I will force from you no farther confessions." He checked himself abruptly, and we walked on again in miserable silence. I could not then have commanded my voice sufficiently to have spoken intelligibly, and I would not have undeceived him if I could; I was too angry and indignant at that moment to care what the consequences of his self-delusion might be; that he of all others should so misjudge me! My proud heart was almost bursting with its agony of rage and mortification, and not for worlds would I have made any farther attempts to conciliate him. Mr. Harrington seemed scarcely less agitated than I was myself, but I gave him no encouragement to pursue the distasteful subject, so in proud silence we finished our walk.

I bade him good-night almost inaudibly; as he threw open my door, he lifted his hat in cold civility, but made no farther answer; and thus we parted, more widely separated than before, for now there was a sense of bitterness against him in my heart which heretofore I had never felt.

"I hope you and John had a pleasant walk home, last evening?" said Miss Harrington to me next morning.

"Oh! certainly," I answered, with a tremendous effort to seem unconcerned, and the good lady turned away from me with a discontented "humph!" which told me that she by no means credited my assertion.

Of course the events of this evening did not increase my affection for Mr. Nettleby, and a very cross assistant he found in me next morning. I could not see that my irritability had much effect upon him, however, for he remained with me quite as long, and made himself quite as agreeable as ever. And thus two weeks more sped on, marked by a haughty reserve on "the governor's" part, and daily increasing affability in Mr. Frank, and then, at last, matters came to a crisis.

Again, from one cause or another, which I have now forgotten, was Miss Jenny absent from the store, and I having double duties to perform, was detained much later than usual. It was a dark, stormy evening, and the rain was descending in a perfect deluge when I started to

leave the store. Mr. Harrington stood at the door, and after a momentary hesitation, just as I was ready to start out into the storm, he addressed me, his color heightening as he spoke. "It is too dark for you to go home alone, Miss Manvers; I trust that I may be allowed the pleasure of accompanying you."

He had just spoken the words when Frank Nettleby came hurrying up. "Never mind, Harrington," he said, in his "take-it-for-granted" fashion, "I am going in the same direction Miss Manvers is, and I will see her home with the greatest of pleasure;" and throwing away a cigar he had just lighted, he unfurled his umbrella, and stepping out of the store, cool and imperturbable, seemed waiting for me to follow him.

I was strongly tempted to cling to "the governor's" arm, as I had done once before, when called upon to choose between them, and thus again strive to quench Mr. Frank's unblenching audacity. Upon second thought, however, I resolved to make no choice. "I am much obliged to both of you," I said, "but I shall get along very well by myself, and need no escort at all." And I walked off independently into the storm.

It was really very dark, but I did not feel much alarm but that between them both I should reach home in safety, and a quick step behind me proved that I had not been mistaken in my anticipations. As I had expected, it was Mr. Frank. "You will have it; so be it then," I muttered between my teeth, and having no escape save by downright incivility, I accepted his offered arm with as good a grace as I could command.

He chatted gayly for some time in his own peculiarly *insouciant* manner, but I was in no mood for gayety, and spite of himself my monosyllabic responses soon brought him to a pause. At last after a few moments' silence he resumed the conversation by saying in a more serious tone than he had yet used, "Miss Caro, do you not think I have waited long enough for an answer to the question I asked you a month ago?"

"I am afraid you will have to propound your question anew, Mr. Nettleby, if there has been one remaining unanswered for so long a time," I replied, trying to speak easily and unconcernedly.

"Do not trifle with me!" he cried impetuously. "I am in earnest now, my dearest girl, if I never was in my life before. My enemies have always called me a trifling, empty-headed fellow, but what little good there is in me you have awakened and brought to life. You have

kindled a passion in my careless breast which I had not believed it possible I could feel. Caroline, once you refused to marry me, because you said that I entertained for you no feeling warmer than compassion. That plea can avail you nothing now, for with all my heart and soul I love you. Speak to me, dearest, tell me that I do not love in vain."

"I can not tell you so, Mr. Nettleby," I answered in a low, firm voice.

He started with undisguised astonishment. "I fear you do not understand me," he said. "I have told you that I love you; of course in saying that, I intend you to understand that I ask you to become my wife."

"And I intend you to understand that I decline the honor, sir," I answered haughtily, for the man's arrogance angered me.

He stopped abruptly in the street, checking my progress with his own. "Caroline, what have I done to deserve this? how have I offended you? why are you angry at me?"

"Pray do not stop me in the public streets to call me to account," I said pettishly, pulling him forward as I spoke. "See, the passers-by are all staring at us. I am not angry with you at all. On the contrary, I am sorry for your disappointment, and still more sorry that this affair should have gone so far as it has done. I am sure—and you will acknowledge yourself, if you look back upon the events of the last few weeks—that in no possible way has my conduct given you any encouragement to renew the generous proposal you made to me when you thought my honor and happiness depended upon your doing so. I declined it then, less decidedly perhaps than I should have done, yet for my indecision I am sure you will not hold me accountable, when you remember the circumstances by which I was then surrounded, and how terribly tempted I must have been to accept your offer. I withstood temptation then, and I find no difficulty in doing so now. Again I decline the honor you offer me, this time positively and finally, with, thanks, however, and the kindest possible feeling toward you."

"But why?" he cried, indignation and amazement mingling in his tone. "I know that I am worthy of your love, were it only by the depth of the passion I feel for you. I am no coxcomb, Miss Manvers, but it surely is allowable in me to say that I am young, wealthy, educated, laying claim to the manners and title of a gentleman, and at least passably good-looking. If you are poor, I can give you wealth; if you are proud, I can give you station; if you are ambitious, you shall teach me to be so like-

wise, and together we will rise to any height to which our capacities will bear us. Are you friendless? I will give you love, ardent, passionate love as ever blessed a woman's lot, or crowned her brow with glory. Reflect, Caroline; remember all that it is in my power to bestow upon you; recall your hasty words, and say that you will yet be mine."

"Your eloquence is all in vain, Mr. Nettleby," I answered, my voice not quite so steady as I could have wished it. "All your arguments are worse than useless when opposed to the one unanswerable fact, that I do not love you. Believe me, I appreciate all your good qualities as fully as you can desire, not the least of which is the noble disinterestedness with which you have loved and wooed a woman so far beneath yourself in worldly station. Most sincerely grateful am I for the good opinion which you profess to feel for me, and as a man and a gentleman, I regard you with sentiments of unfeigned respect and admiration; but something more than this you must inspire, before I can consent to marry you; that something you have never awakened in my breast, and I dare not bid you hope that you ever can. I speak to you plainly because I think it better to terminate at once and forever an illusion which has been no more painful in its effects to you than to me."

"Plain enough, upon my soul!" he cried, angrily. "Pray gratify this candid spirit by answering me as plainly one question more, and I will torment you no farther. Even after all you have said, I shall not consider such groundless objections as entirely unsurmountable unless you can tell me that you love another. In that case only can I bring myself to believe that my suit is hopeless."

I felt that I owed him more consideration than an ordinary suitor could have claimed. I knew, too, that in his honor I could safely confide, and that in any case my secret would be held sacred by him, so after a moment's hesitation, I said: "If that knowledge alone can satisfy you, Mr. Nettleby, I will not be heartless enough to withhold it. I do love another."

"Heaven help me! I ought to have known it; I have suspected it for some time past," he groaned in tones of genuine anguish. Then he cried, "Ah! Caroline, I have your secret now! What price do you suppose a certain gentleman would give to know it? And what direful spell have you cast upon me, that makes me feel just now that the rarest pleasure earth can give would be to cut that fellow's throat, and whisper your secret to him in his death struggles."

"Hush! hush! for shame, Mr. Frank; I



"HE STOPPED ABRUPTLY IN THE STREET."—PAGE 42.

will not hear you talk so even in jest," I cried. "I know my secret is safe with you; I have proved you to be a gentleman, or you had never known it. And now I am home; we must part here, and let us drop this subject now and forever. If you had ever given me the shadow of a chance, I would have spared you the pain of this refusal, but you would not; you took it for granted from the very start that I would marry you, and with that idea in your head you have been laboring for the past month, not to make me love you—that you considered a superfluous task—but to teach yourself to love me. Your offer was made at first thoughtlessly, yet through such generous impulses, that had my heart been free, it must have appreciated the act, and I might perhaps from then have learned to love you. That offer you considered binding, however, only if I proved worthy of the honor you had done me, and to enable you to form a decision upon the subject has been the only aim of your courtship. That the conclusion you arrived at was a flattering one to me, I suppose the conversation of this evening proves. That is all I have to say, and now you must let me bid you good-night."

"You are a witch!" he cried, "and an uncharitable one at that. You certainly have cured me of a propensity for taking things for granted to which I have always been subject. Your remedy has been a severe one though, and has destroyed completely all inclination for love or matrimony in which I may have been fool enough to have indulged. However faulty you may deem my method of courtship, I assure you I have been inspired to it by a love as pure and earnest as ever man felt for woman. I have wasted upon you the passion of a life time, and all that I have received in exchange has been a lecture upon self-conceit, and—a manuscript edition of Nettleby & Son's bills of sales."

He strode off into the darkness without farther leave-taking, and scarcely knowing whether to laugh or to cry, as the words of this last characteristic speech rang in my ears, I entered the house, and during the long monotonous hours that followed before bed-time, I steadily plied my needle and wondered whether Mr. Harrington would ever find out that I had refused Frank Nettleby.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE GOVERNOR" ENLIGHTENED.

THE blank book and its owner did not make their appearance next day in the shawl-department, and though I could easily have accounted

for their absence, outsiders, mistaking effect for cause, concluded that I was neglected on account of Mr. Frank's absence from town, "on business," his father said. At all events, he did not make his appearance in the store until toward the close of the day, and then he did not come near me until he saw me getting ready to leave the store.

He had been standing at his father's desk with Mr. Harrington, examining some papers that the latter had produced for his inspection; but when he saw me he left his companions abruptly, and hurried toward me.

"Shake hands before you go, Miss Caro, and tell me you are not affronted," he said.

Of course I obeyed.

"Haven't repented your cruelty yet, I suppose?" he continued, half in jest, half in earnest.

"No, I have not, Mr. Nettleby," I said sharply, trying to draw my hand away from him, but he held it tightly.

"Don't be so cross," he said pathetically. "I can not imagine how you can nurse wrath against so helpless a fellow as I am. When I left you last night I was about as well wrought up for hatred and revenge, and all that sort of thing, as the bloodiest hero of the bloodiest melodrama you ever saw. I left town this morning on purpose to avoid you and my rival, for positively I was not certain but that I might be tempted to commit some terrible act of violence while under the influence of such savage emotion. I left town, and have amused myself all day by galloping over the country and wreaking all manner of direful vengeance upon your devoted head; but Nemesis is appeased now, and I have come back fully resolved to forget and forgive, nay, more, in such an amiable temper do you see me at present, that, upon my soul! I should really be tempted to renew my offer if you would give me the least encouragement."

"I most certainly shall not do so then," I said, laughing at his whimsical speech, though I saw traces of genuine feeling in his face as he spoke, and I knew that it was not all intended for jest.

"There is no hope, then?" and he gazed wistfully into my face.

"None whatever. God bless you, Mr. Frank, and give you a more loving wife than you could ever find in me!" And then I hurried away.

I had got some distance from the store, when I remembered that I had left my gloves lying upon my desk, so I retraced my steps in order to get them. I re-entered the building by a side-door; it was nearly deserted; all the girls had left, and there were remaining only a few of the

young men, hurrying through their concluding duties, eager to get away also. Mr. Harrington and Mr. Nettleby still were at the desk, and Mr. Frank was sauntering slowly up to them as I came in. As I was anxious to avoid his notice, I slipped into the shawl-room as noiselessly as possible, and catching up my gloves, I was about to depart, when I caught the sound of my name spoken by Mr. Nettleby, senior, and involuntarily I stopped to listen.

Yes, stopped to listen; there is no denying the fact. At first I did so thoughtlessly, and with no thought of hearing what was not intended for my ears; but as the conversation progressed, with shame I acknowledge that I tarried purposely, wilfully, chained to the spot by eager, breathless curiosity, and deaf for the time to the indignant voice of outraged honor, and the whisperings of conscience. I listened, and this is what I heard:

It was Mr. Nettleby who was speaking. "I believe the Manvers has really made an impression upon you, F. N. Seems to me the affair is becoming serious, eh?"

"If you want me to answer you, say Miss Manvers, father," answered Mr. Frank in very different tones from those he had lately used in addressing me. "If there is any one vulgar thing I hate worse than another, it is the habit we men have of speaking of a respectable woman in such a disrespectful way. If you had lingered as often and as long in the ante-rooms of the Paris theatres as I have done, you would have heard enough of such talk to disgust you with it for a life-time."

"Hear! hear! hear!" cried his worthy father, putting his delicate hands softly together in mock applause. "Is it not wonderful, Harrington, what a good little boy we have raised? he is a credit to our management. Every body used to prophesy that he would come to ruin, but he has gone the rounds of continental dissipation, and returned, addicted to no more serious vices than a tendency to lecture his papa, and fall in love with the shop-girls."

Mr. Harrington did not see fit to respond to his employer's witty remarks, but addressed himself directly to Mr. Frank. "If the lady you refer to has been spoken of with disrespect, Mr. Frank, I think you have no one to blame but yourself. The doubtful nature of your conduct toward her, the marked attention with which you have favored her during the past month, has drawn upon her from all sources comments neither delicate nor pleasant; comments that I should imagine would have been a source of great distress and anxiety to her, had not her

pleasure in the cause possibly have blinded her to the unpleasantness of the effects. It scarcely becomes you, who have occasioned this state of affairs, to censure others for language which your own imprudence has provoked." It would have been a great relief to my feelings, at that moment, if I could have boxed John Harrington's ears soundly for that delightful speech. Prudence restrained all outward signs of wrath, however, and I calmed my excitement sufficiently to give my attention to Mr. Frank again as he spoke wrathfully to his lecturer.

"I should like very much to be informed who it is that dares insult, by groundless gossip or indelicate jest, a young lady for whom I feel the highest respect, and in whom I have no hesitation in declaring my feelings are very much interested; one to whom I have never in my life addressed a syllable that a princess of the blood-royal need refuse to hear. If you can point out any such individual, or if I can discover him for myself, I shall certainly so far constitute myself the lady's champion as to thrash him within an inch of his life."

"I assure you, Mr. Frank," said "the governor," dryly, "I am not the individual in question, so waste no wrathful looks upon me. On the contrary, the lady possesses no warmer friends than myself and my sister, nor are there any who have her interests more at heart. If I spoke as I did concerning her, it was only from a desire to ascertain the true nature of your feelings for her; by no means from any disrespect to her. Your indignation, I am happy to say, has appeased any doubts I may have entertained concerning the serious nature of your attentions to her."

"Serious intentions! Ha! ha! ha!" and Mr. Frank's laugh rang bitterly through the store. "By that I suppose you mean intentions tending toward matrimony. Serious intentions! Ha! ha! ha!"

"The governor" brought the young gentleman's mirth to an untimely termination by saying, in a voice so stern and angry that I could hardly recognize it as his, "Frank Nettleby, can it be possible that you are a scoundrel? Can it be possible that by every means in your power you have sought to win the affections of that girl, and that now, when in all human probability you have succeeded, you intend to cast her aside, and to view the whole affair in the light of a meaningless flirtation? Can it be possible that you have only been amusing yourself by the attentions you have paid her during the past month?"

"Hold your horses, if I may be permitted



"YES; I STOPPED TO LISTEN."—PAGE 44.

the inelegant remark, you are a mile ahead of the mark now, oh! Daniel come to judgment," cried Frank again with that bitter unnatural laugh. "I have succeeded in winning the young lady's affections, have I? and her feelings are interested in my unworthy self, are they? A very queer way she has of showing her interest, then, is all I have to say. I last night did myself the honor of offering my hand, heart, and fortune for her gracious acceptance, and the three articles were returned upon my hands, with as contemptuous a 'No, I thank you,' as a harmless young man ever received. Been amusing myself, have I? Lord! what a funny pastime it has been!"

Involuntary exclamations of surprise broke from both his hearers.

"Bless my soul! E. N., you don't mean to say you have gone as far as that! You don't surely mean to say you have made such a fool of yourself!" cried Mr. Nettleby. "And—"

"You have been refused by Caroline Manvers? Do you seriously tell us that you offered yourself to her and she refused you?" cried "the governor."

"There is no need of making such a noise about it," said the young gentleman sulkily; "I suppose I am not the first man in the world who has been mittened by a woman. I plead guilty to all the counts in the indictment, but it isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to me to hear the story rehearsed. I have told you two the truth, but remember I don't want it to go any farther."

"I am astonished," drawled his father. "With no intention to be personal, you will pardon me for quoting the proverb, 'A fool for luck.' You have made a narrow escape, E. N., allow me to congratulate you. You deserved to have been accepted; you have made a narrow escape."

"Wider by a damned sight than pleased me," growled Frank between his teeth, and his father went on. "Not that I should have interfered in your arrangements at all; do not misunderstand me, the satisfaction which I feel at your escape is purely disinterested; the rôle of cruel father is the last one which could be imposed upon me. No, my dear sir, the emotion which your unexpected information chiefly excites in my bosom, is at this moment only surprise, pure, unmitigated surprise; for where, tell me where, do you see any thing in the damsel in question, to warrant you in making such a donkey of yourself as you acknowledge to having done?"

"Ask Harrington, he knows," said Mr. Frank

spitefully, but "the governor" deigning no response to this side-stroke, Mr. Nettleby resumed. "She has a fine hand, yes, I remember noticing that; she has a very fine hand, and she is a tall, shapely young woman enough, but I'll wager you a cool fifty, E. N., that for every homelier girl you can point out to me in the store, I will find you two handsomer ones. A sickly, sallow, sulky, commonplace-looking woman." And the gentleman wound up the string of alliterative epithets with which he had honored me by a contemptuous "Bah!"

My quondam lover caught up the cudgels manfully in my defense. "You know nothing at all about her," he cried dutifully. "She is not one of the milk-and-water doll-babies that I suppose you would admire, and I do not suppose any one would dream of calling her 'a pretty woman.' I have seen that article by scores in my travels, and none of them ran any risk of becoming Mrs. Frank Nettleby. I wore my heart upon my sleeve, and the pretty daws all pecked at it, but it was tough enough to withstand all attacks, until I met the magnificent eyes that flashed a saucy 'No!' at me, last night. Sulky! commonplace! you think her? By Jove, sir! there is more heart, more character in that woman, than—than—" and stammering a moment for a comparison, he at last went gallantly on—"than I am able to appreciate. If you had seen her as I have done, her face under the influence of strong emotion, white, piteous, appealing, the clear, sharp outline of her features thrown markedly forth, the sweet mouth with its varying lines and shadows a study for a painter; those large, clear eyes, shadowed by their heavy lashes, turned with wild, beseeching pathos to your face; if you could have seen all this, father, and at the same time have clasped within your arms the slender, shrinking form, and felt the pressure of that fairy hand, I solemnly believe that it would have been through no fault of yours that I can not at this moment salute Miss Manvers as my step-mother."

"The boy is certainly bewitched!" cried his father—and I really could not blame him for thinking so.

"If I am, I am not the only victim," was the pettish rejoinder. "Turn your arms upon Harrington, father. I am young and susceptible, and may perhaps be justly accused of blindness where the woman I love is concerned; but he, you must allow, is steady enough to have escaped the shafts of Cupid, if wielded by a commonplace girl. It is not every woman who could run unscathed the gauntlet of his keen

eyes, and intrench herself within his fortified breast almost in spite of himself; and yet this sickly, fallow, sulky one has done this. Look at that guilty face. Does it not prove my words true? Ah! my fine fellow, your disinterested and chivalrous speeches can not deceive me. Did you think I had not seen those watchful eyes, resting forever upon our mutual enchantress with a devouring passion that must have consumed her had she been inflammable (which you'll find to your cost she isn't), and not content with that, you must ever be glaring at me, forsooth! as if the story of my success or failure would be written upon my face? I trust the revelations of to-night have set your jealous heart at ease. Had I not been more magnanimous than any mortal can have any idea of, I should have played 'dog-in-the-manger,' to some purpose, in this game. As it is, Harrington, I have called to mind that you are my friend, and that she is worthy of your love. The coast is clear, now; I bid you God speed, in all sincerity; woo your bride, and win her—if you can."

I had heard enough, more than enough. "The governor's" voice was raised in reply, but I dared tarry no longer. Trembling, blushing, overwhelmed with agitation, I stole noiselessly away, and escaped into the street, thence to the quiet of my home.

I dispatched Agnes after supper to spend the evening with one of the neighbors, for I longed for solitude, and felt that even her innocent companionship would be a burden to me. It was a mild, pleasant summer evening, and the air in the house seemed heavy and oppressive, so I took my station upon the door-step in front of the house, and there indulged myself in a bewildering though delightful reverie of tumultuous thought.

The door-step was a favorite resort of mine, and was a far pleasanter one upon these warm summer evenings than any I could find within doors. Our low-ceilinged, narrow-windowed rooms were cosy enough in winter, but in summer they were by no means so attractive. So, upon such evenings as these, the step was the usual resort both of myself and Agnes. The street was a quiet and retired one; the neighbors, generally, civil, respectable people, with no higher pretensions to wealth and style than we ourselves possessed; and the joyous shouts of the children as they chased the hoop, skipped the rope, or scampered up and down the street, were usually the only sounds that broke the stillness. Here, then, I betook myself and my meditations upon the eventful evening in

question. The conversation which I had overheard had given me plenty of food for thought; and as I recalled the jealous severity of Mr. Harrington's remarks, the petulant honesty of Mr. Frank, and the supercilious insolence of his father, I almost lived over again the contending emotions that had swayed me while listening to them.

The revelations which both Mr. Nettleby and Mr. Harrington had made concerning the remarks which Mr. Frank's rather questionable civilities had drawn upon me, was a truth which, though I was not entirely ignorant of, I had certainly never hitherto appreciated as I should have done. So conscious had I been of the honorable intentions of the gentleman, so confident, too, of the tranquil nature of the feelings with which he had inspired me, that I had not considered sufficiently how differently the affair might appear when viewed by disinterested eyes. The contemptuous speech of Mr. Nettleby, the angry rebuke of "the governor," even Mr. Frank's indignation, all served to awaken me to a full sense of the disagreeable position in which I was placed; and the feeling of mortified pride which tormented me as I thought over all the little incidents that memory was now ready enough to bring forward to increase my discomfort, was galling in the extreme.

Then, eager to be rid of so disagreeable a subject, my thoughts turned to the author of all this vexation, and in thinking of Mr. Frank and his speeches, spite of the regret which I could but feel for his disappointment, I was forced to laugh when remembering his whimsical account of his rejection. There was not a particle of malice in Frank Nettleby's composition. His manly, straightforward conduct of this evening had abundantly proved that; and whatever superabundance of self-esteem he might possess, had been implanted in him far more by education than by nature. I somehow seemed intuitively to understand the true nature of the feelings with which he regarded me. From the perfect indifference he had felt for me upon the evening when he had summoned me to look upon Miss Home's wedding finery, through all the gradations of chivalrous pity, idle curiosity, excitement of rivalry, genuine liking, and finally imaginary passion, I could trace the course of his feelings up to the preceding evening as plainly as if, throughout, he had made me his confidante; and the closing act of the drama, or comedy rather, as it had appeared to me, culminating in the proposal, had by no means taken me by surprise.

I believed in my heart that he was really no more in love with me than I was with him. Yet I was not ignorant that the sorrows of the imagination are always as keenly felt and sometimes as hard to bear as are the sterner ones of reality. If Mr. Frank imagined that he was suffering from the pangs of disappointed love, mistaking for them the grievous sensation of mortified vanity and anticipated ridicule, I liked him well enough to feel quite as much sympathy for his distress as if it had arisen from a less commonplace cause. He had borne his troubles so nobly, that I could not help but respect him, even while I laughed at him. The generous, candid nature had come unstained through a trial more dangerous to its purity, perhaps, than real suffering would have been. There was not a shadow of resentment rankling in that noble heart, either toward me or toward the one whom he considered his rival, for spite of the melo-dramatic speeches with which he had favored me, I knew very well that he felt no more real anger against me than I did against him; and that was saying a great deal, for I had never been nearer being what is called "in love" with my young employer than I had been that evening—was now. Without a particle of sentiment, with no shadow of romance or thought of passion, my mind yet dwelt almost regretfully on the loyal heart that I had thrown from my grasp, a heart capable of making the happiness of any woman, a heart that seemed now utterly lonely and unloved, for, spite of all his worldly advantages, Mr. Frank had really been deprived of all the truest happiness that earth can bestow. No mother's and no sister's love had ever blessed his life. No good woman had ever cared for him, as only good women can; and the tie between his father and himself was such an anomalous one, that it really could have brought to him very little comfort.

"God bless you, Mr. Frank, and bestow upon you finally a home in which you will be appreciated as you ought to be!" was the termination of my soliloquy, as far as he was concerned. And then my thoughts betook themselves at last to the consideration of a subject yet more interesting, a subject which quickened my pulses and flushed my cheeks, and awakened in me that wild, delicious happiness which never comes but once to the heart of woman.

Frank Nettleby had said that "the governor" loved me—was this so? dared I believe it? or was it but the outbreak of a causeless jealousy, which found food for suspicion in the

most unlikely object? His words still sounded in my ears, and even in the darkening shades of twilight the hot blood mounted to my face, and burned in my cheeks, till I was fain to bow my head upon my hands, and cover it even from the gaze of the stars. "It is not every woman who could have run unscathed the gauntlet of those keen eyes, and have intrenched herself within that fortified breast; and yet the sickly, fallow, sulky one has done this!" And it was while these words were echoing in my heart, while my burning face was yet buried in my hands, that a familiar footstep fell upon the pavement in front of me, and a familiar voice greeted my ear.

"Good-evening! Miss Caroline." With a guilty start I lifted my head to behold Mr. Harrington standing before me. For an instant I felt almost as scared as if he had been able to read the thoughts which but now had possessed me; and yet I need not have been alarmed, for certainly an humbler man never stood before woman than, hat in hand, now awaited my greeting.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Harrington; it has grown so dark that I hardly knew you," was the polite fiction with which I finally endeavored to excuse my embarrassment. "Walk in; I will light a lamp in an instant."

"No! no! do not go in!" he stammered, scarcely less confused than myself. "It is much pleasanter out here, and, if you will permit, I will sit with you here on the step awhile; I shall not detain you long."

So I remained, and he seated himself upon the step below me, leaning his elbow on the one upon which I sat, and gazed upon the ground silent and thoughtful.

I tried to chat upon the topics of the day, unconcernedly and freely, as if our long estrangement had been a dream, and there had been no break in the friendly intercourse of the preceding winter; but I found that indifferent subjects were rather hard things to manage between two individuals who had been almost at sword's point, understood if not expressed, for more than two weeks past, and who, during that time, had been thrown into daily, almost hourly intercourse without exchanging one word save such as business or common civility demanded. The attempt was a difficult one to me, who, as the injured party, felt sure of my ground; to him, with the embarrassment of an expected apology upon his shoulders, and the confusion which a consciousness of having been in the wrong naturally produces, the effort was not only a difficult but an impossible one.

Indeed, he made no attempt to keep up the appearance of indifference; monosyllabic responses, or no responses at all, were all I received in return for my most brilliant conversational efforts, and finally I, too, lapsed into silence, awkward indeed, but really less embarrassing than had been our previous attempts at conversation.

At last he made a desperate plunge. "Miss Caroline, I have not been behaving right to you for some time past; I have been angry at you causelessly, as I have now every reason to believe, and even when you did me the honor to make an effort at conciliation, blinded and misled by my own mad passion, I was too miserable to receive your advances as I should have done, and by rejecting them I have added so incalculably to my faults that I now dare scarcely hope that you will overlook them."

The charges he made against himself were so undeniably true, and I had felt them so deeply, that I could not in conscience contradict him, so I maintained an unbroken silence, though he paused for some time evidently desirous of reassurance ere he proceeded; none coming, he again desperately resumed. "If my penitence were less heart-felt than it is; if my consciousness of the wrongs I have done you were less acute, I should not have dared make this appeal; as it is, I feel that these explanations are due to you, even although I am almost hopeless of obtaining your pardon. Caroline!" with a sudden burst of emotion that belied grievously his assertion of hopelessness—"Caroline! this estrangement has made me very unhappy, may we not be friends again?"

And then I found my tongue. "There has been no cessation of our friendship so far as I am concerned, Mr. Harrington."

My pretty speech was received with a petulance unexpected indeed in our dignified "governor." "Do not insult me by insincerity, Miss Manvers; for anger, indifference, scorn, I am prepared; I have deserved them, but for Heaven's sake disguise not your real feelings behind the garb of cold civility, or I shall feel hopeless indeed of winning your pardon."

"And yet you told me once that it was vain to expect truth from me; how then can you be unprepared for insincerity?" And thus the bitter words which so long had rankled in my heart were brought to light, and the citadel of my pride was left defenseless.

"Did I say that?" he asked, meekly enough, for he was thoroughly ashamed of the sentiment now. "Oh, Caroline! had you only known the misery I endured when those words

were forced from me, you would have forgotten them as soon as uttered. Be generous now, and overlook the past, if not for my sake, for Jenny's, who is worrying herself half sick, through anxiety to see us friends again. Shake hands, won't you?"

I do not know to this day whether I did or not, but I do know that somehow my hand was caught in his, and remained imprisoned throughout the whole of that memorable interview.

"Entirely on Miss Jenny's account, though; remember that, sir!" I said.

"It will not be the least of the services she has rendered me; and I accept the pardon thankfully upon whatever terms it is accorded. And now, Caroline Manvers, let me put to you a question which has burned upon my lips ever since I took my seat beside you. Why—from what imaginable motive—did you lead me to believe the other evening that you loved Frank Nettleby, when from his own lips this evening, in the story of his rejection, I have learned that no such feeling ever animated your breast?"

"I never led you to believe any such thing," I said, a little indignantly. "I misunderstood the motive of your question, and from the confusion I evinced, you chose to draw a wrong conclusion, and leaped at once to the decision which misled you; I would not undeceive you then, for I was too grieved and indignant to do so; I—I thought you had no right to misjudge me so."

"I do not think my mistake was at all surprising; you blushed deeply when you heard my question, and your eyes, which until that moment had frankly met my own, sank in confusion to the ground. Surely these are the signs of conscious love, if the stories poets and novelists tell us be true! You misunderstood the motive of my question, you say; what possible construction could you have put upon it, that could have caused such marked confusion?"

And then I told him Mr. Frank's first proposal to me, saying, as I concluded the narrative, "I did feel sadly guilty that I had not given him at the time a more decided negative, for I well know that by consenting to leave the subject unsettled, as by my silence I did, I virtually encouraged him to expect a favorable response. His manner showed that he so understood me both then and afterward, and though he gave me no possible opportunity to undeceive him, he did not cease to act upon the supposition until last evening. I supposed, when so abruptly you asked me the strange question

you did, that Frank had spoken to you concerning his offer and my indecision in answering it, of course conveying to you his own interpretation of the matter. I was horribly ashamed of it; no wonder I blushed; I feel my face burn yet, when I think of it. Are you convinced?"

"That I have acted like a fool? Yes. That you were right in resenting my folly? No. Now, Caroline, answer me one other question, and my catechism is finished. Why did you refuse Frank Nettleby?"

"Because I did not love him," I replied promptly enough.

"And how has it happened that you did not love him? Young, handsome, and wealthy as he is, these qualifications are valueless when compared to the inestimable worth of a heart as noble as was ever proffered to woman; a disposition and mind whose charms I know that you perceive and appreciate. Why, I ask again, was he allowed to sue in vain? The wooer who would prove irresistible to ninety-nine women out of a hundred has found the hundredth in you; is your heart invulnerable? or is it—"

But here I interrupted him. "Have you sought me out this evening to plead Mr. Nettleby's cause, Mr. Harrington?"

"God forbid!" he ejaculated fervently. "I have the cause to plead of a far less worthy man than Frank Nettleby, yet one in whom I am much more interested. Knowing his fate, how dare I proceed! If he, with all his noble qualities and worldly advantages, was unprosperous in his suit, on what possible grounds can John Harrington hope for success?"

He paused as if expecting me to reply, but I remained perversely silent. He dropped my hand and rose slowly to his feet.

"I understand," he said; "your silence is expressive, and in it I read my fate. All that now remains for me, is to thank you for the kindness that has spared me a harsher answer, and to take my leave." And he was moving away when my words detained him.

"You have asked me no question, Mr. Harrington, it is impossible that I can have given you any answer."

One instant he stood gazing eagerly upon me, the next he had resumed his position on the step.

"Women are all born coquettes, I verily believe," he said. "You have no pity upon the agitation and confusion which a man must feel when addressing you upon the subject of love and matrimony. You are no kinder than the

rest of your sex, Caroline. You know perfectly well the meaning of what I said, or tried to say, and yet you will not yield one iota of your privileges, but cruelly torture me with doubt and suspense until I have satisfied your exacting pride by every concession you have a right to demand. Yet it is your right, and God forbid that I should wrong you by withholding even so much as a word that is your due. Listen to me then, for my destiny is in your grasp, and upon your decision depends the happiness of my life. I am an unpolished man, with neither position, wealth, or personal endowments to tempt a woman's love. Yet with strength to defend her, and with love to bless her, if she will trust her fate to me. I can offer for her acceptance a hand never willfully guilty of a dishonorable deed; a name whose stainless integrity no act of mine has ever sullied. That hand, that name, Caroline Manvers, I offer to you; will you accept them?"

And still I was silent. He was right, my greedy woman's heart would not forego one atom of the happiness it had a right to claim.

"You ask me to marry you, Mr. Harrington," I said softly; "but you have not told me that you love me."

"Not told you that I love you!" he cried vehemently, the restraint which he had hitherto by visible effort maintained over his words and manner, now entirely overthrown. "Love you! there is not a nerve in my body that does not resent indignantly the implied doubt. There is not a thought of past pleasure, of present content, or of future prosperity that my mind conceives, that is not mingled with dreams of you. Since that evening when I left you after my first visit to your home, and looking back saw you through the darkness of the night standing upon this very step, clad in your black robes, with your little sister clinging helplessly to your side, so lonely, so young and fair, so unprotected—from that moment I took you into my heart as I never before had taken a human being, and silently vowed that if my love could save you from the snares and troubles of the world, your path should thenceforward be a pleasant one. O, my love! will not this content you? what else can I say to woo from you the answer my impatient spirit craves?" and casting aside the shy reserve which had always marked his conduct toward me, he threw his arm around my waist, and drew me to his side, gazing into my face with eyes whose eager passion not even the obscurity of the evening could conceal.

And all the answer that I could make was to rest my glowing face upon his shoulder, and en-

circle with my arm the neck that was bowed so lovingly over me. Lower, still lower drooped his head; our breaths mingled; his cheek touched mine; and then our lips met in that first sweet, thrilling kiss of love, which man never gives, or woman takes, but once.

A happy silence ensued, broken at last by him, as he murmured, "My Caroline, this expressive silence is very sweet, and yet, exigent as yourself, my heart craves words to satisfy its longing. Speak, dearest; tell me that I am loved—that you are happy."

Spite of my agitation I could not resist the mischievous retort: "Does the spirit of coquetry then exist in man's bosom also?" I said. "Are you, too, so pitiless as to require from my confusion every concession you have a right to demand? Can you pretend to misinterpret the answer that my looks and actions have already given you?"

But I could not divert him from his aim. He only whispered, "Be generous, Caroline; tell me that you love me."

And at last the words found utterance, and my answer was given, definitely enough to satisfy even him.

The happy moments flew quickly by, and I only knew that the evening had sped by the return of Agnes, with the intelligence that ten o'clock had arrived.

A little later and my lover rose to leave. "I shall expect you to give Mr. Nettleby warning to-morrow to provide another clerk for his shawl department," he said with playful assumption of authority; "no more task-masters, no more toil for you, my darling. You are mine now, and I shall not allow you to be any longer subjected to the temptation which Mr. Frank's handsome face must be to you. I shall be very jealous of you until you are once irrevocably my wife, and shall allow no man's eyes to gaze upon you, save my own."

"I shall make no rash promises," I said, laughing, but a little tremulously too, for the new feeling of being protected and cared for was very precious to me. "Miss Harrington and I will talk the matter over, and I shall act as may appear to her most seemly in the matter."

"I claim no other concessions," he said contentedly. "I am sure of her support; and now good-night again, and may the good Lord bless and protect my Caroline, now and ever."

A brief caress, and he was gone; and I stole to my room, and laid myself down by Agnes's side that night, the happiest, most thankful woman that slept beneath the canopy of God's bright heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

F. N. RETIRES "THE GOVERNOR" IN POSSESSION.

THE engagement between Mr. Harrington and myself was not a long one; there was no need that it should be so, and a long delay was impossible if I acceded to my lover's wishes, and resigned immediately my situation in the store; for, as may be readily supposed, I had laid by but little capital during the eighteen months I had worked for my living, and could afford to live in idleness but a very brief time. Miss Jenny proved to be as earnest as her brother in desiring me to leave the store, and on many accounts it was really better that I should do so. The relations existing between "the governor" and myself could not easily be concealed, and would of course attract notice and remark that would be embarrassing to both of us. Beside this, it would be very disagreeable to me to be thrown constantly in the society of Mr. Frank, uncertain as I was how he would be disposed to view the altered demeanor which I must henceforth sustain toward him, and so I left the store the evening following to return to it no more, and the same evening it was arranged between Mr. Harrington and myself that our nuptials should take place one month later.

Never was bride received into her husband's family more affectionately than was I by Miss Jenny. Master Eddie, when next he saw me, very politely and prettily expressed his satisfaction at the prospect of the near connection which was shortly to exist between us, and though I half fancied at the time that there was a want of cordiality in his advances which might give ground for the suspicion that they were not altogether sincere, still his youth and shyness were very likely to have been the only cause of the reserve which I noticed. At all events, I did not disturb myself long with the idea, for in Miss Jenny's hearty, tearful greeting, I found full solace for any coolness on the part of her young brother.

Her feelings on the subject of the approaching marriage may perhaps be better understood from the substance of a conversation which occurred between us a few days after I had left the store, and as it settled also several other questions of equal importance, I will record it for the reader's benefit.

It was at my own home that the scene transpired. "The governor" had brought his sister to spend the evening with me as of yore, and her kind hands were now busily engaged in some needle-work on my behalf, as were my own also, for, though my trousseau was necessarily humble

enough, yet I had sufficient work upon my hands in preparing it, to employ me very busily during the month that was slipping away so rapidly. Of course "the governor" was with us, lazily ensconced in an arm-chair, with Agnes hovering about him, amusing himself alternately with her and with us, his eyes often seeking mine with an expression that filled my heart with satisfied happiness such as nothing else could give. John was by no means a demonstrative lover—fond words or tender caresses being but seldom bestowed by him. This phase of his character, however, was so accordant with my own, that I never wished it otherwise, and thus, perhaps, I prized even more fondly than less timid women would have done, those tender glances which were the only tokens of love of which he was not chary.

"I have a piece of news to tell you, Caroline," said Miss Jenny, "that I dare say you will find interesting. Frank Nettleby sails for Europe next Monday."

"Does he, indeed?" I cried, as much excited by the intelligence as she had expected I would be. "I thought he never left until autumn?"

"Such is his usual custom, but I find no difficulty in accounting for his early flitting this year, nor, I suppose, do you?"

As no answer was admissible from me in this case, Miss Jenny after a pause resumed:

"And I have yet another bit of information to give you—unless John has been beforehand with me?" A negative shake of the head answered her inquiring glance. "Eddie has concluded to accompany him."

"Eddie!" I cried. "What in the world takes him to Europe?"

"Inclination, chiefly, I suppose, for I do not know that he has any stronger motive. Mr. Frank wanted him to go last year, but he would not leave until he had finished his studies and been admitted to the bar. You know, I suppose, that he is a lawyer by profession?"

"Indeed I did not know it," I said, in still greater astonishment. "I had not thought he was more than eighteen or nineteen years of age—too young to be any thing but a student."

"You have made no greater mistake than people generally do, though I had thought you were better informed. Ed. is considerably older than he looks. But, as I was saying, Frank and he were very intimate last year, and Eddie was only hindered from accompanying him on his trip over the Atlantic by the delay it would necessarily make in his future settlement. Now, however, that his profession is a settled thing,

he is willing enough to postpone entering into regular practice for six months longer, and this is such a capital chance for him to go abroad, too, for he goes with Frank in a business capacity, and while his duties are light, his expenses will be still lighter."

"Mr. Harrington," I said thoughtfully, after a few moments' silent musing upon the news I had just heard, "I do not see why I can not resume my situation at the store again after Mr. Frank goes away, or, even if I remain at home for a while now, why can I not go back again after—after we are married?"

"Why, what in the world is the child thinking about!" cried Miss Jenny, dropping her work in dismay.

"Proceed, Miss Manvers," was the only comment my *fiancé* chose to make at this stage of my proposition.

"You are not a rich man, Mr. Harrington," I continued, "and Miss Jenny has always deemed it her duty to support herself, and why should not the same duty be imperative upon me? more especially, as I bring to you not only myself, but Agnes. I really see no reason that you should bear this double burden alone, when I can assist you a little just as well as not."

Here Miss Jenny's indignation forbade a longer silence. "John Harrington's wife stand in a store! A pretty story, upon my word! I think you have taken leave of your senses, Caroline. As for my earning my own living, it is a different thing altogether. I commenced doing so when John was not able to do it for me, and I had become used to my daily toil, and found it actually necessary to my happiness, before he could offer to relieve me. I was too wise to yield up my independence, and knew too well the discomfort and misery of an aimless life to be contented to settle down into idleness, though I well knew that he would never have considered my support as a burden. I had another reason too, which the events of the past week have proved was not an idle one. I had dreamed that the time might come in which John would wish to take to himself a wife, and make for himself the home that he never yet has known. Then, thought I, there shall be no possible unpleasantness caused by the knowledge that he has a sister, who must be dragged along with him, wherever he chooses to settle, to mar with her enforced presence the harmonious privacy of married life, which all men so dearly prize. No! Caroline; Eddie is now independent of his brother's help—I have never ceased to be so. So John has nothing to do with his money but to provide a home for

himself and you. And you must have nothing to do with your time but to make that home a happy one; while, meanwhile, if I in my boarding-house should miss too much the society of the boys, I shall have a little sister handy who can cheer me up, and in her happy home I shall find a very pleasant place to spend my evenings."

"Spend your evenings!" I cried indignantly. "You do not mean to say that wherever John may take me to live your home will not also be? You can not possibly dream that I would allow his marriage with me to separate him from you? Never, my dear, dear friend! Where our home is, there must yours be also, now and ever. I could never forgive myself if I thought I had caused the shadow of a separation to come between him and the sister whom he so dearly loves. Why! you might just as well propose that I should send Agnes to a boarding-house, rather than disturb the privacy of our home. Why would it be more unnatural for me to be parted from my sister than for him to give up his?" And then "the governor's" grave voice took up the strain.

"You see, Jenny, it is as I told you; I knew Caroline's sentiments too well to fear to trust my cause in her hands. Renounce at once all idea of being separated from us, for where my home is, there must yours be also; and the home to which I look forward with such ardent anticipations, would be robbed of one of its fairest features, if you, my dear sister, refused to bless it with your presence." His voice faltered, and Miss Jenny's eyes and mine were dim with tears; after a moment's pause he resumed in a lighter tone, "As for the subject upon which your indignation was aroused, I have but one remark to make; when I need Miss Manvers's help in supporting my wife, I will call upon her for it, and until I do, I sincerely trust she will never again volunteer it. I hope that settles the question?"

"I am sure, sir," I replied demurely, "Miss Manvers has no intention of contending for the privilege. I am 'silenced but not convinced.' I still cling to my original line of argument, I have just as good a right to work for my living as has Miss Jenny."

"Work! so you shall, Caroline; you will have plenty to do, never fear," said that lady energetically; "if you start housekeeping with Agnes and me to take care of, as well as yourselves. I think you will find your hands full in keeping the wheels of the domestic machinery in running order. Just think, John, how nice it will be for us to come home from

the store to a real, genuine, bond-fide home: to have some one to watch for us and to greet us when we come; to sit down to our meals with our own family only, and to gather around the table with our sewing or reading of an evening, as people only can do when they are in their own homes. And you, Caroline, dear, are so eminently gifted with the quality of making a house a home; I noticed that upon the first evening which I spent with you here, and I said to John that very night upon our way home, 'John, if ever you make up your mind to marry, I should think you would like such a woman as that;' meaning you, dear, of course. Well, what do you think he said?"

"What?" I cried quickly; and then I drew back again, blushing at the eagerness I had shown.

"Why, he said," continued Miss Jenny, "that he had already learned to like just such a woman as that."

"Still meaning me, I hope?" I said, glancing at "the governor's" placid face.

"Still meaning you," he responded, and Miss Jenny resumed:

"From that time I have worked just as hard as I knew how to promote this marriage. You can not tell, Caroline, what a relief to me it was to find upon whom his choice had fallen, I knew that John was never destined to be an old bachelor, and I had always been afraid he would fall in love with some one of the fine-lady girls into whose society he has been so much thrown at the boarding-house; for even if such a one could have made him happy, she would have come between him and me, I knew, and instead of gaining a sister, as I so much longed to do, I should only have lost a brother. But I have always had faith in you, and had I selected his wife for him myself, I should certainly have chosen you."

"I am sure, Miss Harrington," I cried with tearful eyes, "I am very grateful to you for your good opinion; you have indeed proved yourself my friend; always have you done so; from the first day I came to you, a sorrowful, timid stranger, awkward and inexperienced, to worry you with my ignorance, until this night that you put the finishing stroke to your kind labors, by telling me that you have helped me to a husband. I am really curious to know by what great good fortune I ever ingratiated myself so completely in your favor; what have I ever done, that from the first you should have been so kindly disposed toward me?"

"Sure enough, that must seem a little mysterious to you," she said, laughing, "but you

must know that both John and I had been predisposed in your favor before you came to us. I will tell you how it happened. One evening, just before the store closed, John and I were at work at your old post of observation behind Mr. Nettlesby's desk, and we there overheard a conversation between him and Mr. Henderson, of which you were the subject. The latter gentleman gave an outline of your history, and of your father's before you, and spoke of you in such terms of glowing admiration that we became quite anxious to see you. The story of your desolate situation warmed my heart to you, and I resolved, if you came among us, that I would try to make your store-life as smooth as possible. You know yourself what excellent friends we afterward became, and, as I tell you, I was vastly pleased when I saw that you and John were beginning to take a fancy to each other, for I saw it, my dear, before you had ever thought of such a thing yourself. Even during the little episode in which Mr. Frank figured so prominently, I, more clear-sighted than John, saw plainly enough that it was not Frank you cared about, whatever might have been his sentiments toward you, and I had far more fears of losing my chosen sister-in-law from John's jealousy than from Frank's love. I tried for a while to manoeuvre you into a better understanding with each other; but after the unfortunate termination of the evening in which I made him escort you home, I forsook that line of business, fearing that I might by my meddling work more mischief than I did good. I believed, too, that if you really had a liking for each other, every thing would come out right at last, and you see events have proved that I was correct—John's insane jealousy came very near blocking the game, though. You must always beware of that, my dear, it is his weak point; he has always been jealous, jealous of his father and mother as a mere baby, jealous of me, of every one he loves; I hope the lesson he has lately received will go far toward curing him, but at all events it is my duty to give you warning. Mr. Henderson told us how proud a man your father was, and I know you have inherited that characteristic; if ever your pride and John's jealousy are brought into collision, I fear you will both have reason to rue the day."

Far-sighted Miss Jenny! Her words were indeed prophetic, yet of how little moment they seemed to me then. I was far more interested in knowing that they had heard of my dear father, and could admire with me his glorious character, so I said eagerly as soon as Miss

Jenny had ceased speaking, "You had heard of my father, then, Mr. Harrington, even before you saw me?"

"That I had," he replied smilingly; "of him, and his father and his grandfather before him; at least as far as it was in the power of Mr. Henderson to enlighten us. He discoursed at length upon the fine old Manvers blood that had never known a stain through countless generations. He spoke of your mother, too, as being a Winthrop, and remarkable for her stern, Puritan principles; and then he finished his remarks by saying that he believed you to be a satisfactory compound of both parents; possessing the high pride of name and birth which characterized your father, judiciously tempered by the strong principles and sober good sense of your mother. Of course you can easily imagine how much our anticipations were excited by so glowing an account."

"Well, for my part," chimed in Miss Jenny, rather irrelevantly, "I can not undertake to vouch for the merits of my grandfathers and grandmothers, but I know my father was an upright, honest man, and that he left behind him as fair a name as ever sons inherited; and I know that my mother was a good Christian woman—a better one than her daughter will ever succeed in becoming, I fear. And yet another thing I know and will say, John, even though you are my own brother, that no woman, be she high or lowly, need shrink to accept the name you give her, for it is borne by as honorable a man as America can boast of."

"Indeed, indeed, I believe it, Miss Harrington!" I cried; "proud even to foolishness as I am of the stainless name my father bequeathed to me, I merge it willingly in your brother's, and that I would not do, were he a royal prince, had I not most boundless faith in his integrity. Agnes and I are the last of our race, you know, and I fear you will think that Mr. Henderson made rather a rash assertion in attributing to me my mother's good sense, when I tell you that this pride of family is as truly my ruling passion as it was my father's, and that I would make any sacrifice of happiness and affection rather than bring upon my father's name a shadow of dishonor."

"Hush! Caroline," said "the governor" gravely, "you know not what you say; talk not of sacrificing happiness and affection to a shadow. Suppose you should be put to the test; suppose I were to tell you now of some dishonorable deed which had stained irretrievably the name which you are hereafter to bear, would you have me believe that you would reject the love

I offer you rather than sully your father's name by connecting it with mine?"

"I would, yes, I would!" I cried with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes raised defiantly to his, but when I met the loving, earnest gaze he bent upon me, and read in it the ardent affection that I knew was ready to crown my life with blessings, my haughty spirit was subdued, pride vanished, and with a sudden revulsion of feeling I burst into tears, crying petulantly, "How can you torment me so? it is cruel even to imagine such a case!"

My lover gazed wistfully at me with an expression in his eyes which I strove in vain to understand. He sighed heavily, and did not speak for some moments. When he did, however, his voice was clear and steady as usual. "I believe I know you better than you know yourself, Caroline; yet I am sincerely thankful that there is no need to put your resolution to the test. You need not anticipate discovering in me a second Eugene Aram."

And then the conversation, by mutual consent, turned upon other topics, and the words we each had spoken passed into temporary oblivion, to be recalled after many days with fearful emphasis and weight.

From all this it will readily be seen that I found no difficulty in making a sister as well as a friend of kind Miss Jenny. Heart and soul she entered into all our plans and arrangements, taking as much pride and interest in my preparations as if I had been her own sister, and thus the happy weeks of my short engagement glided by, and, at length, upon a pleasant, hazy morning in September, I bade a tearful adieu to Agnes and Miss Jenny, leaving them to console each other, while I, the most loving, trusting wife that ever assumed the matrimonial yoke, went forth from my girlhood's home with him who was thenceforward to be the master of my destiny.

An autumn trip up the St. Lawrence and to the White Mountains was the extent of our bridal tour. We were away three weeks, and even now the golden radiance of those happy days tints with glory my sober maturity. The raptures of the honey-moon have been so endlessly extolled, and so endlessly ridiculed, that I am almost afraid to attempt to describe the joys of mine, lest the remembrance of that time, so holy to me, should become the subject of mockery to others. Yet, in spite of sneering cynics, if any approach to perfect happiness can be felt upon this sinful earth, I think it is enjoyed by a pure-hearted, loving couple in the first few weeks after marriage. The complete removal of all

restraint, all espionage; the constant society of the loved one, and the knowledge that a lifetime of such communion is before them; the constant unfolding of new tastes and peculiarities in each other, tastes and peculiarities always harmonious at this epoch, whatever a more intimate acquaintance may prove them to be; the boundless trust in each other which characterizes their communion; these causes combined create for the husband and the wife a new world so rich in indescribable emotions and boundless anticipations of future bliss, that the vulgar realities of life around them, its cares, passions, needs and sorrows, is completely cast into oblivion, and almost perfect happiness for a few brief days is the result.

I speak now from my own experience. I know that at that time I was perfectly happy. My imagination can not conceive, nor could my nature realize, if obtained, a greater bliss than was enjoyed by me in the first month after my marriage, and I think I may safely venture to say that the feelings of my husband were no less intense and absorbing than my own.

So we left the crowded, bustling city, and wandered off amid strangers, into strange places, with no criticising eyes to comment upon our actions, no mocking tongues to sneer at our new-born happiness. John threw off the stern gravity and reserve which long years of responsibility rather than nature had woven around him, and became a boy again, frank, joyous, affectionate, as it was his nature to be. Then did I obtain an insight into the boundless wealth of the heart I had won for my own. His gentle charity, his womanly tenderness of soul; his unselfish, sacrificing devotedness; his delicate purity of soul. All the nobility of the great, grand nature of the man who had become my husband, was now discovered to me; and very, very humble did I become, when recognizing how utterly unworthy I was, with my suspicious, faulty nature, of the love which was so lavishly bestowed upon me; and yet not utterly unworthy either, for great love, like divine charity, covers many imperfections. And oh! how tenderly, how truly, how absorbingly did I learn to love my husband! All other emotions paled beside this one great passion. My life and soul were dissolved in his; and in him, henceforth and forever, were centered all the hopes and joys of my existence.

In our trip we avoided large cities and places of public resort generally. Solitude and retirement were the blessings which our spirits craved, and during many a long ramble through the woods, many a sail upon some placid lake, or

seramble over some grand old mountain, did we drink in health and happiness, mental and physical, while luxuriating in the glories of the bright autumn landscape, and enjoy the pure blessings of the time and place, chiefly because those blessings were felt and appreciated by each other.

At last, after our three golden weeks of holiday, we returned again to the realities of every-day life. We sojourned for a few days with Miss Jenny at her boarding-house, during which time we selected and furnished our future home. A very plain and unpretending residence, plainly and unpretendingly furnished, yet it was our home, and many a happy hour did we all spend in talking over and arranging the pleasant little minutiae in which we were so much interested. At last it was ready for us, and bidding a final farewell to boarding-house life, John and myself, sister Jenny and Agnes, installed ourselves in our new home, as happy and united a family as could be found in Boston.

And then, almost like a dream, the days and weeks sped by, until weeks became months, and months years, and still my life continued to be as rich in love and happiness as my fondest dreams could have wished it. I should perhaps have become hardened in my prosperity and quite forgetful of that future life which all must be taught to prepare for and remember, had it not been for a great sorrow which came upon us, to remind us of the fleeting nature of our sublunary joys.

In the second year of our marriage my first-born son was given to me, a beautiful, healthy child, who soon became the idol of the household. Before he came to us, we had not realized that there was an empty niche in our hearts which only his sweet presence could fill. So perfect had been our happiness that we had not thought it possible that it could be increased, but when our baby was born, we felt that the well of tenderness in our hearts had been stirred by an angel's hand, and with humble, grateful hearts, we offered up our thanks to the Giver of all Good, who had thus graciously blessed us. Yet, alas! not long did our dream of parental rapture endure. Six months did our little one bless us with his presence, and then he sickened and died; and in the bitter grief which my bereavement brought upon me, I woke from my dream-life of a present that gave me nothing to wish for, to the patient waiting for a future beyond the grave, where suffering and death are for evermore unknown. A second babe was born to us within a year after the death of our little James, but this little angel lingered with us

but three short days, and then she too was taken from our longing hearts. The trial and disappointment were bitter indeed; yet no affliction could be overwhelming, no sorrow utterly hopeless, while we were so blessed in each other's love; and I believe the loss of our children only knit together more closely our hearts, and we were half comforted, even when most miserable, because we mourned together.

There years rolled by, at the end of which time Mr. Frank Nettleby and Edwin Harrington returned to America. Their stay had been protracted from month to month, and from year to year, without any definite period being fixed for their return, until they had passed out of our lives so entirely that it required a struggle to welcome them back. A correspondence had been of course maintained between Edwin and his brother and sister, but for the last eighteen months of his absence his wanderings had been so indefinite, his address so uncertain, that our knowledge of his movements had been very unsatisfactory. Through Mr. Nettleby, both John and Jenny had frequently heard of Mr. Frank, and occasionally a merry message from him was sent to one of us through Eddie's letters. Once, too, within a few months after John and I were married, he had written to me a short comic little note, characteristic of himself, and accompanied by a collection of costly lace and *bijouterie* which he tendered to me as a bridal gift. John and I together wrote him an answer, and that was the last we had heard of him except, as I said, through Eddie's letters.

And now they were both home again, and the very sound of their names recalled thoughts and feelings belonging to days gone by, which I had imagined had quite passed into oblivion. Edwin of course came directly to us; neither John nor I ever dreamed of his doing otherwise; and, though he hesitated, and made at first many objections to thus, as he expressed himself, intruding himself upon us, we overruled all that he could say against it, and he became at once a member of our family. He started afresh upon his long-neglected professional career, and thanks to the kindness of the Nettlebys and of other friends who patronized and encouraged him, and I suppose, too, owing a good deal to his own undoubted talents, he prospered finely in his career, and in a few months was engaged in quite a successful practice.

Here then commences a new epoch in my story.

CHAPTER IX.

SHADOWS AND SUSPICIONS.

ONE day, about two weeks after the return of the travelers, John brought Frank Nettleby home with him to dinner. I was heartily glad to see the gentleman, and said so.

"Of course you are," he cried in his old reckless fashion; "I entertained no doubts concerning the friendliness of your greeting; a woman always likes a sincere admirer, even when her taste is so bad as to prevent her from loving him. I was very anxious to see you again, Mrs. Harrington, and my only fear was lest the jealousy of your spouse here should strive to prevent our meeting. However, his invitation of this morning quite reassures me, and I foresee I shall be a frequent visitor in your *ménage*, probably inflicting my company upon you so often as to constitute myself quite a bore."

"Come as often as you like and stay as long as you like," said John; "as long as Caroline does not object, I assure you I shall not."

Then I introduced our visitor to Agnes, who by this time had sprung up into a beautiful girl of seventeen, the fair promise of her childhood being more than fulfilled by the bloom of her youth, for a more charming creature could scarcely be imagined than my little sister. Evidently Mr. Frank himself inclined strongly to this opinion, for his attention was at once withdrawn from my unworthy self, to settle upon this younger and fairer charmer.

I could see very little change wrought in my quondam lover by his three years of absence; he was a trifle broader and heavier, and his hair and skin were perhaps a shade darker, but save in these trifling respects, he was exactly the same Mr. Frank who in former days had caused me so much vexation; no wiser, no steadier, and really looking not a day older. And so in a little while we were all chatting and laughing as gayly and unreservedly as such a party of old friends had a right to do.

Presently Eddie came in, and then dinner was served, and we six sat down to table, a friendly, happy party, with kind feelings reigning in every breast, and good-will and merriment cheering the repast.

Never again did that same party meet with quite the same happy feelings. From that day do I date the first commencement of the storm which afterward burst with such fearful violence upon my life. The first shadowy outlines of its clouds dawned upon the horizon at this time, and from so apparently insignificant a beginning, gradually grew to overshadow the

heaven of my home until all its glories were shrouded in despairing blackness.

I saw with a little uneasiness the evident fancy which Mr. Frank appeared to have taken to Agnes. She sat opposite to him at table, and I noticed how frequently his glance rested upon her, and what evident interest he seemed to take in all that she said and did. I noticed this with anxiety, I say, for though I was never much disposed to "match-making," I had ventured to dabble a little in Agnes's matrimonial prospects, and the husband-elect whom I had mentally chosen for her was Eddie Harrington. I can not say I was the originator of this scheme, for, to say the truth, it was really the evident liking which the young people seemed to have taken to each other which had first suggested to me its expediency; and imagining that to be probable, which was, after all, only possible, I was uneasy at the bare prospect of the disappointment which I feared Mr. Frank was again beginning to prepare for himself.

This was one source of discomfort to me, and then another trouble came upon me, before the conclusion of the meal. Frank Nettleby had been telling us of an eccentric old gentleman with whom he had become acquainted during his travels. He related many humorous anecdotes concerning him, and just as we were all laughing at one of them, the narrator turned to John, saying, as I thought, a little abruptly—

"By the bye, Harrington, not the least curious of old S——'s sayings and doings was his persisting in asserting that he knew you. Father had made some mention of you in a letter which I had just received one morning when S—— had strolled into my room. I opened my letter with the customary 'excuse me,' to him, as I did so.

"I shall not excuse you unless you can find something in the letter which will interest me, too," he said in his usual unceremonious manner; so partly to amuse him, and partly to keep him quiet, as I skimmed through my letter, I here and there read aloud a passage to him concerning local items, politics, etc.; one passage of which I gave him the benefit, commenced thus: "Harrington tells me"—

"Harrington? what Harrington is that?" interrupted my auditor; I once knew a rogue named Harrington."

"Then you did not know our Harrington," I said, and tried to resume my letter. But vainly; S—— was off on another track now, and it was no use trying to bring him back until he was ready to come.

"Who is your Harrington, if I may make

so bold as to ask?" he persisted; "where does he come from, and who was his father?"

At this point my husband rather abruptly interrupted his guest.

"Jenny," he cried, addressing his sister, "would you mind preparing for me a little of that salad, of which I used to be so fond, as a boy? I have just taken a notion that I would like to have some, and I dare say Frank would appreciate it too; if it would not be too much trouble."

I could but stare in astonishment at him for making so inconsiderate a request at such a time, but Jennie rose good-humoredly from her seat.

"Oh, no! I don't mind the trouble if you have a fancy for it; the ingredients are all at hand in the kitchen, and I can mix it for you in a few moments;" and so saying she left the room.

"Did you prove to the old gentleman's satisfaction that John was not a rogue?" said Agnes, resuming the conversation at the point where my husband had interrupted it.

"I can't say that I did," continued Frank; "you may judge for yourself. I answered his questions in full, for I thought it would be the shortest way of terminating the discussion."

"The Mr. Harrington of whom my father speaks," said I, "is a gentleman who has been in our employ for more than ten years. He is a native of Connecticut, I believe; at all events his father, Doctor John Harrington, was a physician of some eminence in Hartford, where he resided for many years."

"That's the chap!" cried the old fellow, nodding his head with furious sagacity, "the identical individual—Connecticut man, son of John Harrington, M. D.; we were humbugged because he was the son of his father. The old doctor had been a college crony of my brother-in-law, and he could not believe but that this lad must be a chip of the old block, and consequently a jewel of steadiness and virtue. That was one of the times my advice was not followed; because I was a silent partner in the firm they seemed to consider me a blind one too, and what my eyes saw was paid no attention to, and I saw that young fellow was a scamp the very first time I clapped eyes on him. Lord! what a young reprobate he did turn out to be! You have a dangerous customer to deal with, Nettleby, I can tell you that, if he has progressed in roguery with his years."

"Mr. S——," I cried, as soon as he gave me an opportunity to speak, "you are entirely mistaken in the man. Our friend Mr. Harring-

ton is a gentleman of the most undoubted honor; one whom long years of service has endeared to us, and who has won our unbounded confidence by his reliability and proved integrity. I can not imagine how you ever can have made so ridiculous a mistake as to confound him with the rascal of whom you have spoken, as you evidently have done."

"All right!" cried the obstinate old wretch, still nodding his head with tremendous emphasis, "he's reformed, I suppose, and the Lord forbid that I should throw a stumbling-block in his way. But one thing I will say, whether you like it or not, if that hypocritical thief Harrington has turned out to be a man of proved integrity—there's hope for the devil—that's all." And to no other conclusion could I force him, though I argued for ten minutes about the impossibility of his Harrington and mine being identical. The old gentleman was undoubtedly honest in his belief, and he had your parentage and history so correct, that the only way in which I could account for his error, was by concluding that he really had known you as he had said, but had contrived to mix your name, by his treacherous memory, with somebody else's conduct. John P. Casey is the brother-in-law of whom he spoke. You never were in the employ of Casey & Co., were you?"

There was a moment's inexplicable pause, as Mr. Frank waited for an answer to his question.

"I never was," at last answered a voice so hoarse and unnatural that I could scarcely recognize it as my husband's.

I had listened to the recital with which we had just been favored, half amused, half indignant, but giving no more serious thought to the accusation than Mr. Frank appeared to have done. Now, however, as John spoke, I turned my eyes to his face, my attention attracted by the strange emotion which his voice betrayed. And surely never did innocent man wear a more confused or guilty aspect. His usually colorless face was scarlet, his eyes downcast, his hands trembling with agitation, and his voice, when at length he seemed able to control it, was, as I have said, so unlike his natural tones, that it not only attracted my attention but that of the whole company.

"I was not," he said; and then he glanced at me and caught the look of bewildered surprise with which I regarded him, and as he did so he turned deadly pale, every vestige of color forsaking his face, leaving even his lips bloodless, and there came into his eyes

such a look of appealing terror as almost made my heart stop beating, from the horrible dread it awakened in me.

With visible effort he turned to Frank Nettleby, continuing his denial. "I never was employed by the firm of which you speak, and to the best of my knowledge I have never met Mr. S—— at all. Furthermore, I can assure you I am not the individual of whom he seems to entertain so unfavorable an opinion."

"I never for a moment supposed that you were," said Mr. Nettleby; and then, to my infinite relief, he adroitly turned the conversation into other channels, and Miss Jenny entering at the same time with her salad dressing, a farther diversion was the result, and the disagreeable topic seemed to be forgotten.

I was thoroughly mystified by John's behavior. I felt uneasy, I could scarcely tell why, though his prompt denial of the charge thus curiously brought against him, had at once laid at rest all active suspicions, if I had really even for a moment entertained any. He had said that he was not the individual in question, and that surely was sufficient. I believed in John as I believed in my religion. He was truth itself, to me; and I could "doubt truth to be a liar" sooner than have believed him guilty of a falsehood. Here was some mystery, some trouble that I could not understand, under all this light talk, but my husband was *not* the man of whom Mr. S—— had spoken. Of that one fact I felt assured; and with a long breath of relief, I turned to listen to the lively chatter of Agnes with Eddie Harrington, and gave no farther present thought to the previous conversation.

Frank Nettleby went back to the store after dinner with John and Jenny, and Agnes, Eddie and I were left alone. I believe I have not yet said how much I was beginning to like this young fellow. So very boyish, spite of his three years European tour; I had almost said *girlish*, for his shy, guileless ways really seemed to have nothing masculine about them. When I had first become acquainted with him, I believe I had entertained rather a dislike to him, certainly a very unreasonable one, founded upon no earthly cause save his delicate lands and musical voice, but from his own shyness I had been able to see so little of him before my marriage, that I had really formed no opinion at all about the boy's character and disposition. Now, thrown as he was into daily intercourse with me, a member of my family, the near and dear relative of my husband, of course I felt much interest in becoming better acquainted

with him. I found no little difficulty at first in drawing him out of the shy reserve behind which he always entrenched himself when in the presence of strangers, but when I succeeded in doing so, I felt well rewarded for my pains, for I discovered that Jenny's eulogiums upon her young brother had been much more just than might have been expected from so interested a critic.

I found to my surprise that Edwin Harrington, the beardless, pale-faced boy, whose blue eyes drooped so modestly when they met my own, whose blushes were as easily awakened as were those of Agnes herself, this timid lad whom I had hitherto regarded with a feeling pretty near akin to contempt, was really a man of commanding talents and rare endowments; whose acquirements for one of his age were astonishing. And surprised beyond expression by the discovery I had made, I was now likely to fall into the other extreme, and become henceforth as ardent an admirer of my young brother as was his sister Jenny.

I have already stated my passionate fondness for music—a passion which neither my husband nor Jenny could sympathize with; so Agnes and I were generally sole auditors of the exquisite performances with which Eddie now frequently regaled us, for he was an accomplished musician, master both of flute and violin, and many an evening I stole quietly away from the room in which John sat with his newspaper, to the parlor where Eddie with his music was wooing my fair young sister's love. And there I would sit entranced and absorbed, even when the sweet harmony would have lulled my unromantic sister into slumber. Eddie never grew tired of playing, and certainly I never wearied of listening, so upon this great master-passion of our souls we agreed so cordially that it opened the way to further intimacy, and swept away at once all the cobwebs of reserve and prejudice which had been spun between us by his timidity and my suspicions. Then, the pathway once opened, we soon advanced more boldly upon it. Eddie's business as yet demanded his attention but for a few hours during the day, and many a long afternoon he was thus at liberty to devote to us; and always at the time when he was sure to find Agnes and I engaged quietly with our needle-work, would he steal upon us, book in hand, to read to us as we sewed; his shy ways and deprecating glances at Agnes always amusing me in spite of myself.

How completely wrapped up in her he seemed to be! How solicitous of her approval!

How fearful of her displeasure! I sometimes was almost tempted to deplore the poor lad's devotion to her, for she seemed so unconscious of the value of the heart she had won; so careless of his feelings, so blind to his sufferings, that I could not help feeling, spite of my affection for her, that she was unworthy of the love she had inspired. Agnes's conduct at this time was a great mystery to me. I could not for the life of me satisfactorily determine whether she loved Eddie Harrington or not. She was such a merry, thoughtless little creature, so full of fun and mischief, that I sometimes was tempted to believe that she was quite incapable of serious feeling of any kind. My love for her had never blinded me to the fact that her nature was not a very deep one, and that, charming as she was, the power of feeling very intensely had never been bestowed upon her. Eddie was her first admirer, and she took a girlish pleasure in the innocent little flirtation that would have been natural to her even were her feelings quite uninterested. Yet this, I could not believe, was the case. Often when I came unexpectedly into the room where the young couple were sitting together, they would be absorbed in low-toned conversations that my presence would be sure to bring to an untimely conclusion. They would start away from each other, agitated and confused. And in Agnes's bright blushes and conscious looks, I could read but one interpretation. I often noticed, too, the quick glances that were interchanged between them, upon occasions, that seemed to have a subtle meaning to them that others could not see. All this, added to the pleasure she undoubtedly took in his society, made me certain that her feelings were interested in him, even while her unvaried high spirits, the pleasure with which she received Mr. Nettleby's attentions, which he assiduously paid her upon every possible occasion, and the, to me, inexplicable fact that she was very apt to fall asleep when Eddie played or read to us, all told a very contradictory tale. I finally came to the conclusion, not a little sorrowfully, that Agnes, besides being incapable of very deep emotions, was also not a little tainted with the spirit of coquetry. Yet having full confidence in her innate purity and loving heart, I did not allow this discovery to grieve me much, feeling pretty sure that the match I was so bent upon making, would, if uninterfered with, finally come to a satisfactory termination.

So Eddie brought his books to us day after day and read, sometimes the charmed words of the poets, sometimes thrilling scenes of travel and adventure, his musical voice growing deep

and eloquent with the emotions the subject excited. And when, laying down the book, he would allow himself to tell of the scenes he himself had passed through in the far-off countries of which he had been reading, and in language as elegant as forcible described to us as no books could do the noted places he had so lately visited, I would sit eager and excited as a child, leading him on with numberless questions, never tired of listening, always heartily sorry when our converse was interrupted. I could but marvel to see the sublime indifference which Agnes maintained at such times, even when she kept awake, which she did not always do if her hands were not busily engaged. She paid at all times vastly more attention to what was transpiring in the street, a view of which she commanded by sitting at the window, than to her young lover's most eloquent descriptions. Now she would interrupt the reading with some frivolous questions about her sewing, or again upon subjects quite as unimportant, which perhaps were suggested to her fickle fancy by the words to which she was pretending to listen. And sometimes, even, she would desert us entirely at the most interesting part of a poem or narrative, to run out to chat with a neighbor, or shop for a skein of silk, and even to Eddie I could sometimes fancy that her absence was almost a relief, for surely there is no greater bore under the sun than an uninterested listener when one is reading aloud, even if such a listener chances to be a young and pretty woman. Several times I had almost made up my mind to lecture Agnes about her giddiness, yet I refrained lest I should chance to work more harm than good to Eddie by my interference, for I know how delicate a thing it is to meddle in lovers' affairs, so I concluded it was wiser for me to let Eddie take Agnes just as he found her, and cure her himself of her foibles if he were able to do so.

I became, as I have said, very much interested in the young man. He was the most highly educated person with whom I had ever been associated, and the charm of knowledge was to me a new and overpowering one, so greedy had I always been to gain it, and so utterly unattainable a treasure had it hitherto always been. And now as the true extent of this young man's acquirements were gradually unveiled to me, in the close intercourse into which we were daily thrown, there was awakened within me a profound respect which I made no attempt to conceal. He was undoubtedly a talented man, and a thoroughly educated one, and the knowledge that he was principally

self-taught, only added to the esteem and admiration with which I regarded him.

He possessed a genius for the study of languages which I suppose is very rarely found; Greek and Latin, and even a smattering of Hebrew he had attained as a school-boy, and his classical education had not been neglected, as is so often the case with professional men after they emerge from college and enter upon the duties of their career. He was an excellent German and French scholar, and was conversant more or less thoroughly with half a dozen other European languages, acquired during his travels. For all of which I had Frank Nettlesby's word, not considering my own judgment in such matters to be very reliable.

He (Frank) had a vast idea of Eddie's abilities, and had been the first to awaken my interest in the lad before I had learned to like him so thoroughly myself.

"Ed is a flower born to blush unseen," he had said to me one day a week or so after the dinner of which I have just written. "He has never been appreciated at home half as he should have been. Miss Jenny, to be sure, considers him a very smart boy, almost worthy to be John's brother; you, I presume, Mrs. Harrington, entertain in a modified degree the same opinion; but as for Harrington, it was always a marvel to me, how a man clear-sighted as he is, could be so blind to merits self-evident as are Ed's. He never could be made to believe him any thing extraordinary, though I have sounded his praises before him most disinterestedly for the last five years back. All of which I suppose is owing to the fact that the prophet is in his own country. It was vastly different when we were abroad, I assure you. Ed was a sought-after man wherever we went, and I really did not wonder at all, for when he chooses to make himself agreeable, a more entertaining or desirable acquaintance can seldom be met with. His memory is marvelous, he never forgets what he learns, and he has an aptitude for learning that is astonishing indeed to an empty-headed fellow like myself. Cultivate him, Mrs. Harrington, draw him out; my word for it you will be well repaid for your trouble."

Inspired by Mr. Frank's eulogies as well as my own interest, I did try to draw Eddie out, and the result was, as I have stated, a wondrous surprise to myself, and a great change for the better in him.

A new source of intimacy was soon evolved from our daily readings. Eddie had one day been reading to us his translation of a charming

little song of Béranger's, a gem that even Agnes appreciated and listened to with delight.

"Ah!" said he, regretfully, "if you could but read it in the original! my words and expressions seem so weak and meagre, when compared to the charming tones and phrases which Béranger himself uses. I give you the outline, the vague idea of the gem, but its soul, its inimitable sparkle, it seems to me the translation hides rather than reveals. If you could but read Béranger in his own language!"

"Ah! if we only could!" I sighed, regretfully; and Agnes cried eagerly, "Why can we not? Will you not teach us, Eddie? We all have plenty of time, and I think it would be delightful. Caro is so clever, that she can learn almost without teaching, and with you and her both to help me, I am sure that even I could make rapid progress. Do teach us French, Eddie, won't you?"

"Would you really like to learn?" he cried eagerly, and he glanced quickly at me as if to find whether the proposition met with my approval. "Nothing would please me better than to become your teacher, and as you say, Agnes, we have plenty of time, that is of course if Caroline wishes to undertake the task."

"It would be an imposition upon good-nature," I remonstrated, though my sparkling eyes belied the objections my tongue was raising. "A language can not be learned in a week or a month, and I fear, Eddie, that your patience would be exhausted long before your pupils were able to read Béranger. I can not consent that you should undertake such a task."

"She is only going through the ceremony of that fine speech for form's sake, Eddie," cried Agnes. "I know that she is as anxious as I am that you should take us in hand. Pray don't mind her!"

And Eddie added earnestly, "Indeed I am sincere in offering my services; if you will really undertake the language, I shall find great pleasure in assisting you to the best of my ability."

And as I had no farther objection to raise, the arrangement was forthwith concluded, and our French lessons became henceforth a daily institution.

My butterfly Agnes, however, soon wearied of her self-imposed task. And after the energetic application which characterized her first week's study, she relapsed into her usual idle ways; and though she would not, for very shame's sake, relinquish the study she had so eagerly commenced, she proved to be a very negligent

scholar, allowing almost any trivial excuse to serve her as a plea for missing her lesson. I fancied perhaps that Eddie would not have been so willing to turn tutor, had he known how the matter would have terminated, but at all events he was too polite to let me see that I was to him a less interesting scholar than my pretty sister, and I was so industrious and eager a pupil that he could not help but take pleasure in aiding me in my labors.

And thus the weeks and months slipped by, and the friendly intimacy between myself and my husband's young brother daily grew closer and more affectionate. It was about a month after the inauguration of the French class that the cloud began to darken over my path.

One day after a short lesson (Agnes was absent, and my well-conned task seldom took much time to recite), Eddie and I had lapsed into conversation, as was frequently the case now that we had become such good friends, and by some means or other we had got to talking of my father, of his struggles, sorrows, and triumphs. Eddie's appreciation of him was sufficiently entire to satisfy even my loving heart, and he had said—

"I no longer wonder, Caroline, at the haughty pride which is so pre-eminently your characteristic. I suppose, now that we have grown to be good friends, that I may tell you how it at first appeared to me so repellent a feature in your disposition. I recognized it, the very first evening I saw you, and then it made me almost dislike you. I could not understand it; I am so deficient in that respect myself, that I could not sympathize with such a spirit in another, especially—" and he hesitated, and blushed confusedly, as he glanced timidly at me.

"Say on, Eddie," I cried, laughing at his embarrassment, "you could not sympathize with pride, especially in one who had so little to be proud of; was not that what you meant to say?"

"And if it was, you can not take offense at it now, when I tell you how excusable I consider such a feeling in any one who can boast of such a father and such a name. The only marvel to me is," he added, laughing, "that you ever could make up your mind to change it for one so insignificant as ours."

"What's in a name?" I quoted theatrically; "'tis the substance I aim at, not the shadow. My ruling passion has found food on no such airy diet as a mere name, the honorable character of the men and women who have borne it has been the nourishment upon which my pride has attained its present mighty growth. I mar-

ried the man John Harrington, not the name; the honor of the one depends upon my husband and myself; of the other upon his father, his uncles, his brothers, his cousins, upon any one who bears the name; I am scarcely so insane as to build my happiness upon so fragile a foundation."

"Your happiness, do you say? would you have me believe that your happiness is built upon your husband's honor, rather than his love?"

"The question strikes deep, most learned lawyer, and I know not whether it is in my power to answer it. My husband's honor and my husband's love are so indissolubly mingled in my mind that I can not separate them, even in thought."

"Let me see then if I can not propound the question in a clearer form," he said smilingly; "I am not very well versed in matrimonial statistics, especially on the feminine side of the question, yet I believe I am right in stating that a true wife should find her happiness in the love she bears her husband?"

"I can only answer for myself," I replied, "and my response is unreservedly in the affirmative."

"Then suppose that from some circumstance over which neither you nor he had any control, disease, mental or physical, incompatibility of temper or disposition, from any of the numerous outside occurrences which so frequently work revolutions in our resolves and feelings, suppose from any of these causes your husband should grow to love you less; more, to look upon you with absolute repulsion; think you that in losing his love your affection for him would fail?" Eddie's manner was half jesting, half earnest, but his voice was so kind and gentle that it was impossible to feel displeased at questions which from any one else I certainly should have resented; to this, and to all the questions he afterward asked me, it seemed rather as if I were responding to some voice within my own heart, than to the cross-questioning of another. He lay upon the sofa, and I in my low sewing-chair by his side, sat facing him as I had done during the just finished lesson. I was so placed that his eyes could read every expression of my face. He had beautiful eyes, large and clearly cut; in color grey, and in expression gentle and tender, almost melancholy, though there were not wanting times when they were lighted up with a fire that betrayed the strong soul within. They were the only really fine feature in his face, for Eddie was by no means a handsome boy; his skin was too sallow, his hair too light, his whole appearance too effeminate to deserve that so

strong an adjective should be applied to him. The charge of effeminacy extended even to his eyes, for with all their beauty they were essentially womanly in form and expression, and they had a peculiar habit of drooping before a stranger's glance which I never before noticed in any save a young girl. I often wondered how a young fellow untrammelled and uncontrolled as Eddie had been, could have preserved the innocent guilelessness which seemed to characterize him, and even as his intellect and attainments commanded my respect, his parity of heart invoked my reverence, and the confidence which I had learned to feel in him was hardly equalled by that which I placed in my husband.

I trust that the reader will pardon this digression; I am so anxious to do justice to the character of this young man, so anxious that the influence he exercised upon the destiny of me and mine should be rightly understood, that I perhaps may become unnecessarily prolix when speaking of him. In this special case the comments I have just made concerning him were the result of the conclusions I formed while sitting by his side that day; the atmosphere of purity and delicacy which impressed me as surrounding him, influenced me to a greater extent than I was myself aware of, so, although the personal character which the conversation seemed imperceptibly to have assumed, really annoyed me not a little, I yet felt no hesitation in responding frankly to questions which I was sure were prompted by no other motive than affectionate interest.

"No!" I said decidedly, "I can not think that it would; if John—you see, Eddie, my mind involuntarily brings the application home—if John ever grew to love me less, the fault being Fate's, not his or mine, I can not think that the fact would alter my feelings toward him. The happiness, a mournful one though it would be, of knowing that I was his wife would still be mine; and the right of loving him dearly as I had ever done would be a precious privilege of which I could not be deprived."

"So, then," he said with his gentle smile, "we have solved one-half of this puzzling enigma; your happiness consists in loving your husband, and your love for him does not depend upon his for you; I confess that I myself am strongly inclined in the latter clause to a contrary opinion. One question more then, Caro, and I am done. Let us suppose again, then, that while his love for you still remained unassailable, you should have found in your husband, instead of the honorable man John Harrington has been proved to be, a rogue, a thief, an arch-

dissembler, who under the fair guise of virtue had won your heart and hand, and whom when too late you discovered to be the false-hearted traitor he was. Still irreproachably true in his love to you, remember, though false to honor, duty, and all the world beside. How in this case, Caroline? Would still your love, and consequently your happiness, survive?"

I fidgeted uneasily in my chair.

"Oh! Eddie, how can you imagine such terrible things! you are only trying to tease me, I believe."

"Not at all, I assure you," he replied earnestly; "the subject may seem a silly and a trifling one to you, yet my interest in it is unaffected. The metaphysical features of the case are to me very curious, and I should really be obliged to you if you would aid me in comprehending them. Or perhaps I trespass too far on your good nature, and my persistency may be construed by you into impertinence?"

"Oh, no! no!" I cried warmly, anxious to reassure him, for as he spoke the last words the color had mounted to his cheek, and his eyes fell timidly before the glance of mine. Impertinence from Eddie Harrington! the idea was absurd, and I told him so.

"Thank you!" he said, "you only do me justice. Your hesitation in answering my question, then, if it arose not from displeasure, was probably caused by the doubt which you feel as to your conduct and emotions in such circumstances; I can not wonder at that, for it is always difficult to know how we would feel in imaginary cases, and in this particular case I can readily believe it would be almost impossible."

"You are wrong again," I answered gravely; "as you say, there are imaginary cases wherein it would be rash indeed to foretell what one would do, but this is not one of them. While my identity remains, but one course of action and feeling would be possible to me were such a contingency as you have imagined to happen."

"And that?" and he bent eagerly toward me, his eyes fastened upon mine with an expression that haunted me for weeks. "And that?"

My voice was hard and cold as steel, as with haughty resolution I answered—

"Utter repudiation of all former feelings of tenderness and affection; resolute pursuit of oblivion, and finally a disenthralled, even although a broken heart."

There was a moment's pause, then my companion arose and strode hastily toward the farther end of the apartment; he leaned against

the window with his back turned toward me, and it was some moments ere he again addressed me; when he did so there was violent emotion depicted upon his countenance.

"Do not speak of a broken heart, Caroline, you are too strong to succumb to so unworthy a cause. Outraged faith, violated confidence, bring suffering indeed to their victims, but they carry their antidotes with them. The pride that would spur you to resentment, would also support you through your trials, should ever you—"

"Don't suppose any more cases, Eddie, for Heaven's sake!" I interrupted, for I was getting tired of the subject, and my companion's agitation filled me with vague uneasiness. "Were I the wife of any other man than John Harrington, what you have already said would be enough to make me nervous for a week."

He started and looked at me in a wild, scared manner as he said hastily—

"God forbid that from me, of all men, you should learn—" and he stopped abruptly.

"Learn what?" I cried; and I felt that the color forsook my face as I asked the question, and his cheek was no less white than my own as he stammered, awkwardly enough—

"Nothing—there is nothing to learn, I assure you. Do not take any absurd ideas into your head from my foolish habit of thinking aloud. John is a good man, and an honorable man. His love for you is as perfect as is yours for him. My supposition was purely an imaginary one, and I am distressed indeed to think that word of mine should lead you to doubt—" But at that word I flashed indignation upon him.

"Doubt! I doubt my husband! Eddie, are you losing your senses?"

He caught my hand and clasped it passionately between both his own.

"I know you do not doubt him, Caroline, I do not want you to doubt him, and yet—O Heavens! to see you so blind, so trustingly fond, and to know—but pshaw! I am but making matters worse. My visionary life I believe has made me morbid, for really all that I wish to say is, that you must remember that John is but mortal. You are making him an idol, and in your worship willfully overlooking his humanity—a humanity that has its passions and its faults in common with yours and mine, and that sooner or later must stand in need of charitable judgment, of loving forgiveness, as must our own. I tremble for the happiness of both of you if your haughty pride be not tutored into mercy before—before the day shall come upon which he shall need mercy."

The terrible misgiving his words and manner had awakened in my breast made me irritable.

"You have chosen a curious text to sermonize upon," I cried sharply. "After all your hints and innuendoes, am I to understand that all you aimed at was these pitiful generalities?"

For an instant his eyes met mine, filled with a strange expression, peculiar, yet indefinable; then his pale, sorrowful face was turned away.

"I am sorry I have offended you, Caroline; it was from the deepest interest in your welfare that I was induced to say what I did."

His voice faltered as he spoke, and in an instant my ill-humor vanished, and shame for my crossness overpowered me. I laid my hand upon his arm, as he turned to leave me.

"Forgive me, Eddie! I know that you love me, and I am ashamed indeed that I should have wronged your affection by my hasty words—"

I stopped abruptly, for his face had suddenly turned scarlet. I gazed at him in amazement, but the secret of his confusion was soon solved, for in another instant I heard the voice of Agnes behind me, saying—

"The French lesson to-day must surely have been an interesting one, Caro, that you can neither see nor hear any one but your tutor."

"Eddie saw you, at all events, as his blushes testified to me before I heard your voice," I answered, thankful enough for the interruption. "I will leave him to explain to you the cause of my temporary deafness."

And gladly embracing the chance to terminate the conversation, I left them together and hastily quitted the room.

CHAPTER X.

JEALOUS JOHN HARRINGTON.

It was growing dark. I was too uneasy and nervous to settle myself to any employment, so I sauntered into the parlor and watched by the front window for John's arrival. I was uncomfortable, I could scarce tell why, for I would not allow even to myself that Eddie's disconnected words and strange manner had really awakened even the shadow of a suspicion against my husband in my mind, the thought was too absurd to be entertained, and I was ashamed of myself that what had passed between us should have influenced my spirits as I could but feel it had done. Eddie was such an odd, visionary sort of a boy, that he could work upon his own fancies and imaginations to

an extent that would be ridiculous in any but a genius. And had his suppositions chanced to have referred to any one but my husband, they would have impressed me no more than he had intended they should. It was only my fanciful affection which made me so prone to exaggerate every trifle in which John was concerned, and to believe that every one else magnified his virtues and perfections as I did myself.

So I stood by the darkening window, gazing out into the autumn twilight, watching the hurrying wayfarers thronging past, and at last, in the obscurity, John's form loomed dimly up.

Jenny and Frank Nettleby were with him, but I recognized my husband long before I was certain who were his companions. The tall, erect figure, broad shoulders, and quick, decided step, all were so familiar and so dear that it seemed to me were I never to see him again, and could yet live on, that after the lapse of half a century they would still be as vividly impressed upon my mind as they were to-day.

Frank Nettleby was talking as they passed the window in his usual energetic fashion, though it seemed to me rather seriously for him, and I was sure that John's face, by the momentary glance I caught of it in the twilight, was cloudy and anxious-looking. The party ascended the front steps, and John opened the door for them himself with his night-key. At any other time I should have run to meet them, even if I had not opened the door, but to-night it seemed as if some irresistible influence was working within me, impelling me to thoughts, words, and actions of which I could not explain the motives.

So I stood by the window still, and heard the steps going past the door through the long entry, and finally entering the sitting-room at the end of the passage, the room in which I had shortly since left Eddie and Agnes. The door closed behind them, and then I heard no more.

I still stood gazing out into the street, thinking odd, disconnected thoughts, about Eddie, Agnes, Frank Nettleby, and the unknown passers-by, who were flitting like shadows past the window, not thinking of John at all, though his face and form were with me in the darkness almost sensibly.

Presently I heard the sitting-room door open and shut, and then a step in the entry which I knew was searching for me. The next moment he stood at the door gazing into the shadows of the room.

"Are you here, Caroline?" he said.

"Yes; by the window;" and then he crossed the floor and stood by my side.

"Any thing wrong, Caro?" he asked, a vague uneasiness in his voice as he bent over me to see my face, as if to guess from it the cause of my strange demeanor.

"No! I am only watching and thinking."

"Watching whom? and thinking of what?"

"Watching the world go home to their suppers," said I, laughing at his suspicious curiosity, "and wondering what they will have when they get there. Of nothing a bit more romantic, I assure you. Did you suspect me of musing upon a former lover?"

"Less probable things than that have occurred, I suppose, Caro, though I can not say I suspected you of such vanity, exactly. Hadn't you better come to your own supper now? It is about ready, I believe. Frank Nettleby came home with me, and, apropos of former lovers, is, I suppose, of course anxious to see you. You were not dreaming about him, were you?"

"No—yes—I believe he was in my mind along with a good many other people. Poor Frank!" and I sighed almost unconsciously, for I really had been thinking over the disappointment which I felt sure his love for Agnes was preparing for him, and, much as I liked Eddie Harrington, there was in my heart a warm affection for my kind-hearted, honorable lover of olden times, that made me loth to have him supplanted even by my new favorite.

John had turned away from me rather abruptly, I thought, and crossed to the open door.

"Are you coming out now?" he said coldly.

"Of course I am," I cried; and springing across the room, I linked my arm in his as we traversed the entry. "You are in a terrible hurry, though, I think. Are you so hungry for your supper? I have seen the time, Mr. Harrington, when the prospect or a few minutes' *tête-à-tête* with me was more alluring to you than the finest supper ever cooked."

"Yes, but if I defer the *tête-à-tête*, I shall have that and the supper too. And the *tête-à-tête* will improve by waiting, while the supper will not."

"You are more discreet than gallant," I said half pottishly, as he threw open the sitting-room door, and then together we entered the room.

"Here she is!" cried Frank Nettleby as soon as he saw me. "You are just in time, Madame Caro, to be included in a general invitation which I have just extended to all friends here assembled to visit my bachelor *ménage* this evening, there to survey the amateur mu-

seum I have collected, and afterward to honor me by partaking of a collation which I have ordered to be prepared. I have really a pretty collection of coins and seals, and some mosaics that I believe can not be matched this side of the Atlantic. May I hope for the gracious company of Mr. and Mrs. Harrington?"

"Of course you may," I said, quite delighted at the prospect. "I am not much of an antiquary, so I will leave all anticipations of the museum to John and Jenny, who, I know, have strong tastes in that direction; as for me, I am free to confess, my curiosity is much more strongly excited by the prospect of discovering what sort of a wilderness a bachelor's *ménage* may be. I am curious, indeed, to see how you look when you are at home, Mr. Frank, so I accept your invitation unconditionally, and so will John, I know."

"Not quite so fast, Caroline, if you please; be content with answering for yourself," said my husband. "I shall not be able to accompany you, for I have letters for the firm to write to-night which will occupy me until midnight; and they must be ready for the morning's mail."

"Hang the firm!" cried Frank Nettleby; "let business slide for to-night, Harrington, I beg of you. Upon my soul, it makes me feel guilty to look at you nowadays, for you go through all my business and your own, too. I dare be sworn now, those are the identical letters I promised our partner to write this morning."

"The identical ones," said John dryly.

"Well, now, I'll tell you what I'll do: do you come along with us to-night, and enjoy yourself as a Christian should, and I will get up early to-morrow morning, and go to the store soon enough to get through a whole mail-bag full of correspondence before nine o'clock. Will that do?"

"No, sir!" answered John shortly; "even supposing you do not oversleep yourself, or forget the whole affair entirely, which is by no means an improbable circumstance, there are more than you would be able to write in so limited a time."

"Don't you believe that! I can get through more work in an hour, when I set my mind to it, than any fellow of my weight in the city."

"That you can, Mr. Frank!" I cried, laughing. "I remember when you used to help me with my work when I was in the store; you used often to astonish me by the rapidity of your progress."

"You have not forgotten those days, then,

Madam Caro?" and Mr. Frank laughed, too. "I do not remember much about the work I did, though; it seems to me I spent far more time looking at you, than in any less interesting employment. You used to work, though, to some purpose. Shade of Hercules! what an indefatigable little creature you were; it used to require the greatest display of brilliancy on my part, and not a little diplomatic manœuvring, to make you raise your eyes from your work; and to win from you a smile, I was obliged to display the combined talents of a Machiavelli and a Hood. I have that precious blank book yet, laid carefully away as a *souvenir* of those memorable days."

I was foolish enough to color quite highly at this light speech, more, I think, because Agnes's eyes were turned inquiringly upon me than from any other reason, and Frank himself looked a little foolish, as he ceased speaking, and saw my crimson face.

There was an awkward pause for a moment, which John broke by saying—

"Supper was announced some time since, Caroline; had we not better obey the summons?"

"You'll go, Harrington, won't you?" said Frank, as we took our seats at table.

"Certainly not!" answered he, a great deal more harshly than I thought warrantable by the occasion. "I promised your father when I left the store that the letters should be written this evening, and it shall be no fault of mine if the promise is not performed."

"Well, if you won't you won't, and there's the end on't," said unimpressible Frank, and then straightway commenced talking about other matters, and nothing farther was said about the proposed visit.

After supper the whole company adjourned to the parlor with the exception of John, who betook himself with a brief apology to the silence and solitude of the sitting-room, for the purpose of proceeding with his letters in peace. Our supper had been late, however, and restless Frank allowed but a short interval to elapse before he was teasing us to start.

"Suppose it is early!" he cried, in answer to Agnes's expostulation; "you have no formal hostess to meet there to rebuke your appearance with an incompleated toilet and an unlighted room. I have a capital valet whom I imported from France five years ago, expressly for my own use. His orders to-night were, to have the rooms all lighted and prepared for company by dark. I have no doubt whatever but that my commands were literally obeyed, and every mo-

ment we spend here is that much gas-light wasted there—so go get your bonnets on, like sensible people, and make no more excuses or delays." And yielding to his energy, the feminine part of the company excused themselves to make such changes in their attire as they deemed necessary for the occasion, and in less than half an hour returned to the parlor, hooded and shawled, ready to depart.

"Where is your bonnet, Mrs. Harrington?" said Frank Nettleby; "it is something new to see you behind Miss Agnes in your preparations for an evening out."

"I shall not want my bonnet to-night, Mr. Frank," I replied. "I shall trust sister Jenny to take care of Agnes, and if you will be kind enough to excuse me, I will stay at home to keep John company."

"Stay at home! Oh, nonsense!" with such a look of genuine disappointment, that I could not help but laugh. "I'm sure Harrington don't want you, and quite as sure that we do. I know you will interfere with the letter-writing if you do stay; so in the interests of the firm I insist upon your accompanying us."

"Not to-night, thank you!" I returned decisively; "some time, when John is disengaged, he and I will come and spend a sociable evening with you, and admire your curiosities to our heart's content, but I think this time I shall feel better satisfied at home."

And after considerable grumbling, and every imaginable remonstrance, I was allowed to have my own way.

Just before they left, Frank stepped back to the sitting-room, and opening the door, cried out to the master of the house, who was sitting at his writing, looking lonely and unsociable enough—

"Good-night, Harrington! Your wife has promised that you will bring her soon to spend an evening with me; you will do so, won't you?"

"Thank you! I suppose we will come if Caroline wishes it," was the ungracious reply, and with this concession our hospitable friend was forced to be content.

After seeing the party off, I re-entered the parlor, where I remained some few moments, arranging the disordered furniture, and extinguishing the gas. Then I sought the sitting-room.

The door was ajar as Mr. Nettleby had left it, and consequently, my husband did not hear me as I entered the room. He was sitting at the table, his writing materials before him, but with his head bowed upon his arms in an attitude of strange dejection. I crossed the

room lightly and laid my two hands upon his shoulders.

"Who is it? guess!" I cried laughingly; and, fairly starting from his seat with surprise, he turned toward me.

"You, Caroline! how is this? I thought you were far enough away by this time."

"And leave you, my dear old bear, sulking at home? I could not think of it."

"My dearest girl!" and he threw his arm around my waist, pulling me down upon his knee, and gazing eagerly into my face as he spoke. "Have you really stayed at home and deprived yourself of a pleasure you anticipated so eagerly, because I could not accompany you?"

"Really and truly I have done so, John, my husband," I answered; "you see I am much more solicitous for a matrimonial *tête-à-tête* than you have shown yourself to be. But jesting apart, I really cared nothing at all for poor Frank's party, except because I have heard you express so much curiosity to see his cabinet, and I thought it would be such a pleasant visit to you; but I shall like it much better if you and I can go some evening quietly, and enjoy Frank's chatter and curiosities all by ourselves. But come, now, let me get my sewing. I did not stay at home to interfere with your writing, and I do not intend to have you working until midnight, I assure you."

"Never mind the writing, sit still," he said, as I endeavored to rise. "I can get through that fast enough, when I feel inclined to get at it, and not work until midnight either. Do you really mean to tell me that, except in such a second-hand sort of way, you cared nothing at all for this visit?"

"Not much; I should like to have gone well enough; but it isn't much pleasure to me nowadays to see Agnes in company with Eddie and Frank Nettleby. It used to be rather amusing to watch them, and see how Eddie with his quiet innocent ways could upset all Frank's audacious schemes to secure Agnes's company to himself; and how completely Eddie, without any planning at all, could accomplish all that for which poor Frank so daringly manoeuvred; but lately I have fancied that Frank's feelings are becoming really interested in the matter, and as I can give him no help in the matter, not even my good wishes, it has become painful to me to watch them, and that I can not help doing whenever we are all together."

"What in the world is all this that you are telling me?" cried John with the most amazed face mortal ever wore. "Eddie and Frank

Nettleby manoeuvring against each other for Agnes's favor, and you grieving over the non-success of the latter!"

"Oh! you blind, blind mortal!" I cried, laughing gleefully. "Has it been such a long time ago since you were in love yourself, that you have not been able to see the tantalizing game of cross-purposes which has been going on these three months beneath your very eyes? And I am not exactly grieving over Frank's non-success either, for though I am sincerely anxious to have him marry some pretty, amiable woman, who will make him as happy as he deserves to be, I by no means wish him to outshine Eddie in Agnes's eyes. Frank wouldn't make a suitable husband for Agnes at all, they are both too wild and flighty; but if Eddie can win her, they will exercise a mutual good influence upon each other, and to no one would I trust my darling sooner than to Eddie Harrington."

"I think we had better allow Agnes to decide that matter for herself; meanwhile there is another matter, of far more moment to me." Then with a strange eager look in his eyes, he took my face between his hands and gazed down upon me.

"You are not deceiving me?" he said.

I almost forgot to be angry in amazement at his manner.

"I never deceived you in my life, John, and you know it. What do you mean by such a question?"

"No!" he went on, still watching me keenly, "you would not deceive me; I did not mean that; but are you not holding something back from me now, that I ought to know? Some thoughts, some feelings, which my true wife ought not to entertain?"

In an instant the hot blood mounted to my cheeks and temples, and my eyes sank frightened and confused before the gaze of his.

"I knew it!" he said, or rather groaned; and releasing my face, he covered his own with his hands, at the same time making a motion as if to push me from his knee. Oh! how ashamed I then was of the foolish doubts and fears which had made me so miserable a few hours since. I pulled his hands away from his face, and held them in my own.

"Look at me, John, I will tell you all; I know you will only laugh at me. If I blushed just now, it was through shame, not guilt; you misinterpreted my blushes once before, remember, and perhaps you are doing so now—listen, I will tell you all. I have somehow or other taken a fancy—perhaps I dreamed it—that you

were not the good honorable man that I know you are, that you had deceived me into believing so, and that some day I should find you out; and sometimes there have come into my head wild horrible visions of what I should do, if my fancies could ever turn into realities. That is all, indeed. I have been shamefully silly, but I really have done nothing to deserve the reproachful look you cast upon me just now."

He laughed aloud.

"And *this* is the terrible secret of which I have been so afraid! My dear little girl, have you really no darker sins than an evil dream to confess?"

"Not against you, anyhow," I answered, quite relieved to find that my confession seemed to be to him of so little weight. "But I wonder, sir, whether your conscience is equally easy? Have you no dark secrets or treacherous thoughts for which to claim my pardon? Pray, of what was it you were thinking so intently when I entered the room just now?"

It was John's turn now to color and look confused.

"I would not tell you for a kingdom," he cried impulsively.

"You have no more right than have I to thoughts you can not share; you have excited my curiosity now, and you *must* tell me, or I shall fancy your thoughts *were* treacherous to me. What were you thinking about, John?"

He looked confused and uncomfortable, but he shook his head resolutely.

"Whatever my thoughts were, I am heartily ashamed of them now, too much ashamed of them ever to reveal them to any human being."

"Only to your wife, John," I pleaded coaxingly, "only to me."

"To you least of all the world," he cried, with energy; and then I jumped up angrily and walked away from him.

"Caro! you are not angry with me, surely, and for such a foolish, trifling cause as this?"

"I wonder what you would have been, had I answered your catechising a while since in such a manner?" said I crossly enough, but with a quivering lip and swimming eyes. He followed me to where I stood leaning by the mantle-piece, and laid his hand gently upon my shoulder.

"Will you not have faith in me, my wife?" he said.

I turned and looked up at him; by a sudden impulse I said—

"John, I will forget my first question, if you will answer me candidly another."

"If I answer at all, it will be candidly," he said gently; and then I dashed boldly on.

"Have you ever kept from me any secret concerning yourself, the knowledge of which might affect my love for you?"

I gazed eagerly into his eyes, and they never blenched from mine, but every particle of color deserted his face until even his lips were white. It was some moments ere he spoke, and when he did so it was with visible effort.

"I should be the most miserable man on God's earth if I thought so," he said slowly.

I threw myself into his arms, laughing hysterically.

"That is all then; I will have all faith in you now, and from this moment my dream shall be forgotten! He caressed me gently for a few moments and then released me.

"Our *tête-à-tête* is making me neglect my work, after all," he said. "It will be midnight yet before I get through, if I do not start pretty soon."

So then he returned to his table and his writing, looking up at me as I stood watching him.

"H hadn't you better go to bed? I shall be several hours occupied."

"No, I will wait here until you get through; I don't want to go to bed yet, but it is too late to get out my sewing." So I curled myself up upon a lounge which stood opposite the table, and lay where I could see his face and watch him as he worked.

He said no more, but wrote on industriously, at times casting an affectionate glance upon me, as I lay comfortably tranquil before him.

After a while he arose, and took down his coat which hung behind the door; coming to me, he threw it carefully over my shoulders.

"You will fall asleep here, and take cold, I am afraid; had you not better go to bed?"

"No, I will wait for you," I murmured, drowsily.

He stood looking at me a moment, and then, suddenly bending down, he pressed his lips to mine, and before I was wide enough awake to return his caress, he had returned to the table and his work.

Ah! could I but have looked forward into the future, and known then all that would intervene, ere again my husband's kiss should be upon my lips, how different would have been the emotions his act had excited. But I was blind; and the long memorable evening, the last of my happy dream of wedded bliss, glided on after its predecessors into the ocean of eternity; and then came the morrow!

CHAPTER XI.

BASE COINAGE OF A SUSPICIOUS BRAIN.

THE next morning at the breakfast-table, Eddie and Jenny united their powers of description to convince me of what I had missed by not accepting the invitation I had received upon the previous evening. Eddie was particularly enthusiastic, which astonished me the more, as I knew this was by no means the first time he had examined and admired Frank Nettleby's collection of home and foreign curiosities.

I said as much to him, and he answered, "It is true; I have frequently seen, while we were abroad, almost all the articles he has collected together; indeed many of them I begged, borrowed, bought or stole for him, myself; he is indebted to me for more than half of his foreign autographs, for as he speaks no foreign language but French, he could do very little begging on his own account. But somehow, I never tire of examining these mementoes of the past, and every time I go over them, I discover something I had overlooked before. John, I am astonished that you never have had curiosity enough to visit Nettleby's rooms to examine his collection; there may be larger, but I really doubt if there be a more unique private museum in the city."

"Caroline and I are going shortly to spend an evening with him, and then we can view these treasures at our leisure."

"Eddie, what were those pictures I admired so? the works of Mercey, you know; there were eight of them," questioned Jenny.

"Copies from Murillo, taken in the Hospital de la Caridad of Seville," answered her brother briefly.

"Yes, that was it. Caroline, my dear, when you go, you must take a good look at them; I saw nothing I liked as well in the whole collection; I want you to notice particularly a female head in the one which hangs nearest the window; it is an exquisite face, and both Frank and I fancied we could trace in it a strong resemblance to our Agnes."

"I thanked you last night for the implied compliment," said my sister, laughing and blushing, "so I will not do so now; but indeed I scarcely acknowledge any compliment, either, for I could not trace the least possible resemblance to myself, for all Mr. Nettleby was so determined that I should. For my part, I thought the museum was the dullest part of the entertainment. I never had any taste for such things, anyhow. But, O Caroline! we had the most exquisite *petite soupe* (is that pronounced right, Eddie?) ever I sat down to.

Every thing was in such excellent taste; and that French fellow who waited on us—André, Mr. Nettleby called him—he is a perfect jewel of a servant; so quick and intelligent, really gentlemanly, I declare. We never have any such in our country. It reminded me altogether of the tales of English high life of which we read. The flowers, and perfumery, and dainty viands, and the French waiter; they were all so delightfully romantic! I was so sorry you were not with us."

"Yes!" sighed Miss Jenny regretfully, "the supper was nice. And that reminds me, Caroline, Frank said that he was going to send you a basket of fruit this morning. He had such an abundant supply of every thing. You remember, Agnes, there was a large vase of those lovely white grapes, and very few were eaten."

"I was rather astonished to notice how deficient his collection of modern coins is," Eddie Harrington was saying, when next I caught his voice. "His ancient specimens are pretty complete, the Greek coins especially, but he seems to have taken no pains whatever to perfect his collection of European specimens. He has one piece I should like you to see, John; an English quarter-florin struck in the reign of Edward III.; undoubtedly genuine. Perhaps you do not know that they are exceedingly scarce. George Emerson wrote to me, when I was in London last year, to get him one at any price, but I could not do it. I did not know that Nettleby had one until last night. He came across his, quite accidentally he said, in Paris; purchased it from a Jew pawnbroker for a mere trifle. By the bye, you used to have quite a collection of coins yourself, what have you done with them?"

"They are in one of the inner drawers of the secretary, I believe," answered John. "I have not looked at them for years. I have long ago outgrown my fancy for numismatics; still, I should like to see what Nettleby has gathered together."

"I suppose you have no objection to my overhauling yours?" queried Eddie.

"Certainly not; Caroline has the key of the secretary, she will give it to you whenever you want it."

And accordingly, that afternoon, when the French lesson was concluded, Eddie called upon me for the promised key, and busied himself diligently in bringing to light a parcel of black and time-stained medals and coins, which had been stowed away in the drawer of the secretary ever since we had been at housekeeping.

I was amused to see the interest which the

boy seemed to take in his new discovery. With a box of whiting, an old-tooth-brush, and a vial of some kind of acid, he scrubbed and polished until he really made some of the old things assume quite a respectable appearance. I watched him for a while, as he unfolded the papers, in which some of the more valuable coins were wrapped, and did my best to sympathize with the excitement he seemed to feel when one dirtier or uglier than the others made its appearance; but I soon got tired of the new pursuit, and sat down with my sewing at the other side of the room. Agnes watched a while longer, but she too soon lost interest in the amusement, and finally sauntered out of the room, leaving Eddie to pursue uninterruptedly his occupation. He would frequently call my attention to some new discovery, which he fancied to be particularly noticeable, and at last he jumped up, and coming over to me, threw in my lap a coin wrapped carefully in paper.

"Take charge of this for me, if you please," said he; "it is a Roman medallion, struck by Hadrian. I heard Frank Nettleby last night wishing he could obtain one. John seems to place very little value on his, so I will ask him to-night, when he comes home, to give this to Nettleby," and then he went industriously to work again, brushing a large bronze coin, whose inscription he seemed to find it impossible to decipher.

I unfolded the parcel he had given to me, and glanced carelessly at the piece of silver (I believe it was) which was within. I saw nothing more remarkable in it than I had seen in any of the other specimens, so I proceeded to refold it in the paper from which I had taken it. This paper seemed to be the yellow and discolored fragment of a letter, and as I took it up, my eye fell upon a few words written in it, which made me involuntarily pause and smooth out the paper to examine it more fully.

"Casey & Co." were the words which had attracted my attention, and the reader may remember, as I did instantaneously, that this was the name of the firm in which Frank Nettleby's eccentric friend S—— had declared my husband had been employed; an assertion which John had, with visible agitation, positively denied to be true. Remembering these facts, and the conversation which had introduced them, my feelings may perhaps be better imagined than described, when upon turning to the top of the letter, I read the following lines:

"DEAR HARRINGTON:—Your letter of the 20th inst. is at hand. I will do the best I can for you, but you must not expect too much. There are plenty of old and expe-

rich need hands, now searching for just such employment as you are anxious to find; and I need scarcely tell you that they will always obtain the preference over a fellow so young as you, unless you were fortunate enough to be backed by stronger friends than I think you can bring to the rescue. You had better hold on where you are. Casey & Co. is a slow firm, but it is a sure one, and by the time you can boast of as many years in their establishment as you can now count months, you will find no difficulty in getting a berth anywhere else. Old S—— I know is a Tartar, and requires pretty shrewd management to get along with; but John P. Casey is a good man, staunch and genuine, and if he seems inclined to befriend you, as you say he does, I—"

That was all there was. The rest of the paper, including the signature, was torn away; but what I had read was enough—enough to convince me, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that my husband had *lied*; that whether the horrible story hinted at by S—— were true or false, the one black, inexcusable falsehood was there before me, and could never be forgotten or explained away. I turned to look at the date of the letter; it was eleven years back, just one year before John had entered the firm of Nettlesby & Son.

I gazed upon the fatal paper until my head swam, and I felt sick and faint.

"What is the matter, Caroline? has your needle scratched you?" asked Eddie, who had just then turned toward me, and noticed my white face, as I sat with the tell-tale letter clenched in my hand.

"No—Yes—I have hurt myself somehow," I managed to falter out, and quite unable to give a more connected reply, unmindful of his anxious inquiries, I rose and left the room.

Hurrying to my own chamber, I turned the key in the lock, and paced the floor distractedly. Had the news been suddenly brought to me that John had met with some fearful accident, endangering life or limb, my feelings could not have been more acutely painful than were they now. My faith in him had been so perfect, my reliance upon his integrity so entire, that a blow aimed at his honor reacted with torturing force upon my heart. The truth was too horrible. In desperate self-defense I strove to argue it away, to reason against reason. Forget it I could not; my too faithful memory cruelly brought forward every suspicious act and word that had reference to the mysterious event that was destined to destroy my happiness. A maddening curiosity urged me on to find out all that had been hidden from me, to discover the motives which had prompted that dark falsehood, the sin and shame which were hidden behind it.

Far back into the past my memory ran, to that quiet evening so shortly following our en-

gagement, when John had put my affection for him to so strange a test, by asking me if my love could fail him were I to discover that his name had been irremediably stained by some dishonorable deed. Well did I remember the earnestness with which the seemingly unimportant question had been asked. To be sure, he had afterward assured me that his question was a foundationless one; but then, I thought with bitter agony, he could lie now, was he likely to have been more truthful then? And then my mind reverted to Frank Nettlesby's strange tale, and the question which had forced from my husband the reply which my to-day's discovery proved to be false. There *could* have been no motive for falsehood, either in Frank or his strange informant S——. Had the old man then really made no mistake in his narration? Had the dark deeds of guilt which he imputed to John Harrington been really imputed to the true criminal? Yet no! no! Dark as was every thing before me, I could not go to the extreme length of believing this. Accurate as were the old man's statements, terribly convincing as was the evidence against him in John's emotion when hearing the story, I *would* not believe that in the truth of the accusation lay the solution of the mystery. The lie was bad enough, but if behind that lay still concealed some dark, dishonorable secret, I could not bear it; I must surely lose my senses, or die of shame and grief. Was there no way to exonerate him? No possible solution to the enigma save through channels of darker disgrace? Could I by no possibility throw doubt or discredit upon the letter I had that day discovered? Was such poor, puny evidence as that to crush forever my belief in my husband's integrity? At least let me suspend my decision until my mind should be in a calmer state, if that time could ever again arrive, and until I should be able to think less distractedly of the events which were threatening to overwhelm me. If I could but sleep, forget all, if only for a few short hours, I fancied I should be able to see some gleam of light in a less agitated mood, which still might dissipate the shadows that were gathering so threateningly around me.

So I threw myself upon the bed, shut my eyes, clasped my hands over my ears, and endeavored with all my power to shut out thought. The miserable hours sped away. Night came, and I heard the tea-bell sounding below. Then presently the light step of Agnes sounded in the passage outside of my door, and after trying vainly to open it, she tapped lightly upon the panels.



"I THREW MYSELF UPON THE BED."—PAGE 70.

"Supper's ready, Caro," she cried, "we are all waiting for you."

Raising myself upon my elbow, I spoke in as natural a voice as I could command.

"Tell them to eat without me; I have gone to bed with a sick headache."

"Mercy on me! why did you not tell some of us? I may bring you up a cup of tea, mayn't I?"

"No! No!" and my impatient misery would manifest itself in my voice; "I want nothing but rest and quiet; do leave me to myself."

So she went away, and I was left in quiet. Alas! was I ever to know rest again? I knew that John would come to me soon, so I rose and unlocked the door, for I wished to avoid any conversation with him; then, undressing hastily, I crept into bed again, with my miserable thoughts, that would not be banished for all my striving, goading me almost to madness.

He came soon; stepping lightly, and opening the door cautiously that he might not disturb me, he came to my bedside in the darkness and laid his hand softly upon my brow.

"Asleep, Caroline?" he asked gently. I made no answer, and after a moment's pause, evidently convinced that I was really slumbering, he silently withdrew, and again I was alone.

An hour later he came again to the door, which he opened noiselessly, and stood listening upon the threshold, but judging from the profound silence within the room that I still slept, he returned without speaking.

At an hour rather earlier than usual, I heard the family retiring for the night. Some of the ascending steps paused at my door, and my ear, preternaturally acute from the dead silence which had reigned around me, distinguished Jenny's voice saying—

"Wait a moment, Agnes, I will go in and see how Caroline is."

And then John's voice answered—

"You had better not; it will only disturb her, and she was sleeping quietly when I was up here an hour since."

So then the others passed on, and John entered the room alone. He carried a lamp in his hand as he approached the bedside this time, and I did not dare feign sleep again, but with a little sharp cry, I turned my head away and put my hand over my face.

"What is the matter, Caro? are you suffering?"

"Yes!" I cried, and oh! how truly, for every tone of that gentle, loving voice struck agony to my heart.

"Can not I do something for you, my darling?"

Then I could bear it no longer.

"Take that light away, it hurts me; and please don't make me talk."

He stood watching me uneasily for a moment or two, evidently doubtful whether to question me farther or not, but he was not by nature either fussy or demonstrative, so finally he turned quietly away, saying no more to me, though his putting out the light almost instantly, and his cautious, quiet movements as he undressed in the darkened room, testified to his sympathy for my sufferings. He spoke no word to me, even after he lay down by my side, except to ask if I were warm enough, for it was late in October, and the night was chilly and stormy; though I had not noticed either cold or storm before. A brief affirmative was all the response I gave, and then silence and darkness again reigned around me.

Soon by his deep, regular breathing I knew that John was asleep, but still I lay, sleepless, suffering, longing for yet dreading the day, and the night was far advanced ere worn-out nature at last conquered my misery, and I fell into a heavy dreamless slumber from which I did not awaken until quite late the following morning.

To my great relief, I found that John had already arisen and gone down stairs, but knowing that he would surely return to me before he left for the store, if I had not descended, and thinking that it would be harder for me to meet him alone than in the presence of others, I arose, dressed hastily, and went down stairs.

The family were seated at the breakfast-table when I entered the room, and John said, when I had replied to the many kind inquiries concerning my headache, which greeted my appearance, "You were sleeping so soundly when I left you, that I would not disturb you. You must keep quiet to-day, or you may have a return of your trouble to-night. What do you think brought it upon you?"

"The prick of a needle, I guess," said Eddie laughingly, "for until that misadventure occurred yesterday afternoon she seemed well and cheerful as usual. I thought at first, Caroline, when you left me so abruptly, that something I had said or done must have offended you, or else that the coin which I gave you to keep for me had proved to be a bewitched one, and had acted upon you in some malignant manner. Nay, you need not look for it," he continued, as almost involuntarily I turned to glance at the work-basket wherein I had

thoughtlessly thrown both the coin and its fatal envelope, when I had fled from the room. "I took it from your basket last evening to show to John, who has consented to bestow it upon Frank Nettieby, whom I know the gift will wonderfully please."

And then I had fresh food for uneasiness, in the dread that Frank too should see that tell-tale letter, and learn from it the disgraceful truth it had already betrayed to me. I sat in torment, determined by some means, no matter how desperate, to prevent John's shame from becoming known, yet feeling so stupidly miserable, that I could contrive no plan to avoid it. At last when Eddie rose to leave the room, I asked, in a voice which I vainly strove to render quiet and natural—

"Shall you see Frank this morning?"

"Yes," he replied. "I have some business down town, that I am going to attend to now. I shall call at his rooms on my way down, I shall be sure to find him there at this hour," and then he left the room.

I hesitated a moment, and then, regardless of appearances, I abruptly quitted my seat and followed him into the hall, carefully closing the door behind me. He stood at the hat-rack, buttoning up his coat, as I approached him.

"Eddie," I said, "let me see that coin again before you take it away, if it isn't too much trouble."

"Certainly, ma'am," he replied gayly; "the only trouble it involves will be the rebuttoning of my coat, and I certainly shall not object to that to oblige a lady." And drawing the coin from his vest pocket as he spoke, he handed it to me.

"But the paper in which it was wrapped—where is that? What have you done with it?" I cried, forgetting prudence in my breathless anxiety.

"What! that old yellow scrap? I threw it into the fire; it was too much torn to use for the same purpose, and I saw no necessity for having the coin wrapped up at all. Was it any thing of importance?—Surely—it was nothing in that which could have caused your sudden illness yesterday?" and an expression of mingled amazement and suspicion came into his face.

I tried to laugh.

"Nonsense! what could put such an idea as that into your head? there was something written upon the paper that—that I thought John might wish to keep; but it is of no consequence. You are sure you burned it?"

"Certain. Any message for Frank?" and he turned to leave me.

"Nothing, except that I am much obliged for the fruit he sent me, and that I hope he will soon come to receive my thanks in person."

Just as I finished speaking, the dining-room door opened, and John came into the hall. Eddie was opening the front door at the time, and I suppose did not notice him.

"I half hated to ask him to give this medal away," he was saying, though between the opening of one door and the shutting of the other I scarcely distinguished his words; and he raised his voice as he continued, "I know that it will please Frank, so I will give it to him if you honestly think John won't mind."

"Certainly he will not," I said, feeling somewhat astonished at his over-scrupulousness, and then he left me, and I turned to John, who was putting on his hat and coat, also ready to start. I thought that he looked flashed and angry, and his voice was certainly sharper than usual, as he said—

"Your business with Eddie was of a strictly private nature, I suppose?" and though the words were jesting, I knew by his voice that he expected an answer.

"I had no business with him, only that I wanted to see that coin again."

He looked at me as I had never seen him look before. My face glowed hotly beneath his glance, and I averted my eyes in angry confusion. He did not say another word, but walked past me abruptly and left the house, and I knew that he thought I had lied to him. I turned angrily away.

"What matters it," I thought, "how poorly he learns to think of me? What need I care for the confidence or esteem of a man who—" and then I checked myself, appalled at the change which that one night of misery had wrought in my feelings toward my husband.

I re-entered the dining-room. Miss Jenny was there alone, seated by the fire, drawing on a pair of india rubber boots, preparatory to venturing into the wet and sloppy streets. I stood by the window, gazing out into the narrow paved yard upon which it looked, watching the slow drizzling rain patter down upon the green crumbling bricks; drumming irresolutely upon the panes as I stood there.

At last, I turned toward her.

"Jenny," I said abruptly, "was—" I was going to say "my husband," but the words choked me, and I continued—"was your brother ever in the employ of John P. Casey and Co.?"

The reader may remember that at the time the

conversation concerning John and his connection with that firm had taken place, Miss Jenny had been absent from the room; sent from it by John on a paltry excuse, purposely made, as I now thought, to prevent her from betraying the truth; consequently she was ignorant of his denial of that fact.

She gave a vigorous pull to the last boot, stamping her foot upon the floor as she spoke.

"Yes, he was, for a few months; it has been a long time since, though. Why do you ask?"

"Why did he leave them?" again I asked, and I wondered that the hoarse choked voice in which I spoke did not attract her attention; to me, it appeared as if I were listening afar off to the words which my own lips had uttered, so unnatural did they sound; but my face was turned to the window, and she was busily engaged in fastening up her dress, that it might run no risk of being soiled by the mud and moisture of the pavements, so my strange manner passed unnoticed, and she answered sharp and quick as ever—

"I have really forgotten, my dear; he always was a changeable fellow, and he never was satisfied in his life until he found his present employment. Now I think of it, though, I remember I was really provoked at him for losing that place, for it was a capital opening for a boy like him. It was his own doings, I suppose, for any firm would like to have kept so clever a fellow as him in their employ. It all turned out for the best, though, after all, for he is much better now." And then, at last fairly equipped for her walk, my sister-in-law bade me a cheerful good-morning, and sallied forth, leaving me alone with my anguish and my suspicions; suspicions alas, to which her unconscious words had given irrevocable confirmation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DREADED TRUTH UNFOLDED.

I HAD resolved to discover what dark secret in my husband's life that falsehood had been designed to cover, and in my mad wretchedness I cared nothing about the nature of the means I must employ to accomplish my end. All scrupulous feelings and right judgment were fast becoming dulled in the agony I was experiencing. Determined as I was to find out the secret that had been hidden from me, I forgot, or would not remember, that in thus prying into my husband's affairs, by means which I could not pretend to justify, I was bringing more real disgrace upon my father's

honored name than any act of John's could impose upon it. This reflection, if it had come to me, could not have influenced my conduct. I was maddened with fear and suspicion; the suspense, the terror of I knew not what, had wrought upon me to such an extent that I felt that I must find out the worst at any cost to myself or to him. The state of insane frenzy to which my feelings were being gradually excited is the only apology that I can present for the sinful recklessness of my conduct at this time. White and resolute I sat alone in my room hour after hour, pondering over all I had thus far discovered, and sorely puzzled to know what steps I must next take to find out what still remained behind. Jenny, I was convinced by that morning's conversation, knew no more than she had told me; it was evident the disgraceful secret had been carefully hidden from her. From John himself it would of course be useless to try to discover any thing which it was to his interest to conceal, and the bare idea of being compelled to listen to fresh falsehoods from his lips, caused a cold shudder of horror to run over me. Eddie must have been such a mere child at the time the events had occurred, that it seemed highly improbable that he should have been made acquainted with them, and yet, remembering the singular conversation I had had with him but a few days before, I somehow felt a strong suspicion that he *was* aware of the dark secret; and the longer I thought upon his words and manner, the more assured I was that he had not spoken without a motive. Could that motive indeed have been a wish to prepare me for the blow that had now fallen? It would be easy for me to ascertain if such were the case, for, with one so ingenuous, concealment would be next to impossible; and if he were really master of the secret to which I already possessed the clue, it would be a matter of little difficulty to draw it from him. If he were not, then my only resource would be to apply to strangers; horrible as was the idea of exposing my shame and sorrow to unfeeling eyes, yet even that dread alternative I would accept rather than suffer a continuance of the suspense which now tortured me.

An interview with Eddie was evidently then the first thing to be sought; and to secure that, I improvised for Agnes an errand in the city which I knew would keep her from home for several hours; then when she was gone, and Eddie, according to custom, came to attend to the daily lesson in French, he found me alone, and I knew that we should be able to converse uninterruptedly for some time.

"No Agnes, again, to-day?" he said, in a disappointed tone, as he entered the room; and then, as I briefly apologized for her absence, he drew his chair to the sewing-table by which I was seated, and placed his books upon it.

I had sewing materials in my hand, for I had been obliged to keep up the miserable appearance of employment, and he noticed nothing unusual in my face or manner.

"*Allons! madame, nous commencerons s'il vous plait,*" he said, gayly; but I threw my work upon the table, and pushed it away from between us.

"No! no! Eddie," I said, "I am in no mood for study to-day; I want to have a long talk with you, and I want you to speak frankly and unreservedly to me, as I think it is your nature to do. I have great confidence not only in your discretion and candor, but in your affection for me. I am in sad trouble, and I have neither father nor brother to fly to for assistance, and in my distress I have come to you. May I depend upon you?"

"Through life and unto death," he said, seeming strangely excited by my appeal; but his excitement and the boyish words with which he had answered me, so much more fervid than the occasion apparently called for, seemed natural and soothing to my present feelings, and in mute gratitude I extended to him my hand, which he clasped eagerly, and after a moment's hesitation raised to his lips. I drew it gently away.

"Nay, my dear boy," I continued, with a faint smile, "I did not intend to arouse your chivalrous nature to such a pitch of enthusiasm as this; my troubles are commonplace enough, and all the aid I ask from you is a truthful reply to such questions as I shall put to you."

He was calm enough now, and seemed quite ashamed of his previous gallantry.

"Rely upon me, Caroline," he said in a tone of quiet gravity. "As far as help of mine can benefit you, I am at your service now and ever," and then he waited for me to speak.

But now that the time and opportunity had arrived, I found far more difficulty in managing the matter than I had anticipated. I felt an unutterable repugnance to mentioning John's name. I feared, if I did so, that I should lose all the self-control which thus far, by desperate effort, I had preserved; and then, too, I was ignorant of the extent of Eddie's acquaintance with the dark business I was striving to unveil, and above all things I dreaded allowing him to make any discovery of it through me. So I hesitated for some time ere

I again spoke. At last, fearing that my strength would desert me, I desperately commenced.

"I want you to allow your memory to take you back eleven years into the past, Eddie."

"To what particular epoch?" said he, and though his words were quiet, I noticed that his face flushed perceptibly as he heard the question.

"He knows the secret, whatever it may be," I muttered to myself, and then with more confidence I continued—

"To the time when your brother was in the employ of Casey & Co."

"I was quite a child at the time: I am not likely to have a very clear remembrance of events that occurred so long ago." And then with increased confusion he stammered, "But are you not laboring under some false impression? Do you not remember the day Frank Nettlesby dined here, some months ago? I think he asked some question about that firm, and John said that he had never been in its employ. You have made some mistake."

"You are breaking your promise already, Eddie," I said, sorrowfully; "that answer was neither a truthful nor a candid one."

He hung his head, and seemed to be in a pitiable state of confusion.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he said.

"First," I continued gently, "I want you to understand that I have discovered that the denial which your brother gave to Mr. Nettlesby was untrue. I know this."

"Don't judge him harshly, Caroline," pleaded Eddie; "you don't know how terrible was the temptation which forced that falsehood from his lips. John is a truthful man, of late years a remarkably truthful man. Do not let that one dark error overshadow in your mind his otherwise unimpeachable veracity."

I laughed, a hard, bitter laugh, wrung from my wretchedness by pitiless scorn.

"Do not make yourself uneasy; your brother will fare well if he never meets with a harsher judge than his wife will prove to be. You admit the fact, then, and confirm the story I have already heard, that eleven years ago he was in the employ of Casey & Co. In what capacity, may I ask?"

"Fourth or fifth clerk, or something like that; he was the lowest in the office," was the rather sullen reply.

"Why did he leave the firm?" I asked, and then I turned sick and white as I waited for the answer.

Eddie turned and fixed his eyes steadily upon mine, as he replied coldly—

"Do you ask this question, also, that my words may confirm some story against him which you have already heard?"

"I have heard no story whatever either for or against him, and I ask you the question because you are the only one in the family who can tell me the truth, and the truth I must know at any cost."

He rose from his chair.

"Mrs. Harrington," he said, with simple dignity, "it strikes me that we are interfering most unwarrantably with John's affairs; I shall say no more. If you wish to learn the particulars of that part of his life, you must refer to him to discover them. For my part, I must decline all farther interference."

And as he finished speaking he moved toward the door. His voice was so stern, his manner so haughty, that I could hardly recognize in him the quiet, timid youth I had hitherto known. I might have been awed by his manner and shamed into silence, had not my feelings by this time become quite uncontrollable; the end *must* come now, for I could bear no more. I respected the young man's honorable feelings, but I was none the less determined to wrest from him the secret which I now was certain he held. I sprang forward and caught him by the arm.

"Stop! Eddie, you must not leave me thus. The question has been asked and it must be answered; all that you say, all that you feel respecting the impropriety of my conduct, I too have felt; judge then how powerful must be the motives which impel me to persist in my course spite of my own self-reproach, spite of your contempt. It is of vital importance to me that I should be made acquainted with this dark secret, and if you refuse me the information I desire, I must seek it from strangers."

"Are you mad?" he cried with agitation.

"No! I am not mad, but I shall soon become so, if this strain upon my heart and mind is allowed to continue. I can never rest until I know all, and if no other source of discovery is allowed me, I shall learn from Frank Nettlesby the address of that man S—, of whom he was telling us, and from him discover all that has been so wickedly concealed from me. I will do this, I tell you, if you still refuse to answer me; but you will not refuse, dearest Eddie, whom I have learned to love as a brother; whose kindness and affection I have turned to almost instinctively in this my hour of shame and misery. When you know how essential it is to

my happiness, to my very reason, that this mystery should be elucidated, I *know* you will no longer refuse to my prayers and tears the information for which I am seeking."

He tore himself from my eager grasp, and paced the floor distractedly.

"You know not what you ask!" he said. "Have you reflected that there may be shame, disgrace, *crime* hidden behind the veil that you thus madly strive to rend away?"

"I know," I said hoarsely, "that no truth, no certainty can be more terrible than are the suspicions my imagination has already conjured up."

He seemed not to hear me, but continued wildly,

"And must I be the one to criminate him? must it be from my hand this fearful blow must fall? for, O Caroline! you know what you are to him, and how entirely his happiness depends upon your esteem and love; the hour they fall him will be the darkest of his life; God only knows whether he would survive their loss; and must it be my words that shall deprive him of them?"

"Alas! who is there to care for my happiness and peace?" I said despairingly.

He came to me, and caught my hands passionately in his grasp.

"You tempt me; you tempt me fearfully," he said.

I gazed mutely, piteously into his face, but made no farther attempt to persuade him.

"If I tell you," he said, still grasping my hands, still gazing at me with an expression I strove in vain to comprehend—"If I tell you, will you promise me faithfully to conceal your knowledge from John?"

"How can I?" I said. "His talent as an actor has been denied to me. Though my tongue should maintain silence, my voice, my manner, my very glance must show the change that has been wrought in my feelings."

"Time will modify that; in a few days, when the first effects of this revelation have worn away, events will glide in their usual channel, and you will soon be as you have hitherto been. If John were to know that you are acquainted with his disgrace, his own shame and distress would widen the breach between you, and perhaps destroy irrevocably your chance of future happiness. If that knowledge can be concealed from him, I do not know but that it would be really doing a kindness both to you and to him, to tell you the truth now. As you say, your imagination may make the reality even worse than it is, and the truth I verily believe will influence you less than the suspicions and fears which now you entertain."

"You are right, Eddie," I cried eagerly, "you are right, indeed; it will be no act of kindness to him to conceal from me now the whole truth. As I have told you, discover it finally I must and will; and surely it were better for all of us that I should hear the story from your loving lips, than from the uncharitable ones of a stranger."

"You are right," he said. "Give me your promise, then, solemnly and unreservedly, that you will endeavor by every means in your power to conceal your knowledge of your secret from your husband, and above all things, that you will never let him know from whom you derived your information. Poor John!" he cried with a sudden burst of grief, and turning from me abruptly, again he paced the floor in agitation that he could not control. "Poor John! if any thing could add to your grief upon discovering that your Caroline's confidence in you was lost forever, it would be to know that I, your only brother, had thus betrayed you!"

Even in that hour of my deep distress, I could but notice and appreciate the sensitive delicacy of this young man's disposition. The distress which he exhibited in being thus forced, as it were, to violate the confidence which had been placed in him, could never have been felt by a mind less innocent, a nature less ingenuous than his own. It is true, the specious sophistry by which he strove to comfort himself, in exacting this promise of secrecy from me, did not deceive my less charitable nature. I knew, as if the spirit of prophecy had been given to me, that John and I could never be reconciled; that no time, no circumstances could obliterate from my mind the remembrance of the deception he had practiced upon me; but knowing this, what difference could it really make whether or not he misinterpreted the cause of my estrangement? I thought the concealment a foolish and a needless one, but I pitied the struggles in my companion's mind, and I hesitated no longer to give him the pledge required.

"I promise you, Eddie," I said, "as far as I can, I will conceal from John entirely my knowledge of his dishonor; and rest assured, that never, through me, shall he learn to doubt the sincerity of the love you bear him."

"Take your seat, then, and I will tell you all; but, Caroline, be merciful in your judgment; remember that all are not possessed of your strong nature, so stanch in rectitude, so unassailable in pride; nor do others view such faults as his have been in the extreme light

that you have been taught to regard them. The crime, inexcusable as it was, has now been long ago forgotten by all save the very few whom it most intimately concerns; nor indeed has it ever been known publicly enough to bring upon the name you bear the scandal of the world. The sin has been repented and atoned for, the injured parties have long since forgiven the culprit, and his wife is now the only one whose judgment he will have to dread. Remember, even while your judgment condemns him, your love and pity are his due by every claim that your duty or your heart can assert in his behalf."

The first tears which had moistened my eyes since I had read that fatal letter, now filled them as I listened to the impassioned pleading of this loving brother, but I brushed them hastily away, ashamed that he should witness such an evidence of weakness.

"Hush, Eddie," I said huskily; "you mean kindly, I know, but your words are torture to me now. Tell me all, and tell me quickly, for my strength is failing me, and this suspense I shall not much longer be able to endure."

He resumed his seat by the table again, as I spoke, and at length with evident reluctance began his story.

"You are aware, Caroline, that I am but the half-brother of your husband. After the death of his first wife, our father, Dr. Harrington, removed to Boston with his two children, and installing them in a boarding-house under the care of a widow lady, whom he had engaged as a governess, entered upon the duties of his profession in this city. That widow lady was my mother; she became his second wife, but only survived her marriage a brief twelve-month, and then she died, leaving me a helpless babe, dependent for life itself upon the affection of my half-sister. That affection has never failed me. Jenny, unselfish and energetic then as now, from that time took upon herself the double duties of housekeeper and nurse, and gratefully do I acknowledge that never have I felt the loss of my mother, since she, my true-hearted sister, adopted me for her own. When I was three years of age my father died, and after that, the path we poor children were forced to tread was thorny enough. We had a small property left to us at father's death, and with the closest economy we were able to live upon it until Jenny, when I was old enough to release her from home duties, obtained her situation at Nettieby's, and we were afterward enabled to get along more comfortably. As soon as John was old enough,

he, too, began to look for employment. Thanks to the public-schools and our own ambition, we had early acquired the rudiments of a good education, and so John, upon attaining his majority, found himself fully competent to undertake the duties of a clerk. After a few years' knocking around the world, first trying one scheme, then another, he was at last fortunate enough to obtain what we all hoped would prove a permanent situation. As you doubtless anticipate, it was in the firm of Casey & Co. The senior partner, Mr. John Casey, had been an old friend and school-mate of father's, and it was through that friendship that his son secured this desirable opening. He was only with them three months—"Here the speaker stammered, hesitated, and finally broke down altogether in his narration.

"Go on!" I cried, with fierce impatience, and he commenced again.

"They were very careless in their money-matters there; Mr. Casey, in particular, was culpably inattentive. The boy was so young; he had been so hardly brought up; so limited in all his expenditures; so many needs were pressing upon him and his loved ones, and the temptations which surrounded him were so terrible, that—that—I can't, Caro—I can't tell you." And stopping abruptly, Eddie's head sank upon his arms as they rested on the table before him, and his slight frame shook with suppressed agitation.

I could not speak; I dared not even tell him to go on, and so we sat in a wretched silence that seemed to last for ages. At last Eddie arose from his chair.

"I have a newspaper somewhere up stairs that contains a full account of the whole matter," he said hurriedly. "I will bring it to you, and you can read it for yourself, for I find it is impossible for me to give you the account you require. I will go now and get it." And then he left the room.

He returned in a few moments, carrying in his hand a newspaper, which he opened and folded so that a particular column should be exposed. He placed it in my hands, pointing out as he did so the article which he wished me to read. He was very much excited; his face was colorless to the very lips, and he trembled so that he could scarcely stand. I was calm enough now; the agitation which I had endured during the last twenty-four hours had at length reached such a crisis, that I had become apathetic from the very intensity of my feelings.

While Eddie threw himself into a chair from

pure inability to stand, I rose from my seat, and, with the paper in my hand, walked steadily to the window, where I stood and read the designated article from beginning to end; slowly, attentively, calmly; not missing a word; understanding every cruel sentence; feeling as if the terrible information it conveyed were being imprinted upon my brain with letters of fire. This was what I read:

YOUTHFUL DEPRAVITY.—An aggravated case of criminality has this morning been brought to our notice, the offender being an employee in Casey & Co.'s mercantile establishment in this city. Though not given to us in such a guise as to warrant us in publishing it openly in the column of local intelligence, we still feel it to be a duty which we owe to the public to expose, as far as we are permitted to do, the ungrateful criminal whom Mr. Casey, with, we think, culpable indulgence, still seems inclined to shield.

The youth in question is the son of the late Dr. H—, a physician of some eminence and undoubted worth, who lived and practiced medicine for many years in one of our eastern cities. He removed to Boston some years ago, and may, perhaps, be accounted fortunate in not having survived to suffer the shame which his son's villainy would have brought upon him. The young man, we are told, was employed by Mr. Casey upon no other recommendation than that of being the son of an old friend. Never has kindness been more shamelessly abused. Small sums of money have from time to time been missing in the establishment, yet still no suspicion was attached to young H—.

Upon the night of Monday of this week, Mr. Casey having occasion to pass by the store at a late hour of the night, was astonished to perceive a light in the building, proceeding from the window of his own private office. By means of a master-key which he is accustomed at all times to carry, Mr. Casey admitted himself into the building, and silently proceeded to the room from whence he had perceived the light. He stood at the door of the apartment, shocked and speechless, for some time before his presence was perceived by the young gentleman whose felonious pursuits he thus interrupted. Young H— was on his knees by the open safe. A package of bank-notes which had been received by the firm the previous day, too late to be deposited in the bank, was in his hands, evidently upon the point of being consigned to his own pocket-book. In the very act of doing this, an ejaculation from Mr. Casey attracted his attention, and springing to his feet, the villain confronted his employer. For an instant he stood pale and terror-stricken; the next, drawing a pistol from his pocket, he took deliberate aim at Mr. Casey and fired, and the bullet entered the wall, not an inch from Mr. Casey's head.

Incensed beyond measure at this atrocious villainy, Mr. C. sprang forward and caught his assailant by the collar. H—'s boyish form was but a reed in the grasp of a large, athletic man like his employer, and in a few seconds the young villain was brought to his knees.

In view of all the circumstances, Mr. Casey's leniency seems to us almost incomprehensible, yet certain it is that, moved by the piteous entreaties of his would-be assassin, he has consented, from consideration for the family of his former friend, to refrain from all legal proceedings.

H— has a brother and a sister living in this city, whose hearts have been almost broken by his insanity. By his own confession it seems he had intended leaving the city as soon as his theft was accomplished, allowing his family to bear the shame which must necessarily have fallen upon them. As usual, gambling has been the root of the evil.

We sincerely hope that the clemency of Mr. Casey may

lead to the reformation of the criminal, yet we sadly doubt it. The atrocity of the young reprobate's conduct proves his hardened depravity, and we honestly believe that a few years in the penitentiary now, might save him from the gallows hereafter.

When I had finished reading I turned to the table again; Eddie still sat there, his head buried in his arms.

"Speak to me," I said; "let your testimony confirm the evidence of my own senses. Is this man of whom I have just read—this man hereby proven a thief and a murderer—is this man John Harrington, my husband?"

He looked up at me with a scared, deprecating look on his white face.

"Be merciful, Caroline; you know not all the temptations which lured my unhappy brother to the commission of that fatal crime. No parent's eye had watched his tempted youth; remember that. When none were near to warn or restrain, it is little marvel that evil companions beguiled him into the paths of error. He found himself inextricably involved in the toils which had been spread for him, almost before he had dreamed of danger; and then how bitter was his remorse! how wild his despair! To free himself from those hateful fetters he stooped to theft! The money was to have been taken but as a loan, and would have been repaid as soon as untiring industry and dauntless resolution should have given him the means to do so. That deed of shame would have been his last sin; the morrow was to have been the beginning of a new life. As for that miserable pistol-shot, I swear to you it was accidental; the newspaper lies about it. There was no deliberate aim, no intentional firing; the whole transaction was over in a few seconds, and the poor, trembling, guilty wretch was at his master's feet voluntarily, almost before that master could realize the scene before him. Think of all this! Pity the agony he must have endured, and remember how long and manfully he has since striven in the paths of duty and of honor. Think of his youth—" But here I interrupted him scornfully.

"His youth!" I cried; "he was four or five-and-twenty at least; older than either you or I now are. Had he been a boy of sixteen or eighteen, youth might perhaps have been his plea, but as it is—" I could say no more; my indignant tongue could find no words that could fittingly express the contemptuous rage that filled my soul.

A new thought occurred to me as I met the gaze of Eddie's appealing eyes.

"How is it," I sharply cried, "that you have learned this shameful secret so fully and

entirely? Jenny herself is ignorant of it, I know, from what she said this morning. It is strange that you, of all others, should have been your brother's confidant."

"I was not made so by his will," he answered. "Like yourself, I, by chance, discovered sufficient to awaken me to fearfully eager inquiry, and finally John consented to reveal to me the whole dark story, sacrificing his own pride to warn me of the dangers which he had so narrowly escaped in yielding to the temptations of evil company and the love of gain."

"He told you this? He, my husband, confessed himself to be what this paper calls him, a thief and a murderer? There can be no mistake?—he confessed it?" And I gazed into his face as if I would have read his very soul.

He could not meet my imploring eyes; he turned away his head, answering falteringly—

"Alas, yes! Why will you force me to repeat the miserable truth?"

It was enough. My last hope was shattered, and I was obliged to confess that there was no longer room for doubt. Every proof that I could possibly demand had been given to me.

I could realize, even then, the full force of all that I had heard; realize and act upon it. My mind was clear enough now; my heart ceased to ache, my brain ceased to reel as I stood there, stern and silent, before the trembling, white-lipped man, who dared not even look upon my anguish. There was no time now for wailing and wringing of hands; all the torture of suspense which had been racking me for the last twenty-four hours was now forever gone. A stolid composure was settling upon me, and I suffered no longer. A feeling almost of triumph was in my heart, and flashed in my eyes as I recognized this fact.

I spoke to Eddie as I turned to leave the room.

"I have learned now all that I wish to know. I will torment you with no farther questions. For the part you have this day acted toward me I shall be grateful to you always. Good-bye!" And I extended to him my hand.

He caught it eagerly.

"You frighten me, Caroline! Why do you look at me so strangely? Why do you bid me good-bye?"

"Nay! you have no reason to be alarmed now," I said. "I am calm, as I told you I should be when once that fearful suspense was over. I bid you good-bye because I am going to my room now, and as I shall not come down to supper, it will doubtless be some time ere I see you again."



"EDDIE STILL SAT THERE, HIS HEAD BURIED IN HIS ARMS."—PAGE 78.

My tone was quiet enough, and my hand lay cold and passive in his grasp, yet still he gazed at me with terror in his eyes. Gently disengaging my hand, I bent over him and kissed him upon the forehead.

"I thank you, Eddie; never forget that. I thank you for the part you have this day acted toward me." And then, leaving the room, I slowly ascended the stairs, and sought my own apartment.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ATTEMPT AT FLIGHT.

ONCE more alone, with the locked door between me and the outer world, I sat down to think. And I *could* think now; my brain was clear, my will firm and resolute. If my heart was numb and heavy as lead in my bosom, at least it had ceased to torture me. I suffered from no acute emotions of any kind; only when I thought of again meeting the man whom I had once sworn to love and honor, a shuddering loathing crept over me. Save the one intense wish to avoid such a meeting, I was recklessly indifferent to all else that could befall me. The suddenness, the intensity of the shock which I had received had deadened every nerve; and at this time, when every natural impulse which God had given me taught me to turn with horror from the man by whom I had been so shamefully deceived, outraged pride stood me in good stead; and with white lips and steady nerves I sat, thoughtful and calm, endeavoring to conjure up some plan that should take me from John Harrington's presence now and evermore.

Agnes was the chief difficulty in my way. I could not take her with me into the wide world, friendless and penniless as I was, even were she willing to go with me, and of such acquiescence I was very doubtful. Affectionate and sweet-tempered as she undoubtedly was, she yet was possessed naturally of a pretty strong will, and it had been by no means weakened by the indulgence which through life had surrounded her. Intuitively I felt that far from joining her fate with mine, and leaving forever the man who so long had been our protector, she would be more likely not only to refuse to accompany me, but to use every means in her power to prevent the course of action which I had resolved upon for myself. To leave her dependent upon John Harrington's charity was galling enough to my pride, and all that made it endurable was the knowl-

edge that I left her rather under Miss Jenny's protection than his. I was obliged to content myself by writing a few lines to her, bidding her seek any immediate employment, no matter how humble or uncongenial, which would enable her to maintain her independence, and free herself immediately from all obligation to her brother-in-law. This, to do her justice, she had long been anxious to do, for she was by no means destitute of the Manvers pride, and she had only been prevented from seeking, some time ago, a situation as a teacher, by John's positive prohibition. I gave her no reason for my conduct, bidding her accept my absence as a mystery, which was and ever must be insoluble to her. I bade her cling to Miss Jenny as to her best friend; to follow her advice in every thing that did not actually conflict with her independence; and again I charged her, above all things, to free herself immediately from the protection and assistance of John Harrington.

"If God prospers me in my own future," I concluded, "I shall soon send for you to come to me; if not—if you should *never* hear from me again, look upon these words as the last request of a sister who has loved you as sisters seldom love; consider my wishes as sacred as if they were those of the dying. God bless and care for you ever, my child; and may He in His great mercy mete to you a happier lot than He has deigned to bestow upon—Caroline."

I could write no more; I did not dare to speak to her those words of yearning affection which seemed meet for the occasion. My heart was hard and cold now, and I dreaded that any softening thoughts should come to waken it again to suffering.

And then I took the pen to leave that explanation for John which I felt must necessarily be given. Not that I felt it was his due; not that I thought he had the shadow of a right to claim another word or thought from me. He had deceived me, cruelly, premeditatedly, from the first, and I felt not a particle of love for him, or pity for his sufferings, that could have led me to give him the slightest clue to the cause of my changed feelings. I must write to him because I knew he would seek me out and strive to melt my obduracy, did he not feel at once that all effort in that direction would be wholly useless, for John loved me, supremely, entirely; I knew that full well; and a horrible exultation filled my heart as I anticipated the sorrow that the morrow would bring upon him. I must write to him too, for Eddie's sake, for I had not forgotten the prom-

ise I had made to him of concealing the revelations which he had made to me from his brother's knowledge. If it were possible to do so, I would hide from him the real cause of my altered feelings, though, surely, his own conscience would supply to him an all-sufficient reason. So I drew my desk toward me again, and wrote as follows:

When these lines meet your eye, John Harrington, she who penned them will be many miles away, never again to meet with you if her own will can prevent that issue. Do not seek me; if one manly feeling, one remorseful thought for her whose life you have blasted, still lingers in your bosom, grant me this boon: give me my freedom—it is all that is left to me, and I swear to you if you deprive me of that, I will kill myself. I can not, I will not live with you longer. The love which once I felt for you has become a thing of the past, whose very remembrance causes me to shudder. I give you no cause for this; I am too miserable myself to seek to palliate your distress. Believe, if you will, that I have never loved you—that I have learned to love another. Believe as you will, but accept at once, as the solemn, inexorable truth, that I love you no longer, and therefore I have forsaken you.

Thus abruptly I stopped, for I could write no more, and unsatisfactory as the letter would surely be to him, I felt that I had said all that was really necessary for my purposes. Had I written volumes, it could have been but a repetition of the one thought, that I loved him no longer, and that I would not live with him. So I hastily sealed and directed the notes, leaving them lying conspicuously upon my writing-desk.

Thus far my course had been plain enough, and these tasks performed, I was now able to devote all my energies to the contrivance of a method by which I could leave the house unperceived and unsuspected, and keep my absence undiscovered for some hours after.

We lived but a few blocks distant from a railroad depot, and there was a train of cars that left Boston, traveling west, a little before day-break every morning. This fact I was fortunately well aware of, and I forthwith resolved to act upon it. There was a small sum of money in my desk, which had been there at the time of my marriage, the small savings of the preceding years, which was all the fortune I had brought my husband. He had never allowed me to need it, and in my own mind it had long been destined for the purchase of Agnes's wedding outfit. Now, however, it must subserve a far different end.

This money I put into my purse, and clothed myself in the plainest out-door garments which my wardrobe contained; not even a change of raiment would I take that had been provided for me by John Harrington's money; and then I left my room in search of Eddie, whose friendly services I must once more call to my

aid. I had heard his step in the entry a few moments before, and I knew that I should find him in his own room. When, in answer to my hesitating knock, he threw open the door and stood before me, I was almost startled to see how white and haggard he still appeared, but I had no time for other than selfish considerations now.

"I want your help again," I said, with a faint attempt to smile. "You must know how terrible a strain upon my nerves it would be if I were forced to meet with John to-night; and besides, I really need rest and sleep. I intend to take an opiate, and go to bed immediately."

That was a lie, but falsehood and deception were rapidly becoming familiar to me now, and I spoke on with unflinching voice.

"Tell John and the others that I do not wish to be disturbed until morning. If I need any thing I will ring, and until I do so I hope they will let me alone. Tell John to occupy the spare room to-night, for I intend to lock my door, and do not wish to open it again until morning. Try to make all seem natural and commonplace to them, Eddie. I trust the arrangement to you; I have no heart to conjure up a more plausible story for my seclusion than the one I have given you."

"Rest easy," he said in a gentle, sympathizing voice. "I will shield you from all observation; you do indeed need rest and quiet, and your slumbers to-night shall be undisturbed if any care on my part can keep them so."

I only waited long enough to murmur a few words of almost inarticulate thanks, and then I fled back to my room, to endure with what patience I could muster the long, long hours that must yet intervene ere I could be free.

To reconcile to my own conscience the excuse I had given for non-appearance at the supper-table, as well as from really feeling the need of that rest, physical and mental, which could only be procured by sleep, I partially disrobed myself, and lay down upon the bed. But sleep came not to my excited brain. I could not even keep my eyes closed; it seemed to me then, as if I should never be able to sleep again. Every nerve in my body was strung to its utmost tension, and at times I felt an almost unconquerable inclination to scream aloud, feeling that only some such hysterical ebullition could save me from insanity. As I have said before, my mental suffering was not acute; I wondered, even then, with a sort of stolid astonishment, at the total indifference with which I viewed the fact that my husband, the one all-engrossing love of my life, was lost

to me forever; that my life was completely wrecked, and that all joy, and hope, and peace was henceforth forever blotted out of my existence. I realized it all, but it caused me no suffering, no forebodings. Later I accounted for this insensibility upon the grounds that my physical system had received through the nerves so severe a shock, that I was really incapable of feeling other pain. The torture which I that night, and many weeks afterward, endured from the excited condition of nerves and brain, mercifully spared me the mental agony which, if added at that time to my physical suffering, must certainly have proved insupportable.

Through the long, dark, silent watches of the night I lay there, my head aching, my pulses throbbing, my mind incessantly brooding on wild, impracticable plans for the future; that dark, terrible future in which, strive as I might, I could see no ray of light, no hope of peace. I do not now remember what my intentions for my after-life really were. Indeed I much doubt whether any actual plans existed in my mind, spite of all my weary thinking and contriving. Vague, chaotic schemes of seeking my livelihood among strangers, sometimes in the crowds of a vast city, sometimes in the loneliest wilds I could dream of finding, flitted confusedly through my brain. Only one idea was plain and clear through the mists that were gathering over my mental vision, and that was that I must escape from John by some means or other, immediately and forever. I shrank with absolute terror from the thought of meeting him again, and I felt that any step, however wild and desperate, which would carry me far from him, would become to me feasible and easy. The only part of my plans for the future that I can now recall with any distinctness, was that I had determined to start in the train that left Boston at four o'clock, and travel by that to New York. After that my ideas rapidly became confused and chaotic. I do not even know whether I had any plans ahead of that. I suppose my mind was even then becoming affected by the disease which, although I guessed it not, was already overshadowing me; but, though I was destitute of the power of looking forward, though I certainly did not realize the extent of the troubles which were environing me, the reader must by no means imagine that I was mentally incapable of acting, in the present, with the full light of reason. Upon my course of action for that night and the morrow, my mind was perfectly clear. I counted the money in my purse, and calculated

how far I should be able to make it go, after deducting the expense of the railway ticket, with close precision and surprising accuracy. I was clear-headed then as I had ever been; clear-headed enough to feel that the physical distress which I was then suffering, and which seemed hourly to increase, might perhaps be the precursor of some terrible disease. I acquiesced sullenly to this unforeseen affliction.

"Let it come!" I muttered to myself; "so once I am away from this hated place, once free from *his* loathsome presence, I care not what other evil shall befall me. There are hospitals, I suppose, in New York, to which homeless vagrants, unable to care for themselves, are conveyed. I can suffer no more there than here; so if disease be upon me, let it come; and if unto death—so much the better."

In consequence of my request and Eddie's clear management, no one came near me, or disturbed my supposed slumbers that evening. When John's foot came up the stairs he paused for a moment at my door as if listening to hear if there were any signs of wakefulness within. All was silence; and, with a heavy sigh, which I could hear as plainly as if that barred door had not stood between us, he passed on into the chamber adjoining my own, in which I had requested that he should sleep. In a short time all was quiet within the house, and soon all out-door bustle had ceased as well, and the reign of the "solemn sisters," Silence and Darkness, was upon us.

A clock in the room beneath me kept me cognizant of the time, and as it chimed out each successive hour, I seemed to grow momentarily more wakeful, more watchful for the longed-for time of action to arrive. When three o'clock struck I rose and lighted a candle, which I was accustomed to keep in my chamber, and proceeded noiselessly as possible to array myself in the garments I had selected to wear. They were of dark, inexpensive material, and plainly made; and with a thick veil covering my bonnet, so arranged as to be drawn closely over my face when I chose to wear it so, I felt that I might safely risk the chance of meeting any one who would be likely to recognize me during the journey. I felt sure that I was disguised beyond the danger of accidental recognition.

Thus equipped, I extinguished the light, and silently quitted my room. I am naturally very light of foot, and I had taken the precaution in this instance to draw on over my boots india rubber sandals, which helped to deaden the

sound of my footsteps, and I was thus able to descend the stairs and traverse the hall below almost noiselessly. I had some trouble in the dark in getting the hall-door opened, but I finally succeeded. The last barrier was passed, and I emerged into the clear, cold air of the early morning with an exulting sense of deliverance that made me forget for a moment the suffering I was still enduring.

It was a frosty, starlight night, or rather morning, in October. The cold air struck upon my hot brow with a delightful freshness. I drew a long breath as I stepped upon the pavement and the door closed behind me, like one who shakes off some horrible incubus, and emerges from darkness and despair into light and liberty. It was strange indeed that no emotions of grief should oppress me as I thus tore away from my heart every tie that it had ever felt precious; even if I had ceased to love my husband and felt no pang at thus renouncing forever his name and protection, still it was strangely unnatural that with him I could give up Eddie, Jenny, Agnes, my once happy home, all that I had hitherto so loved and cherished, without a tear or a sigh. Yet so it was; in the one mad, desperate wish to be free forever from the man who had so unpardonably deceived me, I absolutely forgot all minor ties, and felt only wild exultation in my newly-acquired freedom.

There is no hour of the night so still and solemn as that which immediately precedes the dawn. Never had that stillness and solemnity impressed me as it did this night. I felt no fear. I, a timid, defenseless woman, for the first time in my life outside of my home after dark without a protector, felt no more dread in traversing the streets of that great city at this unseemly hour, than I should have felt had it been noonday. Once or twice I was passed by other wayfarers, who peered inquisitively at me through the darkness, and one of them, a woman, a poor, simple creature, more miserable perhaps than myself, shouted after me some coarse expression as I glided by her. Once, too, I thought that I heard footsteps behind me, as if some one were dogging my path; but to none of these circumstances did I give a moment's heed; the outside world and all its occupants seemed to me but the shadowy features of a dream; I only, of all the world, was awake and alive. The only reality which life bore to me was the dread of being again forced to confront my husband.

I reached the depot, and by the light and confusion which surrounded the ticket-office, found no difficulty in discovering its where-

abouts. The clerk who sold me my ticket gazed inquisitively at me, while he counted out the change for the money that I had given to him. There were several women in the station-room, like myself, waiting for the departure of the train, but they were each surrounded by their boxes and bundles, with husbands, fathers, or brothers loitering near to chat with them concerning their approaching journey.

I alone sat gloomy and desolate, apart from the rest, the cynosure of many curious eyes, the subject of many a whispered comment. I bore it all with stoical indifference; I saw it all; I knew all the unpleasant peculiarities of my position, for, as I have said, my mind was perfectly clear, and my resolution as undaunted as it had ever been; but I cared no more for these petty annoyances than I should have cared for the buzzing of a fly. It all seemed so insignificant, so contemptible, when I compared it with that one great horror which had fallen upon my life.

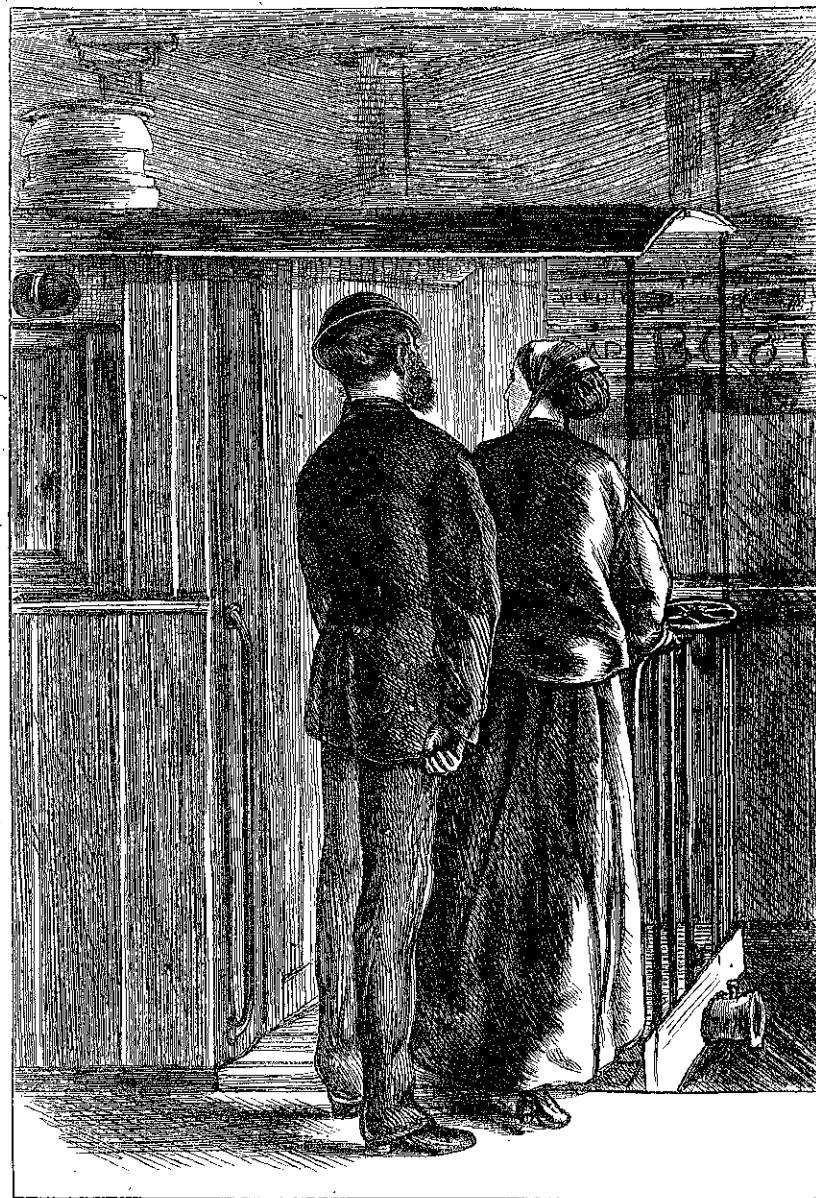
Presently the shrill shriek of the engine announced that the train was in readiness, and the passengers, bag and baggage, thronged to the platform. Pushing and crowding, shouting, directing, all moved onward, I with the rest, though far in the rear, for I had no one to push and crowd for me, and those accomplishments I had not yet learned to practice for myself; but I followed the crowd until we came to the cars, and then I stood patiently waiting until the thronging crowd ahead of me would give me an opportunity to enter them. Thus it happened that all pushed on, until I was last upon the platform, and already had the impatient whistle given warning that the moment for starting had arrived; when, just as I at last found opportunity to step upon the cars, a hand was laid upon my shoulder. I turned with a faint, startled cry, and found myself face to face with my husband.

For a moment I stood breathless, speechless, before him; then the hoarse cry of "all aboard!" and the clangor of the bell, awoke me to the consciousness that the train was in motion, and that I was about to be left behind. One mad, wild effort I made to escape.

"Let me go!" I cried, and would have sprung upon the moving train, had he not caught me by the arm, and forcibly pulled me back upon the platform.

"Are you mad?" he said fiercely; and then the train was gone, and with it my last chance for freedom. And I stood trembling and despairing, alone with the man whom, at that moment, I hated as much as I had ever loved him.

"Leave me, John Harrington!" I cried, as



"I TURNED WITH A FAINT, STARTLED CRY."—PAGE 82.

soon as I could command speech. "I am no longer your wife, nor have you any right to control me. You have forced me to lose this train, but the detention can avail you nothing. I will wait at the depot here until the next train starts, and then I will leave the city in that."

"You will do no such thing," he said. "I believe you have taken leave of your senses, but at all events I shall take you home with me, and whether you consider yourself my wife or not, I shall take very good care that you do not leave me again without my knowledge and consent. Come, I tell you!" and an angry stamp of the foot enforced the command.

I was literally terrified into obedience. So terrible was the alteration made in the man by the fierce passion that raged within him, that I shrank with fear from the fierceness of his voice and glance. He dragged rather than led me to the end of the platform, and there hailed a passing cab, into which he lifted me, half fainting, and springing in by my side, gave the direction of our residence to the driver, and the vehicle rattled rapidly over the intervening streets.

The ride occupied but a few moments, and not a word was exchanged between us during the interval. He assisted me to the steps when the cab stopped, and opened the door for me as silently as possible.

"Go to your room," he said in a stern whisper. "Make no more noise now than you did in leaving the house. There is no need of scandalizing either your sister or mine with the narration of this night's exploits, if it can be avoided."

I obeyed mechanically, and while he dismissed the driver and silently re-fastened the door, I stole up to my room, and groped my way in the dark to the sofa, upon which I fell as I reached it, totally exhausted, and almost in a state of insensibility.

A moment later, and John had followed me. He closed the door as he entered the room, and turned the key in the lock.

"Where is your candle?" he said; and almost inaudibly I directed him to it. He lighted it, and, as the blaze of the match glared up, I, for the first time since our meeting, caught a full view of his face. He was deadly pale; his brow sternly corrugated with frowning lines, his mouth compressed until the bloodless lips were hardly distinguishable, and an expression of dark and fearful passion disfiguring his face, such as I had hitherto little dreamed that familiar countenance could wear.

"And now, Mrs. Harrington," he said at

length, turning toward me that stern, ireful visage, "I am ready to receive such explanation as you can give of this night's singular proceedings."

"And what if I do not choose to give you any?" I said sullenly, the terror with which his altered demeanor had inspired me fast giving place to anger.

"In that case," he said savagely, "I shall consider that your conduct proves you to be a fit subject for a lunatic asylum, and act accordingly," and as he spoke, he looked both able and willing to carry out the threat his words implied.

Wild terror again took possession of me. I sprang to the door, crying wildly—

"Let me go! let me go! I will not stay here with you."

His arm was around me ere I had advanced a dozen steps, and forcibly he detained me.

"Be quiet!" he said. "Are we not sufficiently disgraced already? Would you have all the household know to what a pass our matrimonial affairs are tending? Come back. I tell you," as still I struggled wildly to free myself. "You shall not go; you belong to me, and mine you are and shall be while I have life and strength to hold you." And lifting me from my feet, he carried me to the sofa from which I had just arisen.

He had caught my hand, as I endeavored with all my feeble strength to push him from me, and in his blind rage had grasped it so forcibly that the sharp setting of a ring which I wore upon it was forced into the flesh so as to draw blood.

I gave a faint cry of pain.

"Oh! John, don't! you hurt me; loosen my hand!"

He obeyed as soon as he comprehended my meaning, and the sight of the blood produced in him a complete revulsion of feeling.

"My God! what a wretch am I becoming! Poor little hand that I have loved so well!" And obeying the new impulse, he raised my hand to his face, and covered it with passionate kisses.

This evidence of love was more terrifying to me, if possible, than his former anger had been—the more so, that in my own heart the action awoke a strange, wild throb of joy that too well I knew sprang from the knowledge of his undiminished affection. I could not bear it. I was not yet all ice, and, O my God! if love should return to me now, how powerless I should be! I trembled from head to foot; cold perspiration bathed my brow, and I had barely

strength enough to draw my hand from his passionate grasp.

"Don't, don't," I cried piteously. "You torture me. There is a note on the desk there; read that. It will tell you all that I have to say."

He turned eagerly, and snatched up the paper almost before I had ceased to speak. A fresh storm of rage and anguish swept over his face as he perused it. Throwing it angrily from him he turned to me again.

"You confess it! you dare to confess it! The vows you took upon you before God's holy altar you thus daringly and shamelessly disavow. Speak, Caroline! can you really acknowledge that the sinful words that note contains were written by no mad impulse, no wild infatuation, but are now as then the sober expression of your feelings?" and, as I caught the fierce gleam of the angry eyes that were bent upon me, I thought, with a shudder, "It was thus he looked when he leveled the pistol at his benefactor's head!" and I cried—

"If they are *not* the expression of my feelings now, it is only because no words are strong enough or bitter enough to express the hatred that has crept into my heart toward you, John Harrington."

"Then God help us all!" he said, and his face looked ghastly in the mingled light of the sickly blaze of the candle, and the shadowy daylight that was commencing to creep through the curtains of the windows.

He glared at me for a moment in horrible silence; then he came to my side, and laid his hand heavily upon my shoulder.

"Do you know there is murder in my heart this moment? Do you know there is a feeling here"—striking his breast as he spoke—"which, if it conquers me, will bring the three of us to a bloody grave—him first, and you and me a moment later?"

His words brought a new terror upon me. He knew then of the share which his brother had taken in betraying his fatal secret. Yet how could I have hoped to conceal it? His own conscience must have told him the cause of my behavior, and as Eddie was the only person cognizant of his crime, it was only natural that he should instinctively have fixed upon him as my informant.

"O John! John!" I wailed in my bitter agony, "if you *could* kill me without bringing fresh crime upon your own head, how unresistingly, how gladly would I receive my death-blow from your hands!"

The sight of my distress softened the fierce

anger of his mood, and anguish and remorse seemed to take possession of him. He sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"I thought I could make you happy," he said. "I thought I had succeeded in doing so. Why have you deceived me so long?"

The injustice of the accusation roused me.

"I have not deceived you," I cried. "You knew my feelings before I married you. I never strove to disguise them."

"But I thought it was all a girlish fancy, long since forgotten. I thought that your true wifely love for me, your husband, had long since enabled you to overcome it."

"I shall never overcome it," I said passionately. "I could not and remain the woman I am. I had hoped to have avoided this fearful scene of anger and recrimination, but now that it has come, let us accept the issue as best we may. I must leave you. You can see for yourself that feeling as I do it is impossible that I should any longer fill the position of your wife. Be merciful to me, John. You have wrecked my life; spare me all farther contention, and give me my freedom."

He rose and walked the room in violent agitation for many minutes. He seemed for a time quite incapable of speaking. At last he came to me again, and his face, though white and agitated, was free from the disfiguring traces of passion which hitherto had marred it.

"Listen to me, Caroline," he said. "As God is my witness, if I believed that it would conduce to your happiness to let you leave me, I would set you free from me to-morrow, as far as act of mine could do it. Did I not know your proud temper so well, I would give you your liberty even though that liberty took you to the arms of another. But I know you better than you know yourself, and for your own sake must I refuse the boon you ask. You will be better able to endure the misery of living with a man you do not love, than the shame which the world will cast upon the wife who is separated from her husband."

His words were true; I felt that; yet still every instinct in my nature cried out for freedom.

"I can not, I can not be your wife!" was all that I could say.

A spasm of pain contracted his features, but with great effort he controlled himself, and in a still gentler tone continued—

"I will not ask it of you so long as you feel thus toward me. All that I do ask is, that you accept the shelter my name and protection give you, and spare yourself the agony which your

pride must endure if the vile tongue of scandal is allowed to make free with our unhappy disagreement. Forget all that I have said to you in my anger and distress. If I have been so unfortunate as to bring despair and wretchedness upon you, in the depth of your own misery have some sympathy for me, for I, too, am suffering."

There was a depth of pathos in his tone that pierced the armor in which I had cased myself. I started to my feet in an agony of apprehension. Beyond all things I dreaded the awakening in my heart of that love whose powerful influence I had such cause to fear. Love, pity, for him, the thief, the would-be murderer! The bare idea maddened me.

"I can not, I will not stay; O John! you will break my heart!"

He caught my hands in desperate pleading.

"Caroline, I beseech you! It is for your own sake, dearest. All that I ask is that you shall hide our ignominy from the world. Say that the fault is mine, as perhaps it is, for you were so child-like, so inexperienced when I married you, and I know that I ought to have given you time to have studied more deeply your own feelings. I ought to have done so, but alas! I was so sure you loved me! Grant that I am the guilty one, still you are my wife, and you too must share the penalty of my errors. Our lots are cast together, and it is vain as well as sinful to try to separate them. Do not leave me. Again I beg you to spare yourself the scandal of an open rupture. For your father's sake; for the sake of that proud old name, which, as you have so proudly boasted, has never known a stain; my wife! my wife! for the sake of our dead children; by the memory of that unspeakable joy and sorrow which we have shared together, I beseech you forsake me not!"

I gazed into the excited face of the man I loved, and read the intense devotion his eyes expressed, and I became a weak, pitiable coward. I despised myself as I listened to him. I felt that I was dishonoring the race I sprang from; yet still under the influence of the passions then raging within me, had his hand been raised against the life of my own father, I could not have acted other than I did.

"I will stay with you," I said. "I will direct your household, sit at the head of your table, and in the eyes of the world I will continue to fill the station which, as your wife, I have hitherto occupied, and in return for these services, I will accept my maintenance at your hands. Because of my marriage vows, because you were the father of my dead children, I will

compromise my self-respect thus far. Is this the future you wish me to accept?"

"It is all I will ask of you now," he said. "Your love I can not command, but mine is, as it ever has been, devotedly and only yours; and, by God's help, I yet will prove to you the worth of the affection you now so scornfully reject." He caught my hands as he finished speaking, and would have raised them to his lips, but with quick abhorrence I drew them from him.

"No!" I cried, "this must not, shall not be! I will bear no word, no look that can mock me with the remembrance of a dead and buried love. Break but the letter of our bond, and I leave you forever."

"So be it, then," he said gravely. "I have no inclination to force my love upon you, and you shall have no cause of complaint against me in this respect in the future. Yet I will give you fair warning, that of howsoever poor a stuff your love has been composed, my emotions are of a less evanescent character. If I have been deceived in regard to the nature of your feelings for me, I have not mistaken my own for you. I love you, Caroline, and I shall love you so long as my heart continues to beat. I can not cast you off as a worn-out garment, as you would have me do. The letter of our bond I will observe; the spirit of it is beyond my control."

How mysterious are the workings of a woman's heart! But a moment since I hated the man as I hated an obnoxious reptile. I shrank from his touch with shuddering repulsion, and could conceive of no lot so terrible as that of being claimed by him as his wife. And yet, now, in spite of my despair, my anger, my pride, my heart was throbbing with a wild joy to hear those words of solemn, earnest love, and, as my husband turned to leave the room, an overwhelming impulse came over me to cast myself into his arms, and weep my life away upon his heart.

Conflicting emotions blinded me; my head swam, my knees tottered beneath me. I thought that I was dying. I tried to call his name, but an inarticulate cry was all my parched lips could utter. He turned at the sound, and I stretched out my hands blindly, staggered forward, and fell senseless into the arms that were opened to receive me.

CHAPTER XIV.

A YEAR OF PAIN AND CHANGE.

THE month that immediately followed that miserable night is all a blank to me. When

roused from the insensibility into which I had fallen at the close of the exciting interview which I have just endeavored to record, it was but to stare stupidly around, mutter a few unintelligible sentences, and then relapse again into stupor. The physician who had been summoned, after a very brief examination, unhesitatingly pronounced me the victim of brain-fever, and such my illness proved to be.

For many weeks thereafter, I lay prostrated by this terrible disease. Oblivious of all things, talking, singing, praying, laughing, crying, night and day, with no rest save the unhealthy stupor, at long intervals produced by opiates, through weeks of suffering to myself, and of torturing suspense to those who loved me, I struggled through a desperate contest with death, and even when I finally was proclaimed the victor, I brought from the encounter a mind and body so shattered by disease, that my convalescence proved to be almost as serious an affair as my actual illness.

It is the fashion with romancists, when brain-fever attacks their hero or heroine, to cause them to reveal to the awe-struck watchers all the most treasured secrets which their hearts contain. The fashion is, to say the least, a convenient one, when the *dénouement* of the story can be thus dramatically and satisfactorily accomplished; yet it has this one objection—(a serious one to me, for I am trying to tell an "over true" tale)—reality refuses to carry out the idea. Except in a romance, no brain-fever patient ever made any revelation to which a sane mind could be tempted to give credence. Unintelligible muttering, broken, disconnected sentences, plainly testify to the unnatural character of the thoughts which the diseased brain conceives. If any central idea is harped upon by the unconscious sufferer, it is seldom one that the state of his mind at the time of his illness might be supposed to call forth. Very frequently some entirely imaginary person or event becomes the phantom around which his fancy conjures up a thousand terrors. Seldom, if ever, I suppose, does the memory remain sufficiently alive to call into action the genuine sorrows of the patient. His ravings, however fierce, however incessant, are utterly meaningless, and are quite powerless either to attract attention or to satisfy curiosity.

It is a pity perhaps for the artistic effect of my story that the novelist's theory is not the true one. Had I, in my delirium, discoursed freely of the troubles upon which my mind had been brooding the few days preceding my illness, matters would have been vastly simplified.

Many a day of sorrow would have been afterward spared me, and the story of my life's tragedy would have been near its close. But, unhappily for me, my unconscious tongue, during those weeks of crazy babbling, was true to nature rather than to romance. The present, with all its agony of passion and despair, was forgotten. My suspicions, my suspense, the confirmation of my worst fears, which the history of my husband's crime had been to me, my flight, and that long scene of agony and excitement during which my mind had succumbed to the disease with which it was now battling, all these events were as completely obliterated from my mind as if they had never caused me grief. Far back into the days of my girlhood my mind rambled, and I babbled ceaselessly of "Sue," and "father," and "baby Agnes." Then again I was back in Nettleby's store, and the names of the girls I had there associated with, and whom, perhaps, I had never seen or thought of since, were mingled in my vagaries with those of "Jenny," "Mr. Frank," and "the governor." I seemed to have forgotten entirely that the latter had ever occupied a nearer and a dearer place in my heart than that name entitled him to. Indeed, as they afterward told me, if any one incident of my actual life occupied a more prominent place in my wanderings than another, it was that of Frank Nettleby and his big account-book, into which I was copying, under his bewildering auspices, endless bills of sales that would mix themselves inextricably together, to unfathom which, my tired brain would work fruitlessly, hour after hour, until physical exhaustion induced the stupor from which I could only be aroused to relapse into fresh delirium.

The only circumstance attending my illness which testified that the late suffering I had undergone still retained any hold upon my mind, was the fact that throughout the whole time of my delirium I refused to allow my husband's attendance. His approach was always the signal for fiercer raving, more uncontrollable excitement. I would take no medicine from his hand, nor permit him to come near me, or wait upon me in any manner.

Poor John! Whatever his faults might have been, his sufferings during those days and weeks were intense enough to have balanced them. Fortunately for both of us, my conduct toward him was accredited entirely to the workings of the disease, and to this day Miss Jenny triumphantly relates the circumstance as a proof of one of her favorite theories, namely: that in cases of brain disorder, the patient acts in a



"I AWAKENED TO FIND HIM BENDING OVER ME."—PAGE 87.

manner precisely contrary to what he would do in a state of health.

After many weeks of suffering, at length the day came when reason again held sway. Not clearly and thoroughly at first, but, little by little, with my increasing strength, my mind resumed its natural tone, and with returning reason, alas! came also returning memory, and I wondered, in my impotent wretchedness, why it had pleased God to bring me back again to a life that for me had nothing but sin and sorrow. I did not mend rapidly; there was no desire for life in my heart, and long after all active disease was exterminated, did I lie upon my bed, nerveless and dispirited, gaining no strength either in body or mind, simply and only because I would not.

I saw very little of John at this time. Fearing, I suppose, that the excitement of his presence would be injurious to me, he troubled me as seldom as possible with his company, and it was easy to account to others for his conduct on the grounds that the ill effect his presence had had upon me during my delirium might still continue while I was so weak as I still appeared to be. But, though he came into my room but seldom during the day, and made his visits as short as they were rare, yet I was instinctively conscious at all times of his incessant watchfulness.

During my illness and convalescence, Miss Jenny occupied by night a couch in my room, and, during the time when I really required her attention, a more untiring and faithful nurse no mortal ever had. But when the time of actual danger was passed, and I required no attentions, save those which I could call for when necessary, though she still persisted in retaining her position as nurse, she found her task a light one, and her night's repose was frequently completely uninterrupted.

At that stage of my recovery I would lay awake at night, suffering no pain, in no want of any thing that mortal aid could give me, yet feeling, oh! so unutterably wretched and forsaken! And it was at these times I became conscious that I suffered not alone; that my sick-room was haunted by the presence of a love that never tired, a care that never slept. Often, when waking suddenly from the light, fitful slumber of the invalid, would I open my eyes upon the care-worn face of my husband, bending anxiously over me. At such times, with some faint attempt at excusing his presence there, he would withdraw abruptly from my sight, leaving me to imagine, as he supposed, that I was again alone. Yet, though I

made no sign acknowledging his presence, I felt that he was always near me, and oh! of how much misery and loneliness did that knowledge beguile me! The subtle sophistries of pride vainly contended with the power of nature in those hours of unreasoning languor. The love that I despised and rejected, was at once my comfort and my salvation. I should have died, I think, even after the disease was conquered, of pure disgust of life, had it not been for the knowledge of that grand, unselfish sympathy, the thorough conviction of my husband's devoted love.

One night, when I awakened to find him bending over me, he did not retreat as he usually did, but stood, still gazing at me, his anxious eyes scanning my face, as if to read therein the solution of a question which he dared not ask.

"You are more restless to-night than usual, Caroline; I fear you are getting no stronger."

"I know that I am not," I said, turning my head wearily upon the pillow, as if to terminate the conversation. He saw and understood the motion, but he persevered.

"Why is it? You have no disease; the fever has quite left you; you are young, energetic, elastic, with a constitution, your physician tells you, of unsurpassed vitality. Why should you not grow stronger?"

I turned my face toward him, and raised my eyes sadly to his.

"I suppose it is because I have no desire to live. I don't want to talk recklessly, John; I try not to feel so; if it pleases God to raise me up again, I will take up the burden of life uncomplainingly; but—but—you know how I feel—I don't want to live."

"Do you know how it tortures me to hear you say this?" he said, and his pale, haggard face seemed to become still paler, still more haggard as he spoke. "You used to be kind-hearted, Caroline; I have seen you weep over a dead bird; and the sufferings of an over-tasked animal could once arouse your liveliest sympathy. Have you no feeling now for me? Can you spare no pity for my sufferings? Look upon me!" And snatching up the candle, he held it so that the light fell full upon his face. "Do you see the change the last few weeks have wrought in me?" And as I looked, the first emotion that had touched my benumbed heart since my illness, melted its torpor then, and the tears sprang to my eyes as I gazed upon the hollow eyes and wasted features.

"Poor John!" I said, with quivering lips, "how selfishly blind I have been. You have grown quite grey!" And I covered my eyes with

my hand, that he might not see the emotion I was too weak to repress.

"Ay!" he continued, "my grief has made of me a prematurely old man. Have pity on me, Caroline; spare me farther suffering. Throw off this sinful lassitude that is killing you, and torturing me. It has pleased God to spare you, and you are just as surely rejecting the life he gives you by your indifference to it as you would be by violently casting it from you. I know, and *you* know, that the will to live is all that is lacking to your recovery."

"How *can* I wish to get well?" I said pitifully. "Life is so dreary, so tiresome; all joy has gone out of it; I have nothing left to live for."

"You have many things to live for," he answered with gentle tenderness. "You have friends who love you, and whom you love; you are yet young, and life with all its beautiful possibilities is spread before you; time will temper the keenness of the sorrows that now encompass you, and you will yet live to find that the truest happiness earth can give, the pleasure of making others happy, may still be yours. Yet more, Caroline; you have my love, and little as you value it now, you will find, when health returns to you, that it is by no means a worthless offering. Oh! my dear one, do you not know how my heart yearns over you? Not even in the days of your girlish beauty, when so blindly I thought that I had won your heart; not even in the days of early wedlock, when I believed that neither earth nor heaven could produce a being more beloved and loving than my own dear bride; nor yet when I saw my child within your arms, and the holy light of mother love beaming in your eyes had doubly endeared to me my wife; nor even, when sorrowing over that infant's tiny grave, you wept upon my breast, though then I thought I could not love you more;—never, no, never have you been so dear to me as now—now, when I know that I have lost you. Oh, my love! my love! Do you think I have not sorrowed with you? Do you think one pang has wrung your heart that has not tortured mine with sympathetic grief? I have prayed for death, even in the same breath that I prayed for grace to aid me in withholding violent hands from my own life, for I have thought that with *my* death, happiness might again return to you—"

"No, no! oh, no!" I gasped, interrupting the passionate flow of words. "Oh! John, you could not think that!"

"I will try not to think it again, love, for I

believe that I can make even my worthless life a blessing to you, and that in God's mysterious providence, even my rejected love may comfort you. I ask for no return; God help me! I know that can not be; only your pity—only your pity. Live, Caroline, live to bestow it upon me."

He leaned against the bed-post, white and exhausted; powerless to say more, yet pleading with me still with his eyes. The tears were running down my cheeks, and my heart turned to him in his misery, until I felt that had he then asked me for my love, I must have given it to him, in spite of his sin and my pride.

"I will try to live, John, for your sake," I said, and then I turned my face away and wept.

The tears did me good, I think; they were the first which I had shed since my sorrow; they broke up the torpor which encased me; they softened my heart from its selfish grief; and as divine pity shed her radiance over my distracted soul, I began to think more of others and less of myself, and to remember that whatever John's sins might have been, I, too, had been far from blameless.

I framed new resolutions for the life which must henceforth be before me; I could no longer be the trusting wife of the man who had deceived me, but I would be the faithful friend of the man who loved me; my soul yearned over him in his remorseful sorrow, as a mother's over her first-born. In that moment of pitying tenderness, I began to frame excuses for the crime which, in sterner moments, I had pronounced inexcusable. I began to think less of the crime and more of the criminal, and the more I pondered upon the miserable affair, the more singular and incomprehensible did the whole story become. The cold-blooded villainy that characterized the hero of the newspaper paragraph was so utterly foreign to the nature of the man who called me wife, that even the evidence of my own senses seemed insufficient to convince me in my calmer moments of its existence in him. Treachery, deceit, ingratitude, love of money, a passion for gambling—all these sins, so foul and degrading, so contemptibly vile, were completely at variance with a nature which, until now, I had considered chiefly admirable from its sensitive honor, its truthful simplicity. If, in the days of my unshaken faith in him, I had been asked of what sin John Harrington would have been least likely to prove guilty, I should have answered—"Falsehood." His nature had always seemed to me to be most singularly free from guile;

his sincerity sometimes amounting to a bluntness for which I had often playfully chided him. And who should have been so likely to judge him justly as I, the wife whom he had loved so devotedly? At least there was no deceit there; with all my bewilderment and distress I had never for one moment doubted that I possessed my husband's passionate and faithful love. I believe that at that time, when my mind and body were alike so weak, and my feelings, in consequence, more than usually acute, I believe, had it not been for the downright falsehood I had heard him utter, and the virtual acknowledgment of the charge which his words and conduct but now had given me, I should really have tortured myself to believe the whole affair a base fabrication or an egregious error. I could not reconcile the man and the deeds; had there been the slightest room for doubt, I should have doubted then; and it was only after long and painful consideration of the matter, after viewing it in every possible light, that I came to the despairing conclusion that there was *no* room for doubt; that, by evidence which no rational mind could dispute, I might almost say by his own confession, he had been proved guilty of actions that must forever destroy my confidence in his integrity. I never could trust him again, and that love which had been founded in my faith in him had perished with it, and could never be again resuscitated, however much I might learn to pity and forgive.

And forgiveness was no light task for me, even with the full conviction of his sorrow and remorse fresh in my mind and heart. He had wronged me cruelly; he had linked my father's honored name with that of an all but branded felon; he had ruthlessly violated my dearest and holiest affections; and he had done all this willfully and knowingly. Well aware as he was of the peculiarly sensitive pride which was my most prominent characteristic, in the very face of my avowal that I would never forgive the man who should bring dishonor upon my father's proud old name, he had married me—an unsuspecting, confiding girl—with that dark secret of shame and ignominy buried in his bosom; a secret which he must have known would, if revealed to me, as certainly have prevented my becoming his wife, as if I had discovered him to have been the husband of another woman. There lay the dark page of his transgressions appallingly plain before me; I could not overlook them, nor forget them, nor excuse them; all that I could do was to pity, and perhaps some day to forgive them; and

this, in view of his devoted love, his unfeigned remorse, his bitter suffering, I would do.

With this resolution solemnly engraved upon my heart, again I took up the burden of my life, and uncomplainingly moved forward under my heavy load, upon the dark and thorny path that lay before me.

One very startling piece of intelligence greeted me when I was considered able to resume my position in the family circle. John was out of a situation. He and Frank Nettleby had had a quarrel, and John had resigned his position in the store. The angry shadow that came upon John's countenance when this announcement was made to me, forbade my asking any questions then upon a subject which was evidently, before him, a forbidden one; but the first opportunity I could find, I assailed Jenny with eager inquiries as to the cause of this unexpected misfortune.

"Heaven only knows; I don't," she said crossly. "A more different man from the John Harrington of six months ago than the John Harrington of to-day, it would be hard to find. I had thought all along that your illness, and his uneasiness about you, had been the cause of his constant gloom and irritability, but I can not say that his temper has improved though your health has. He is sullen and morose as ever, and this quarrel with Frank Nettleby has been only one of the numberless strange things of which he has lately been guilty. He has actually forbidden Frank the house, and he tried to persuade me to leave Nettleby's when he did. A pretty one I should make of hunting for new employment at my time of life! I'd like to know where the bread and butter is to come from if we all stop working. John's savings were not very extensive, we all know, and your long illness and all the consequent expenses, have made a pretty big hole in them already. Did he give no reason for his quarrel, do you say? not he; nor would Frank either, though I tried my best to get an inkling of the matter from both of them. I never believed Frank could be so wrathful as he has managed to be at John; they have quarreled about something they are both ashamed of, I'll guarantee that. Do you try, Caroline, to find out what it was about. I still think matters can be set straight, if one only knew how to go about it."

And I did try to find out, in a faint, irresolute sort of fashion. I could not yet quite reconcile my new relations with my husband with free and unembarrassed conversation, but I ventured to ask him, in a timid, hesitating way,

whether there was no possibility of a reconciliation between Frank and himself.

"None whatever," he replied curtly; and then, when with desperate courage I ventured to beg, spite of his sharpness, that the matter might be sufficiently compromised to permit of Frank's visits to us being renewed, even if in a less friendly manner than of old, he turned fiercely upon me. "He shall never enter my doors again. I wonder at you, Caroline; you ought to know, and I am astonished that you do not feel, that all farther intimacy with him is out of the question."

And then at once the thought occurred to me that by some means Frank, too, had become cognizant of John's dreadful secret. No wonder he had discharged him from his employ! No wonder that he could never again become the guest of such a man! And, sick at heart, I turned away with no desire to hear more. I could guess the whole miserable truth now.

The changes which had been wrought in John and myself were not the only ones in our family. Indeed, with the exception of poor, bewildered, unconscious Jenny, who watched the transfiguration of all around her with perplexed and sorrowful eyes, there was not a member of our small family who did not seem completely transformed within the past few months. John, morose, irritable, and sardonic; I, cold, listless, and unhappy; and Eddie and Agnes, each as unlike their former selves as could possibly be imagined. Eddie restless and variable, watching John and me constantly with the strangest interest, neglectful of Agnes, and altogether behaving so oddly and unaccountably, that I could not wonder that Miss Jenny entertained serious thoughts of his sanity, as she confessed to me she did. I, who, in his case at least, was pretty well aware of the cause of his strange conduct, reassured her as best I could, and, by redoubled kindness to him, strove to show that no bitterness lurked in my heart toward him. And to do John justice, he, too, seemed actuated by similar motives. By the angry words he had let fall when first he discovered Eddie's almost involuntary treachery to him, I had feared that he would have been terribly angry with his brother; but his calmer moments, I suppose, had taught him the injustice of that feeling, for his anger seemed to have worn entirely away, and he treated his brother with far more cordiality than he was wont to do before this trouble had come upon us. I could plainly see, however, that Eddie's sensitive nature would not allow him to forgive himself for the part he had acted; I could see

that the estrangement between John and myself, however successfully we might conceal it from the others, was plainly visible to him; and his sympathy for me was shown by an unselfish devotion that was almost lover-like in its passionate tenderness. My heart warmed toward the boy with an affection that I had not thought I should be again capable of feeling. Thrown back upon myself as I was, deprived so suddenly and entirely of that love and sympathy which for years had been my reliance and my strength. I turned to this young man, whose merits it seemed to me I alone could thoroughly appreciate, with a gratitude for his sympathy and affection that could not have been more instinctive and unaffected had he been my own brother. My feelings toward him at this time were the warmer, perhaps, because I saw very plainly that he too was suffering, and suffering I fully believed from the pangs of misplaced affection. There had evidently been a misunderstanding of quite a serious nature between him and Agnes; and, though he seemed to be resolute against taking any steps to terminate it, I knew that he was suffering none the less deeply from its effects. I dared not interfere; in my heart I believed Agnes to be utterly incapable of appreciating a love so devoted as his; I believed that even did he succeed in winning her for his wife, the union would never be a happy one. Sorrow had made me clearer-sighted than of yore, and knowing as I did the utter congeniality of their natures, I began to think that my plans for uniting them were perhaps as unwise as they were likely to be unsuccessful. Feeling this, I dared not interfere between them; and though I tried by every means in my power to convince Eddie of my sympathy with his sorrow, I never mentioned Agnes's name to him; and as he was equally reserved, I had no opportunity of learning from what cause their estrangement had arisen.

Agnes too, as I have said, was sadly changed; the laughing, thoughtless, light-hearted girl was metamorphosed into a quiet, pensive woman. She was evidently unhappy as well as the rest of us, and seemed to feel the trouble between herself and Eddie much more than I had imagined she would. At times, I fancied that she was anxious to make a confidante of me, and that she only needed a little encouragement to have drawn from her a full confession of her troubles. But this encouragement I would not give her; I was beginning to feel very certain that her fancy for Eddie Harrington was an unwise and unsuitable one, and, as with him, I dreaded to interfere in any manner, lest I

CHAPTER XV.

STARTLING REVELATIONS.

should precipitate where I had really wished to retard. So I shunned all opening for confidential communications from her, much as it pained me to see the poor child so perplexed and unhappy.

And what shall I say concerning the state of affairs between my husband and myself? a state so unnatural, that many times I felt as if open rupture would have been far less trying to both of us; and had it not been for the sake of Jenny and Agnes, I believe I must have given up the hopeless task of glossing o'er our misery with the tinsel of fair appearances. How I hated and despised the falsehood of our lives! Like the whitened sepulchre, so fair and pure without, while inwardly full of foul corruption. No conversation ever passed between us that was not absolutely necessary. I never met his eye if I could avoid doing so, and strive as I would (for I saw the pain such conduct caused him), I could not help the shrinking dread that overpowered me whenever he approached me. Yet, notwithstanding all this, never had his love for me been so palpably evident as now; not shown by words, of course, but by all those thousand trifles in themselves so insignificant, yet so powerfully convincing when looked back upon in their unforgotten completeness.

His temper had grown strangely irritable, as indeed could little surprise any one, for, apart from the troubles between himself and me, the fact of enforced idleness to a man so constitutionally industrious and energetic, would in itself have accounted for almost any amount of nervous irritability; yet with all the trouble that perplexed and annoyed him, no cross word ever passed his lips when addressing me; nay, more than that: his voice invariably softened, his words were ever more gently phrased in his intercourse with me, than with any other member of the family. I can not tell exactly how he made it apparent; the ways were so numerous and so trivial. A constant regard for my tastes; habitual deference to my wishes; unceasing care for my health; everywhere and at all times, by every means in his power, he silently proved to me that the love which he had once given me was still unchangeably my own.

And so the days sped by, and the winter passed, and the spring followed swiftly after, and summer was again upon us, ere any event of more than ordinary importance occurred to vary the dull and wretched monotony of our lives.

In the summer of the year of which I am about to write, Mr. Henderson died. The reader may remember that in the second chapter of this eventful history I have recorded a conversation which I held with him shortly after my father's death. He was the gentleman in whose employ my father had passed the last ten years of his life. I saw the announcement of his (Mr. Henderson's) death in the morning papers, and though I had not met him for several years, not, in fact, since my marriage, I yet remembered gratefully his kindness to me when most I needed friends, and I mourned his death as sincerely if not as deeply as many who had perhaps a better right. My surprise, however, may be more easily imagined than described when, shortly after learning this sad intelligence, I received from Mr. Henderson's lawyer a letter which told me that he had bequeathed to "Caroline Harrington, the daughter of my honored friend the late James B. Manvers, as a mark of respect and affection, the sum of ten thousand dollars."

My kind old friend! How little had I done to deserve this mark of remembrance from his hands! My heart swelled with emotion when I remembered how entirely his kindness had passed out of my memory, and how completely I had forgotten almost his very existence, until the sad tidings were brought to me that he was no more.

Yet never did unexpected legacy come in more propitious time than did this. John had been unable despite his most vigorous efforts to obtain a permanent situation. A few odd jobs, laborious and poorly paid, had been all that he had been able to procure, and our small savings had been steadily drawn upon during the intervening months, until now they were quite exhausted, and the coming winter stared us in the face, finding us entirely unprovided with any means to meet its exigencies. Neither Jenny nor Eddie were in any situation to offer us much help, even had John and I been willing to accept it from them, which we were not. On one point at least we were of one mind. A certain monthly sum, which they had always paid for board, was, of course, still continued, and now that was absolutely all we had to depend upon. Agnes had roused herself sufficiently from the listless indifference into which she had lately been sunk to insist upon trying to find employment, and as I was convinced that steady, laborious occupation would really be the best medicine

her "sick mind" could receive, I quite agreed with her as to the expediency of her trying to do something for herself. John, at my request, had sought and obtained for her a situation as teacher in one of the public-schools, and she would commence her labors with the first of the ensuing September.

I, too, had felt very bitterly my enforced idleness, and the necessary expenses my long illness had brought upon my husband, and as soon as I was strong enough to make the plan a practicable one, I announced to John my intention of trying to find something to do that would lighten his expenses, and render me less dependent on him.

"Dependent on me!" he cried in bitter scorn. "Has it really come to that, then, Caroline, that you can wantonly insult me with such a speech?"

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Harrington," I said coldly. "I mean no offense to you, and you are over-sensitive to consider it as such. So soon as you shall be able to work for us both again, I will permit you to do so. In consenting to bear your name, and remain under your protection, I also conceded to you the privilege of providing for my personal needs—but at present, I think, and you must see yourself, that it is far better you should be as little hampered as possible with idle hands at home, who make your burden of responsibility and care just that much heavier than it ought to be. Let me try to procure some needle-work or fine sewing. I suppose, of course, you would object to my entering upon any more public employment, but, I think, among Jenny's acquaintances and my own, I can surely find something to do that will help us through this time of need. Every little helps, you know; and though I am painfully aware of how very little it will be that I can do to help you, still I shall feel much better if I am allowed to try."

I would have added farther details of the little plan I had mentally contrived to provide for me the work I was so anxious to commence, but he would let me say no more.

"For God's sake, hush, Caroline! you will drive me mad. You going out as a sewing-girl! you cringing and begging for the patronage of some would-be fine lady, or supercilious aristocrat! I had rather work on the public roads than permit you thus to degrade yourself. Do not speak of it, or think of it again; no, nor of any other plan of the same nature. I forbid it positively and entirely. Yet hold; that haughty glance would tell me I have no right to forbid you. I will not, then; but be generous, Caro-

line! pity the anomalous position which I am forced to occupy—my heart full of a husband's love, yet in my hands none of a husband's authority."

"I will do as you wish, Mr. Harrington," I said, turning abruptly away, for I feared lest a longer conversation might break down the composure which I was now maintaining only by the greatest effort. So I said no more about helping to earn our daily bread, but I proceeded practically to do it, for I dismissed my servant, and turned very energetically to doing my own housework, and I soon found that very little time would I have had aside from that to devote to fine sewing or sewing of any kind.

I was several days queen of the kitchen and maid of all work, before John discovered that my girl had left me. He came upon me accidentally one morning as I was carrying a scuttle of coal up the cellar stairs.

He descended the stairs, meeting me half-way, and took the scuttle from my hand.

"Why do you not let Sarah attend to this?" he said reproachfully. "It is surely her business."

"I am my own Sarah now," I said, striving to treat the whole affair as a jest. "I am determined to immortalize myself, and as you declined to let me do it in any other way, I must do it amid pots, kettles, and pans. And I think I have thus far every reason to hope for success."

He gave no answering smile, but asked, as he set his burden down by the kitchen stove—

"When did you dismiss Sarah?"

"Last Monday, I believe, but I have got along so well without her, that I hardly remember when she did go."

"Where does she live? do you know?"

"Now, John Harrington," I cried tempestuously, "you need be making no arrangements to hunt her up again, for I tell you plainly, I won't have her! no, nor any one else, either."

"Just for a little while," he said beseechingly. "I shall certainly get into some kind of business in the course of the next month, and it is so unnecessary for you to undertake this responsibility. Let me get Sarah back again for a few weeks only, and by that time I dare say there will be no need of doing without her at all."

I shook my head resolutely.

"No, I'll have none of her. If our circumstances warrant us in keeping a girl next month, why next month you can get me one, but until then I shall take charge of the house myself. Don't make yourself ridiculous, John. There is nothing to do but what I can get along with

very comfortably. We will put out the washing as usual, and with a little help from Agnes, once in a while, I shall manage all the rest without any trouble."

"I can not allow it," he commenced, but he checked himself as he saw the tears of real vexation that sprang to my eyes. He turned away and finished abruptly. "God bless you, Caro! do as you please. If you make yourself ill by this extra exertion, I shall never forgive myself."

"No danger," I said, and thus the question was settled decisively, no further interference on John's part ever troubling my domestic peace, except I considered as interference the fact that from that day he took upon himself the burden of all the heavier household duties, building fires, carrying coal, etc., and saving my labor by every possible means that loving heart could prompt and willing hands employ.

It was really singular how unfortunate John had been in his efforts to obtain employment. When he first left Nettleby's, I had thought, and he too, that there would have been no trouble at all in procuring another situation. His having been so long in the employ of that firm would have been sufficient recommendation in itself, we thought, to procure for him a similar situation elsewhere. But, whether the fact of his leaving Nettleby's so suddenly, and without any assigned reason, was considered suspicious; whether any inkling of that old, dark tale of crime and ignominy had got abroad; or whether, as I was sometimes almost tempted to think, there was some occult influence at work undermining his reputation; certain it is that most discouraging results met him in his every attempt to find work.

How much he suffered from these disappointments that met him at every turn, none knew better than I, bravely as he sought to conceal his anxiety from me. And under all these circumstances it may easily be understood with what a delightful sense of relief came to me the tidings of Mr. Henderson's legacy.

John was not at home when I received the letter, nor did he return until evening. I was in the kitchen making preparations for tea, when I heard his step in the dining-room. I heard Jenny ask him her usual question at his return, as to what "luck" had met him in his day of weary search, and his customary answer, in a tone which I fancied sounded more dispirited than usual, "None whatever." Then, without waiting for farther conversation with her, he passed on at once into the kitchen, to

fulfill the many little duties that it had become his undeviating practice to perform.

I almost forgot our estrangement at that moment. Tossing the letter toward him, I cried gayly—

"We will have Sarah back again next week. Read that letter and see how rich we have suddenly become."

His face lightened from its despondency as he read it.

"I am indeed heartily glad for your sake, Caro."

"Yes!" I rattled on, "you can take your time now about getting to work. If people find you are not so anxious, they will be readier to employ you, and now you can wait until you find something that will really suit you. You see Providence always provides a way for those who are willing to help themselves, and though I am very, very sorry for poor Mr. Henderson, I can not help but be glad about the money, for you know, John, we really did need it so badly. I suppose it is not such a very great fortune, but it seems to me now an inexhaustible sum; a veritable purse of Fortunatus."

"Not quite that, my dear," he answered, smiling faintly, "but still quite sufficient, if properly invested, to secure you a competence against all contingencies. If I may be allowed to advise you as to its disposal—"

He hesitated, but I cried indignantly—

"Why, John! how can you! you know it is as much yours as mine."

"Not exactly, but I suppose I may consider it such for all intents and purposes until it is received and disposed of. As I was about to say, then, if you are willing, I will invest it for you in some good, reliable stock, which you can realize at a short notice if it is necessary, and which will bring you in, as interest, a regular and certain income. With this and the money you will receive from Eddie and Jenny for their board, you will be able to manage very comfortably until I am able to do something better for you. As your family after this will be one less, your trouble and expense will be proportionably lighter."

"What do you mean by my family being one less?" I cried sharply.

"Only this, that as I have no longer any hope of getting any employment that will suit me in Boston, and as I shall now be able to leave you in easy circumstances, I shall go to New York as soon as I can get off, and endeavor to find occupation there."

He spoke very gently and very kindly, but so resolutely that I saw that his mind was made

up, and that the fact of his departure was with him a settled thing. My heart throbbed wildly as I asked him—

"How long shall you be gone?"

"That of course depends upon my success. If I secure a situation, my absence will probably be indefinitely prolonged. I take this step with the less reluctance, Caroline, as I can but feel that my absence will add to your happiness, at least to your peace of mind, and it will certainly be deplored by no one, except perhaps Jenny—poor Jenny!" and his voice faltered a little.

As for me, I felt as if my heart were breaking, and yet I dared give no sign. At last, after a long pause—

"Why must you go?" I asked faintly.

More gently than before, he replied—

"You know, Caroline, I must work for my living, and I can find no work to do here."

"There is no hurry, I am sure," I persisted.

"As I said before, you can take your own time for finding a place now."

He drew himself up haughtily.

"Live here a dependent upon *your* bounty, Caroline? Heaven forbid!"

"John Harrington, I am ashamed of you!"

I cried passionately. "When I said something of the same sort to you not long ago, you told me I had insulted you, and now, how dare you suggest such a thing to me!"

"I think we had better not discuss the subject, Caroline. It can do no good, and you only distress yourself needlessly."

His composure frightened me. Could it be that he would really leave me?

"Oh, John!" I cried, "you begged *me* to be generous, and I was. I sacrificed *my* pride to your wishes, and I have said not a word on the subject since. Can you not be equally magnanimous? Whatever our troubles, do not let me feel that a mere despicable money-matter can add to them! Take the legacy as your own and use it just as you think best. You *know* that whatever you see fit to do will be satisfactory to me. Don't refuse me, John! As you said to me, 'be generous!'"

"The cases are not parallel, Caroline," he said in a low, hesitating voice. And I, thinking that he was yielding, continued eagerly—

"They are; there can be no difference. You thought it perfectly right that you should provide for my wants, and why, pray, should I not help you in the same way?"

In my eagerness, I had advanced to his side, and was gazing into his face as I had not done since our estrangement. He turned pale.

"You could very easily receive benefits from the man who loved you, and who, you knew, had the right to love and care for you. I should have no hesitation whatever, Caroline, in receiving favors from my wife, if she loved me."

He moved as if he would have taken my hand, and his eyes gazed appealingly into my own. I turned sick and faint. I could not, I *could* not give him the assurance he desired; I shook my head and shrank away from his outstretched hand. He sighed heavily, but his voice was gentle as before when he spoke to me.

"You see I shall have to leave you, Caroline."

What could I say? He was only acting as I myself should have done in similar circumstances. Nay, feeling as he did, I could not wish him to act otherwise. His honor was mine, and I was proud for him as for myself. So the question was dropped, and from that time the fact of John's speedy departure was considered a settled fact, and only the day was still in abeyance.

Just at this time, fortunately perhaps for me, my mind was prevented from brooding over my own private grievances, by the discovery of a new trouble of very different character.

Agnes fainted one morning at the breakfast-table. No unusual symptoms had manifested themselves until, with a faint apology to me, saying that she felt ill, she rose to leave the room. Ere she reached the door she staggered and would have fallen had not John, who had been watching her very anxiously, sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

He carried her to her room, and then, while Jenny and I proceeded with the usual remedies for restoring suspended animation, hurried off to call to our assistance the nearest physician. Before he came, however, the faintness had worn away, and save for her weakness and pallor, she seemed really as well as usual. The doctor, after the usual inquiries, wrote out a simple prescription, advised out-door exercise and cheerful company, and after assuring us that there was really no cause for alarm, withdrew.

I followed him to the front door.

"You are sure, doctor," I asked anxiously, "that there is nothing serious the matter?"

"No physical ailment, madam, that I can discern. Your sister's system seems much debilitated from some cause or other, but I have every hope that a proper course of treatment will soon remedy that."

"But why," I persisted, "should her system be debilitated? She has never been ill in her

life, and if, as you say, there is no physical ailment; what can have occasioned a debility which could produce such alarming results as we this morning have witnessed?"

The doctor answered hesitatingly—

"I hardly know, madam, whether I am justified in saying so without a farther acquaintance with my patient—but, if my experience is not strangely at fault, it is mental trouble of some kind that is producing all these unpleasant symptoms."

"Mental trouble; impossible!" I cried, aghast at the idea.

"Well, perhaps not," answered the gentleman, evidently afraid of compromising himself by persisting in the statement. "I may possibly be mistaken; I shall be able to judge better upon a second visit," and then with a polite bow the doctor took his departure.

I returned to the sitting-room to relieve the minds of John and Eddie, who were anxiously waiting to hear the doctor's opinion concerning Agnes. Jenny, too, came down the stairs at the same moment, reporting the patient to be apparently quite recovered. I gave to them the doctor's assurance that there was nothing serious the matter, reserving from them, however, for evident reasons, the farther opinion he had given; then I hastened to return to Agnes.

I was more disturbed by what I had heard, than I was willing to confess even to myself. Though to the doctor I had denied all possibility of mental trouble for my little sister, I was by no means so certain myself on that point as I could have wished to be. That there had been a misunderstanding between her and Eddie I was very certain, but that her feelings were so deeply interested in the matter, that it should actually have undermined her health, I would not believe. Bitterly did I reproach myself, however, for not having possessed myself of her confidence, and so have been able to have remedied the trouble before it had proceeded to so alarming an extent. I hurried to her room, determined at once to know how far the doctor had been right in his suspicions.

If I had had any doubts as to the propriety of this course of action, they would have been at once put to flight by my discovering when I entered the room that Agnes was weeping bitterly. When she first saw me she endeavored to repress her tears and conceal her emotion, but the very effort in her present feeble state but produced a contrary effect, and for a few moments her grief was almost hysterical.

"My child! my darling! what is all this?" I cried, soothing her excited nerves with all the

endearing appellations and tender caresses a mother could have showered upon a weeping child. "Speak to me, dearest; tell me what it is that has thus distressed you."

She clung to me in a perfect passion of grief.

"I wanted to tell you," she sobbed, "you know I have, all along. I have tried to, a hundred times, but you would not let me, and now—" She could speak no more.

"And now, my own precious sister, you shall tell me every thing, and I will listen to you and try to help you, and share your troubles, even if I can not cure them," I said, scarcely less affected than she was herself, for my conscience told me that her charge was but too true. I had repelled her confidence, and even now, though I felt that for her own sake I must let her unveil her heart before me, I could form no idea of what I ought to say or do to console her. Encourage her feelings toward Eddie Harrington I dare not, uncertain as I had lately become of his sentiments for her, and to discourage them would, perhaps, in her present excited state, be still more dangerous.

When she had become a little calmer, I said to her—

"And now, dear, tell me what it is all about, and let me see if I can not find some way to make you happier."

"Oh! you know, Caroline, you know. I am sure there is no need for me to tell you; you must have seen long before you were taken sick that—that—I loved him." And her voice sank to a whisper, and the sweet face that leaned upon my shoulder was suffused with rosy blushes.

"I am afraid that I did, Agnes; or at least I fancied I saw that he loved you, though I must confess, my darling, that I had no idea your feelings for him were any thing like so vivid as this day's events have proved them to be. But tell me, what has been the cause of your misunderstanding? You forget that I am quite in the dark in regard to that."

She raised her head from my shoulder and gazed at me in unfeigned amazement.

"Why, Caro! Of course it has only been on account of the hard feeling between John and him. Frank and I have had no misunderstanding whatever."

"Frank and you!" I cried, echoing her words in blank astonishment. "Why, Agnes, is it not Eddie Harrington whom you love?"

"Oh, Caro! surely you never thought that!" she said in a voice in which contempt, indignation, and amazement were curiously mingled. "Eddie Harrington, indeed! I never liked him



"MY CHILD! MY DARLING! WHAT IS ALL THIS?"—PAGE 95.

much at the best of times, and since you were taken ill he has grown to be absolutely insupportable."

"And can it be possible that you have loved Frank Nettleby all this time, and I have never suspected it?" I cried, still incredulous, and again the blushing face drooped upon my shoulder as she murmured—

"How could you help seeing it? I thought of course you knew."

"And he—does Frank love you? I mean, has he told you so?"

"Oh, yes!" was the whispered response, "ever since the night of that little party in his rooms. Miss Jenny guessed what I felt, I know, for she walked off with Eddie that night and let Frank take me home, and it was coming home that he told me. He asked me to be his wife, and I told him yes, if you were willing, Caro, you and John."

"And I was never told of this, Agnes," I said a little reproachfully. "Have I deserved such treatment?"

"Indeed, indeed, I could not help it; don't you remember the day after the party you were ill? and the next was the commencement of your fever. I had not the slightest chance to tell you then, and since that you—you wouldn't let me."

How blind, how incredibly blind had I been! Even yet I could not believe that all the fanciful fabric I had been rearing since Eddie Harrington's return was absolutely without foundation.

"And you really never cared for Eddie at all?" I asked.

"I can't bear him," she rejoined pettishly.

"But surely, Agnes, I can not have been deceived in thinking that he loves you? Poor boy! He has been sharper-sighted than I, and this, then, is the cause of his constant melancholy."

Agnes laughed outright.

"Oh, you foolish, foolish Caro! What fun it would be if his learned lordship could hear you. I think it would ruffle his imperturbability if any thing could. What you have been thinking about I can not imagine, but Frank and I saw how matters stood long, long ago. Edwin Harrington cares more for one of your raven tresses than he does for poor foolish me, body and soul."

I colored with indignation.

"Hush! Agnes, you forget the impropriety of such language when addressed to me. The affection which I have no doubt my husband's brother really feels for me, is too sacred an emo-

tion to be made the subject of such indelicate remarks. But we have strangely wandered from our original theme. You have not yet told me what it is that has changed my blithe Agnes into the sorrowful maiden who so lately wept upon my breast?"

The bright face was again overshadowed.

"There is nothing that you can not guess without my telling you. You know how angry John is with Frank. Well, Frank is just as much displeased with John. He says that John has insulted him so grievously, that even for my sake he can never come beneath his roof again. He calls John such dreadful names, and seems so determined never to be friends with him again, that it makes me wretched to hear him. And then I get to see him so seldom now. He can not come here, and, of course, Caroline, I would not go anywhere to meet him. And so it has been only by chance that I could see him at all, and it makes him so impatient and angry that he hardly seems like his old self. And oh! sister, he has been urging me lately to marry him right away—not to tell John any thing about it, but I would not do that for the world. See here, this is what has troubled me so this morning," and slipping her hand beneath her pillow, she drew forth a note which she handed to me.

"Frank met me at church last evening, and walked home with me. He gave me this note to give to you, and he says that this must decide it all, for if you will not consent, and I will not give up John Harrington, I must give up him. I have been so miserable, you can't imagine, Caro. I almost wished this morning that the doctor might say I was going to die. I did not know what I ought to do. I was afraid to give you the note. He talks so dreadfully of John, that I was sure you would be more angry with him than ever. I am sure I can not guess how all this terrible quarreling has come about." And as she finished her incoherent speech, I was again obliged to resume my own burden of woe, which in the interest I had taken in her story I had for the moment laid down. A fierce anger against Frank Nettleby filled my soul. How dared he blacken my husband's fame in the eyes of this innocent girl! Against her at least John Harrington had never sinned, and it was cruel, wickedly cruel, to try to turn her heart away from him.

I was careful however to disguise this feeling from Agnes, and opening the note, I read as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. HARRINGTON—My dear friend may I not call you?—for such most fondly do I hope that you will

CHAPTER XVI.

EDDIE HARRINGTON'S PASSION.

It was only after a severe struggle with myself that I could bring my mind to the task of writing to Frank Nettleby. I could not do so without virtually acknowledging my husband's crime, and the justice of Frank's opinion of him. Yet for Agnes's sake it must be done. My happiness was wrecked, but hers I still could secure, and I must do so at whatever cost to myself.

"After all," I murmured bitterly, "the true shame and disgrace consist in the crime itself, not in its being known to Frank Nettleby."

When I was calm enough to bring my mind to the task, I descended to the dining-room for the purpose of answering the note. My own desk was deficient in some article of stationery that I needed, so I seated myself at John's escritoire to write.

I re-read Frank's letter. There was much in it that had wounded me cruelly, yet upon a re-perusal, I could but feel grateful for the lenient manner in which my husband's crime had been alluded to, and though "ridiculous" seemed to me a strangely inappropriate adjective to apply to a midnight burglary and an attempt to murder, yet I was too thankful for the delicacy that spared my feelings by avoiding harsher language, to quarrel with the words that had been used. I hesitated for a long time how to address my new correspondent; his newly-discovered relations to Agnes had given me a right to express the sisterly affection I had long felt for him, so after much reflection, I wrote as follows:

"DEAR FRANK—For dear you are and long have been to me, scarcely more so now than heretofore, though to-day I learn, for the first time, that I am soon to claim you for a brother—Unhesitatingly do I commit my sister's happiness to your hands, and the happiest day my future life can know, will be the one which makes her your loved and honored wife. I shall be disengaged to-morrow morning, and shall be glad to see you here. I think I can promise that you shall meet no one during your visit save Agnes and myself. With warmest wishes for your happiness, believe me, your friend, CAROLINE HARRINGTON."

As I penned the last word, a heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder. With a startled cry, for I had been so absorbed in my occupation that I had heard no one approach me, I turned, and beheld my husband. His face was absolutely livid with rage, and his eyes glared upon me like those of a maniac, while the hand that rested upon my shoulder grasped me so forcibly as to cause me actual pain.

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter with you?" I cried, terribly frightened by his strange demeanor.

prove to be to me—Again do you see me before you in the light of a sutor. God grant that I may now be more successful than I was of yore—"

"He told me all about your having been his first love, Caro," interpolated Agnes, as she read the note over my shoulder, "but I don't mind it in the least now."

"I presume the trouble John has brought upon us all by his ridiculous conduct, has been yet more severely felt by you than by me, though, I assure you, the sundering of a life-long friendship has fallen upon me very heavily. Of course I dare not express my indignation openly in addressing you, though he has wronged you even more than he has myself, and knowing this, you can not deny me your sympathy. If I have been too blunt, forgive me. Knowing as you must how impossible it is that any intimacy can ever again exist between your husband and myself, you will feel for my embarrassing position, I know, and for your dear sister's sake, if not for mine, aid me in removing the barriers that this miserable estrangement has built up between us. Agnes will have told you that I love her, though that you must have known before, for how utterly impossible would it be to know and *not* to love her. You are the only one whose claims upon either her duty or her affection I can recognize. To you then I say, give her to me for my wife, and, with God's help, I will make her happy. My life shall be devoted to the endeavor, and never will I cease to be grateful to you for the blessing with which you thus will crown my life. Dear Mrs. Harrington, may I not call upon you, and in person plead my cause? I had sworn that I would never set foot within John Harrington's doors again, but even that humiliation I will descend to, rather than endure longer this maddening suspense. Write me, I beseech you, if only a single line, and tell me when and where I can see you, and by so doing command forever the gratitude, as you have always possessed the admiration and respectful esteem of

"FRANK NETTLEBY."

"Do tell me, Caro, what has been the cause of this dreadful misunderstanding?" said Agnes pleadingly. "Frank will not, though I have almost quarreled with him in begging him to do so, and I only stopped questioning him because he said that it would not be proper for me to hear. And yet you know all about it, it seems. Do tell me, Caro?"

"Frank was quite right. The story is not fit for you to hear, so I certainly shall not inform you of it," I said, rising to leave the room, for the shame and agony which overpowered me I could not hope much longer to conceal.

"At least," she cried, catching my dress to detain me, "tell me this much—I must know, indeed I must!—Was it Frank's fault? Is it any thing he has done?"

Justice both to Frank and to her demanded that I should speak, though I felt as if I would rather have died than done so.

"No!" I said, "Frank is not in the least to blame." And the miserable confession wrung from me, I rushed to my own room, there in its friendly solitude to weep the bitterest tears that outraged pride and wounded love ever wrung from woman's tortured heart.

"You dare—you dare—to write to that man!" he gasped, in a voice hoarse and inarticulate with passion.

"Yes! I do dare," I cried, wrenching myself from his grasp, indignant at the tone he assumed to me. "I am sure I can not conceive why you should hate Frank Nettleby so bitterly. At all events I will not visit upon his head a fault that has been wholly yours."

"Beware! Caroline, beware!" he said, his voice trembling with illy-repressed passion. "There is a point beyond which endurance must give way. In my great love for you I have borne and forborne more than mortal man ever did before. But if I have pitied rather than condemned, it has only been because I have believed you an innocent, even though a tried and tempted woman. What must I think of you now, when, knowing your own frailty, you dare sit down in my house to pen your infamous letters to that more infamous man?"

I stared at him in terrified amazement. The anger seemed so disproportionate to the offense, that I could account for it in no other way than by believing his brain was affected.

"How long have you been carrying on this clandestine intercourse?" he furiously continued.

"Upon my word! John Harrington," I said, as soon as I could find breath to speak, "I believe you have taken leave of your senses. I don't know what you mean by 'clandestine intercourse.' Frank wrote to me yesterday a message, chiefly concerning Agnes, certainly an affair which is no business of yours, and I have answered him as I saw fit, and I do not choose to consider myself accountable to you for the manner in which I have treated my sister's private affairs."

"A lie! a lie! a base unwomanly lie! In the very face of that letter, in which mine own eyes have read the confession of your guilty love, you would fabricate this false story concerning your sister to impose afresh upon my credulity," and he pointed to the letter I had just written, and my eyes following the direction of his hand, I read the first line of the letter, "Dear Frank—For dear you are and long have been to me—"

I stood like one awaking from a troubled dream. Catching up both the letters, I thrust them into his hands.

"What monstrous thought have you been entertaining! Read the letters; read them both, and then tell me, if you can, what there is in them so terribly to excite you."

He needed no second bidding. Passionately

he tore open poor Frank's uncomplimentary note. He read first that and then my answer, and then again turning to Frank's letter, read it through the second time. As he finished, the papers dropped from his trembling hands. He leaned against the wall, white and exhausted. A stupid, bewildered look was in his eyes, and he spoke like one asleep—

"I—don't—understand. Caroline, what does it mean?"

"It means just what those letters say. Frank Nettleby has proposed for Agnes, and I have given my consent to their marriage."

"And you," he continued, in that same strangely bewildered tone—"Have you so far conquered your love for him that you can write to him thus coolly concerning his union with another?"

My cheeks were scarlet with indignation, and in a voice choked with shame and anger I answered—

"How could I conquer a passion that I never felt? You *know* I never loved Frank Nettleby."

A sudden change passed over his face. His cheeks flushed, his eyes gleamed with triumphant lustre.

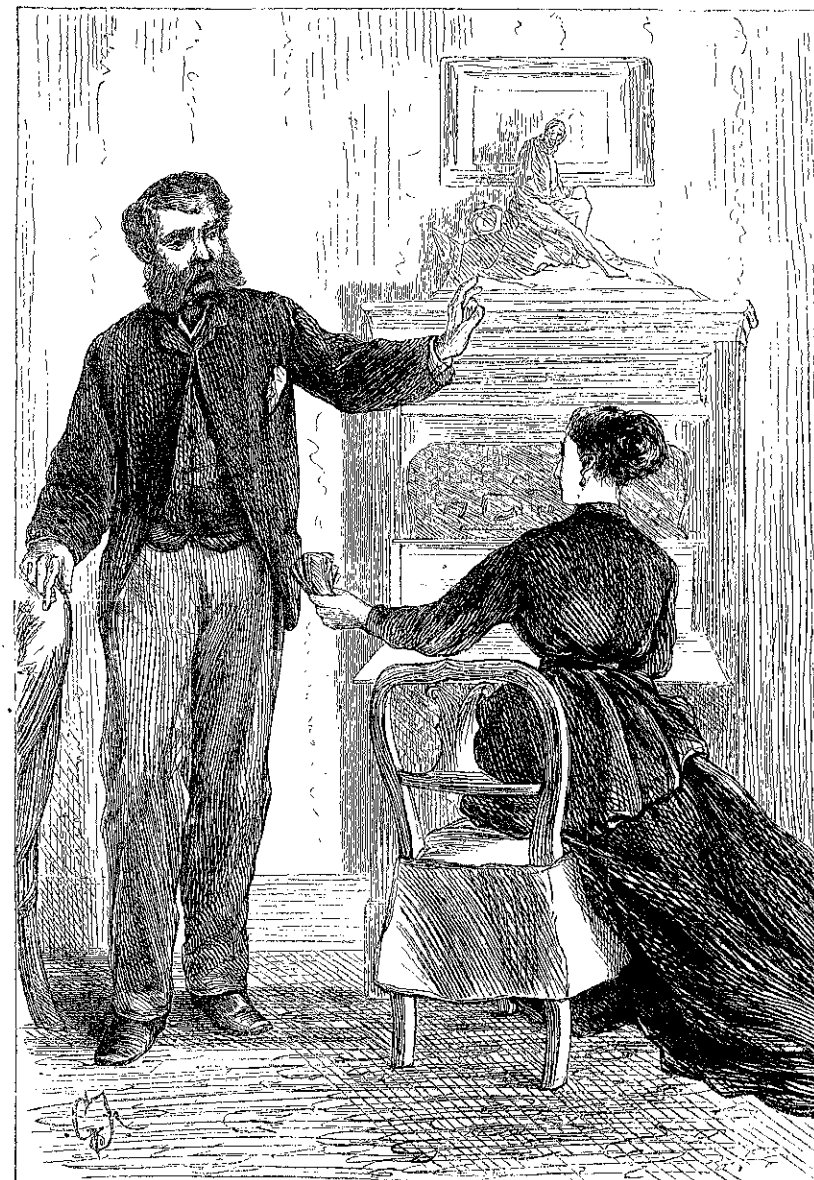
"Say it again, Caroline! tell me once more. I can not believe it. This sudden joy has almost crazed me. Tell me again that you do not love that man."

"Would I have rejected him when he asked me to become his wife, if I had loved him? Would I have married you, if to him I had given my heart? And as to loving him since—loving him now—oh, John! how can you insult me by so base a thought!" And overpowered with grief and vexation, I buried my face in my hands, and cried for very shame.

He threw himself on his knees by my side, and cast his arms around me, while vainly I sought to disengage myself from his embrace.

"My love! my wife! what is it then that has come between us? If no other man has won your heart, why do you no longer love me?"

I ceased my struggles to escape from him, and turned to look him in the face, indignant at his audacity. I turned and met those loving, beseeching eyes, whose counterpart had once looked up at me from the face of my little child—those eyes, whose loving light had once been dearer to me than hope of heaven itself—and wild with grief and passion, I started to my feet and tore myself from his encircling arms. I trembled for myself. My courage, my pride was failing me. Another glance into that tender, beseeching face, and I should have forgotten all—all, save that I loved him.



"READ THE LETTERS! READ THEM BOTH!"—PAGE 98.

"How dare you!" I cried. "How dare you touch me, when you know how bitterly you have wronged me! when you *must* know that Eddie has told me all."

Scarcely had the words fallen from my lips, when I would have given worlds to have called them back. I had broken my promise; and terrified at the possible consequences, I stopped short in the indignant rebuke I was about to deliver, and uttered not another word.

"Eddie, you say? What has he told you?" cried John eagerly. But I remained speechless. From the entreating tenderness of love to the red flush of sudden anger, his countenance again had changed. "The infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "He is at the bottom of all this, as I ought to have known. And to think I have never suspected him!" And then, without another word, with no attempt whatever at farther apology or appeal, he turned, as the passionate words escaped him, and abruptly quitted the room.

The new direction his rage had taken, gave me fresh cause for alarm. I was overwhelmed with self-reproach when I remembered the words that I had said. I had broken my solemn promise to Eddie, and even as he had prophesied, his brother's anger seemed disposed to vent itself most unreasonably upon him. It was poor consolation to me to know that my disclosure was an involuntary one, drawn from me in the excitement of the moment, and repented as soon as uttered. I had grievously injured my best friend; the one whose unselfish devotion to me had brought upon him the evil which of all others he most deprecated, his brother's wrathful displeasure. And what would be the result of my thoughtlessness? I turned sick with apprehension when I thought of the effect that an exhibition of John's fearful rage might have upon a nature so sensitive and affectionate as Eddie Harrington's.

"Yet, thank God!" I murmured, "there *can* be no actual violence. Eddie's gentleness prevents all possibility of that; and surely, when John becomes a little calmer, he can but see how unjust it is in him to visit his ire upon his innocent brother. Oh! if I could but have told him a little more about the manner in which I had discovered his guilty secret! If I could but have told him how all but the bare details had been known to me without any revelation from Eddie, and how even the little that he revealed to me had been drawn from him reluctantly and painfully by my urgent entreaties and distress."

John, when he left me, had also left the

house, as I knew by the opening and shutting of the street-door, and I had scarcely a doubt but that he had gone instantly to seek his brother, while still under the influence of the anger my imprudent words had aroused. What could I do? How could I bear this torturing suspense and fear? And so fully occupied were my thoughts with these distracting imaginations, that I found no leisure to recur to the strange revelation my husband had just made of his own suspicions concerning me. There was food enough for contemplation in the subject, but I was in no condition now for settled thought upon any matter save the all-engrossing one of the quarrel which I doubted not was at that time transpiring between the brothers.

An interminable hour dragged its weary length along, and at length the sound of the street-door opening caused me to spring breathless to my feet. A rapid step traversed the entry, then the door of the room in which I had been sitting was suddenly thrown open, and Eddie Harrington made his appearance.

By the solemn thanksgiving that silently ascended from my heart when I saw him standing well and unharmed before me, I realized the terrible nature of the fears that had oppressed me during the past hour.

With an irrepressible cry of joy I sprang toward him, and the next instant he had clasped me in his arms; I felt the throbbing of his heart as it beat tumultuously against mine, and I knew that he was fearfully agitated, so for a moment I permitted the embrace; then, gently disengaging myself, I seated myself upon the sofa, and motioned him to take the place beside me.

"You have seen John?" I said, as soon as I could speak.

A shudder passed over his frame, and his lips could hardly articulate the monosyllable—

"Yes!"

"Oh, Eddie!" I cried in the greatest distress as I marked his agitation, "can you ever forgive me? I have broken my promise, but God knows it was unintentionally done; the words slipped from me before I knew what I was saying. I can never forgive myself! What an ungrateful wretch you must think me!"

"Hush! not a word of reproach against yourself. I will not hear it. I think of you only as the dearest, loveliest, kindest of women; and if, in your service, I am called upon to lay down my life, I shall sacrifice it gladly."

I forgot to notice the impropriety of his

words and manner in the horrible idea they suggested to my mind.

"What do you mean? What has passed between you and John?"

"He came to my office an hour ago in the most violent fury I ever saw a human being give way to. I was alone as it chanced, and he forthwith commenced showering upon me the most abusive epithets that one man can apply to another. I was a traitor, and had betrayed my nearest and dearest ties; I was a spy, and had crept into his family but to create suspicion and disturbance; I was a villain, who, from the basest of motives, had won from him the heart of his wife, and had brought endless disgrace upon my father's name. In short, all that man could conceive of crime and villainess, he accused me of being guilty of; and for your sake, Caroline, I bore it in silence. I could not exonerate myself without accusing you, and rather than do that, had he then and there raised his hand against my life, I should have died and made no sign. My silence infuriated him more than the angriest responses could have done; he would have laid violent hands upon me had I not thrown open the window that looked upon the streets, and given him to understand that if he approached a foot nearer to me, I would summon the police to my assistance. This I could readily do, as he knew, and in impotent rage he finally left me, swearing that he would be bitterly revenged ere twenty-four hours had passed over our heads. And he will keep his word, Caroline," continued the young man, trembling with feverish excitement, while I, white with horror, listened to the terrible recital. "He had no weapon about his person when he was in the office, or I should not now be alive to tell this tale; but he will return again to the attack better prepared to wreak his vengeance upon my devoted head. What shall I do? advise me. If you fail me in this extremity, I am lost indeed."

My horror was merging into incredulity; the situation which he depicted was so dreadful that it seemed impossible.

"There is some mistake here, surely!" I said. "You have been so excited yourself, Eddie, that your fear has overpowered your reason. However angry and violent John may have been, I can not think there is the least danger of his doing you any personal injury—"

He interrupted me.

"I swear to you, Caroline, that what I have said to you is the unexaggerated truth. Can you think that the mere base fear of death could have thus excited me? I am no coward;

poorly as you may think of me, could my death bring happiness to you, I would stir not hand or foot to save my life. It is for your sake—yours and John's only—that I have felt the terror which you seem to think has overpowered my reason."

"I can not—I can not believe it!" I cried, half crazy between doubt and fear. "John Harrington's hand upraised against his brother's life! It is impossible. You are putting both yourself and me to useless pain. I know that you are deceived."

"Caroline," said Eddie, in a tone that made me shudder, "you do not know John Harrington as I know him. Be warned before it is too late. Could any thing but the most direct evidence have convinced you that once before, for far less provocation than he this time imagines himself to have received, he raised his hand against a fellow-creature's life? Do you know why he is now so angry with me? It is not because he believes me to have betrayed his trust—it is because he believes that you love me."

His voice had sunk almost to a whisper as he spoke the last few words, but as I heard them, the last lingering hope fled from my mind. The violent anger which John's jealousy had caused him to exhibit against Frank Nettleby, and which I myself had witnessed, made me realize with an agony of fear the danger which might really exist, had he now taken it into his head to be jealous of Eddie. In the former instance he had little or no cause for suspicion, and "trilled light as air" it had indeed been that had then aroused his fury. But in regard to Eddie it was far different. As I looked back over the past year, and remembered how strong a partiality I had always shown for the boy, and how careless I had been in concealing the fact, showing, too, that there was a secret between us, which a jealous man might easily have suspected to have been a guilty one—when I thought of all this, I felt as if my senses were deserting me—that Eddie was indeed right in his belief that his life was in danger.

"Fly!" I cried, starting to my feet. "You must not stay here a moment longer. Leave the house! Leave the city! Hide yourself anywhere from this unhappy man. My God! what will become of us all! Why was I ever born for such a miserable fate! Why do you tarry? Do you not know that your brother may return at any moment? Go! Do go, I beseech you!"

He too had risen to his feet, and in my wild, unthinking terror, I had laid my clasped hands



"YOU SHALL NOT LEAVE ME!"—PAGE 101.

beseechingly upon his arm, and now stood gazing into his face in voiceless agony. A strange look of triumphant elation came into that face as I gazed. Not a trace was left of the quiet, pensive Eddie Harrington I had hitherto known; for the first time I saw in him a resemblance to John; his lips quivered, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes gazed into mine with the same look of unfathomable feeling I had so often seen in John's. He caught my hands with a close, passionate grasp in both of his.

"I will go, Caroline; I will obey you now and always, at whatever cost to myself; but—must I go alone? My dearest! my dearest! I adore you; I can not leave you. I dare not leave you helpless in the power of that bold, bad man. Fly with me, Caroline—for I love you as never mortal woman was loved before! Fly with me—leave this man who has deceived and outraged you in a way that no woman ever could or should forgive; he has canceled every claim; he has ruptured every tie; he has changed your love into hatred, and henceforth he can inspire in your bosom no feeling save those of terror and disgust. Leave him, Caroline! Leave him to reap the fruit of his own doings; to learn too late the value of the woman he has betrayed."

Indignation lent me strength; I tore my hands from his, and stood with flashing eyes and heaving bosom before him.

"How dare you—how dare you—" passion choking my utterance—"how dare you insult me by such a proposition! Leave the room, leave the house, this instant, and never let me see your face again."

He gave no heed to what I said, but continued speaking more rapidly, more vehemently than before.

"You have thought me a boy; you have believed me cold and passionless as yourself. Awake, now, to know that you have deceived yourself; that it is a man, with a man's heart and a man's passions, who stands before you this day and tells you that he loves you. Hold! do not interrupt me. I will speak. It is no crime in you to listen, for you know and I know, that in the sight of Heaven you are divorced from that man whose name you bear. Listen to me then, for I love you; madly, devotedly. I am proud, I am selfish, I am ambitious, but for your sake I will give up reputation, fortune, fame, content to gain no other good in life than your love, for in that is comprised all that life holds good to me. Again, Caroline, my glorious, peerless Caroline, again

I beseech you to fly with me! Let us leave this land of cold and formal propriety, and with it leave all the sorrows and misfortunes of the past. Together let us seek a home in some bright southern land beyond the sea, where, with love that only natures such as ours can feel, we shall revel in a happiness that even Paradise can not surpass. Caroline! my love, my angel, say that you will be mine!" And with outstretched arms he advanced toward me.

Words would fail me to portray the emotions that swept over me while listening to this torrent of passion. Amazement, scorn, and anger by turns possessed me; but when he ceased, and I saw him approaching me with quickened breath and burning eyes, and knew that (save for Agnes in a room two stories above me) I was alone with him in the house, wild terror overpowered every other feeling, and I sprang to the door, hoping to escape from the room and fly to Agnes before he could offer me farther insult. But he was too quick for me. Guessing my intention, he intercepted my retreat by placing himself before the door.

"You shall not leave me! you must listen to me. For days and weeks, nay, for months have I looked forward to this moment. You are pale—you tremble; surely you do not fear me, Caroline? My love! my dearest! do you not know that I would die a thousand deaths rather than give you pain? Have pity upon me! If, in your cold, immaculate virtue, the voice of passion sounds to you only as the voice of guilt, even in your hatred for the sin, at least be woman enough to have pity for the sinner. If it be a sin to love you, then blame yourself that I am guilty, for you inspired the passion and nursed and encouraged the secret flame, until now it has become unquenchable. Do you not know how I have suffered—how I suffer still? You are not the icicle you would fain have me believe you. Tell me, is there no instinct of your nature that can teach you to pity the agony that you too are capable of feeling?"

There was truth in what he said. Too late I knew it, and marveled at my own blindness in having been so long deceived. I had encouraged him; I could not deny it. I had sought his companionship and welcomed him to mine ever since he had been an inmate of my home. That I had done so innocently, suspecting no evil, dreaming of no danger, was also true; but that could not exonerate me in my own eyes. Besides this, let those who read interpret the acknowledgment as they will, he was also right in attributing to me that instinct which

bade me feel for his sufferings as if I too were capable of experiencing the tortures of a guilty love. Ah! there was guilt in *my* heart as surely as there was in his; as undisguisable to my own conscience, though the world might have viewed its existence with a lenient eye. In my inmost heart I felt that to love John Harrington as I surely did, despising his character, abhorring his conduct, loving him spite of my reason and my principles, was to be guilty of as great a crime as that to which Eddie Harrington had but now confessed. That feeling made me humble enough to answer him with comparative calmness.

"If I have done you wrong, Mr. Harrington, I pray you to forgive me, and in token of my sincerity in making that request, I freely and unsolicited grant you *my* forgiveness for the grievous insult you have this day put upon me. Let me pass now, and let this dreadful interview fade forever into oblivion."

He made no motion to stand aside, but began again his mad appeal.

"Oblivion! Caroline, do you think oblivion can ever again come to me? While life remains, your image will ever reign supreme in my too constant heart. Do you remember the day that you spoke to me of woman's pride, and woman's love? Do you remember telling me then that the day that assured you of John's unworthiness, would see the death of your love for him? Well, Caroline, I loved you even then, but up to that day it had been with a hopeless passion. That you loved your husband I knew, and that there was any possibility of effecting a change in your feelings I could not hope; but from the moment you made to me that acknowledgment, hope sprang up in my heart, for I knew him to be unworthy, if you did not. There is no need to dwell on these remembrances; you discovered John's crime, and by your own acknowledgment he had forfeited your love, and then I fondly dreamed that I, perchance, might win his vacant throne. Do not tell me I have failed! I am no fool, and surely flattered vanity could not have deceived me into believing that I had been successful, had not your every word and action for the past six months lured me to believe what I had so madly hoped. If ever woman's conduct was intelligible to man, yours has endeavored to prove to me that I was not indifferent to you."

"I am too weak and sinful myself, Mr. Harrington," I said, forcing myself to speak steadily and distinctly, though the effort whitened my lips and shook my frame, "to venture to

express the indignation which your language ought to excite in me. What might have been the result of your dishonorable wishes, were your premises correct, it is scarcely profitable to inquire. There is one error however in your argument which, when discovered, will, I think, convince you of the fallacy of your conclusions. When I told you that I could not love a man whom I did not respect, I deceived you; but the deception was unintentional, for I did not know my own heart. To my shame I confess it—never in the days of my firmest faith in his virtue and goodness has my husband been so dear to me as now. In spite of my pride—in spite of my reason—in spite of all that I have professed and he has forfeited, I love him now with all the force and passion I am capable of feeling; and were he guilty of every crime that can disgrace his manhood—miserable woman that I am—I should love him still."

As I spoke the color gradually faded from his face, and now as he gazed upon me his countenance wore the ashen hue of despair. The solemnity of my tone carried conviction with it, and not for one moment did he question the truth of my asseveration. He bowed his head upon his hands, and I could see that a mighty struggle was going on within his breast. Presently he raised his head, and when he spoke his voice made me shudder, so strangely hollow and discordant had it become.

"I have staked my all upon this chance for love, and I have lost. Home—sister—friends—my dreams of ambition and my pride of intellect alike have perished from my grasp. I have made a great mistake, Mrs. Harrington, and perhaps have caused you not a little pain. I think I may safely promise you, however, that from henceforth you shall find no fault in Edwin Harrington. One boon I still must claim from your hands. You may perhaps remember—" and as he spoke a strange smile curved his white lips—"that my life is in imminent danger at the hands of that blood-thirsty gentleman whose step we may now at any moment expect to hear. As I told you, it is jealousy that at present inflames his mind—a feeling which you will doubtless be able very speedily to relieve. But, as I did *not* tell you, he is still ignorant of the share I have taken in developing his guilty secret. I endeavored, and very successfully I believe, to convince him that so far from knowing all the unpardonable details, you were only aware of the fact that he was at one time a clerk in Casey's establishment, and that your anger has been the result of the lie he told in denying it. Caroline, my request is this: that

you will not deceive him upon this point for twenty-four hours at least. Will you promise me? Remember, I am but asking of you a renewal of the pledge you formerly gave me, and which you have so grievously wronged me by violating even in part."

This was true, and as I could see no possible objection to renewing the promise for that limited time, I said so, and promised as he wished.

"Farewell, then," he said, extending his hand. "We perhaps shall never meet again; at least let us part friends."

Very reluctantly I gave him my hand, and he retained it with close pressure, spite of the uneasy efforts I made to withdraw it.

"Good-bye! Mr. Harrington," I said. "I shall try to forget this day's occurrences, and remember you only as the friend you have hitherto proved to me."

"And that is all!" he said. "No sympathy—no good wishes—not a single tear! Yet this is the woman for whom I have sacrificed every hope of my life; the only creature on God's earth I ever loved—the only one I ever shall love. I will not be so vilely defrauded! If I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage, shall that paltry pittance be denied me? By Heaven! no!" And before I could guess his intention, he had caught me in his arms, and bending over me, kissed me twice upon the mouth, passionate, fiery kisses, that brought the blood in torrents to my face and neck. Then, as suddenly, he released me, and ere I had recovered my senses sufficiently to comprehend the insult I had received, I heard the street door slam behind him, and Edwin Harrington had left his brother's house forever.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN HARRINGTON'S EXPLANATIONS.

It was a fortunate thing for me in the present excited state of my nerves, that I had no leisure to ponder over the bewildering events of the day. Active exertion did more toward restoring my mind to an even balance, than could any other remedy have done. Sarah had not yet resumed her sceptre, and I still was considered responsible for the smooth and regular working of the household machinery. Knowing therefore that supper *must* be prepared, and that there was no one but myself to prepare it, I was perforce obliged to exert myself, and the effort brought with it its own reward. Common sense returned to me while fulfilling my homely domestic duties, and the utter absurdity of the

melodramatic fears which Edwin Harrington's words and looks had conjured up, became very clearly apparent. The idea of John Harrington—the sober, self-contained "governor" of former days—my quiet, matter-of-fact husband—lurking about the streets of Boston with concealed weapons, ready to fall at any moment with deadly onslaught upon his helpless brother, was so utterly and entirely unnatural, that, spite of some very singular circumstantial evidence, that would obtrusively present itself to my mind, I dismissed the thought determinedly and successfully.

Jenny's entrance, too, upon her return from her daily labors, aided greatly in restoring me to composure. The overwrought feelings and excited passions which I had been suffering from in myself and others, were so utterly at variance with her sharp, cheery voice, and simple, unaffected ways, that they could not exist in her presence. Bewildered and uneasy as I could but be, I still, under the influence of her society and my own occupations, rapidly settled my mind into a tolerable state of composure.

"You need not wait tea for Eddie," she said, as she entered the kitchen. "He came to me just as I was leaving the store, and told me that he was about to leave the city. Some business for one of his clients, I believe. At all events, he bade me good-bye very affectionately, and said he would write to me from New York, telling me when to look for him back again."

Poor Miss Jenny! Who was to tell her that "her boy," as she so often called him, had gone from her, not for days or weeks, but for years, perhaps forever? I would not, certainly. He should tell of his own sins if they must be made known to her, for from no words of mine should she learn the shameful story of that day's proceedings. Eddie Harrington had passed from my life forever; at least I hoped so. Yet not the lightest of my many troubles was the thought of the sorrow that was brewing for my sister-in-law, and I could not altogether rid my conscience of an uneasy feeling that I was partially responsible for it.

Agnes had by this time joined us. "A little weak and shaky," she informed us, but feeling otherwise more than usually well and cheerful. And after waiting more than half an hour beyond the usual supper-time, and John not returning, we three women took our places at the meal without him.

"How long does he expect to be away?" asked Agnes indifferently, when informed by Jenny of Eddie's departure.

"He did not say; only a few days, I suppose, though he kissed me good-bye as affectionately as if he expected to be gone for years. How fond he is of me, the foolish boy! I don't believe he will ever learn to act and feel like a man."

"He may well love you, Jenny," I said, with quivering voice, for I saw a deeper meaning in that earnest farewell than was apparent to his unconscious sister. "I should think but very lightly of his heart if he could leave you without some signs of emotion—even"—I added somewhat hastily—"even for a few days."

"It has always amused me," said Agnes, laughing, "to hear you two women talk of Edwin as you do. To hear you, any one would suppose that he was some bashful, unsophisticated boy of eighteen, instead of being, as he is, a man wise enough, if not old enough, to outwit you both."

"How old is Edwin, Jenny?" I asked, suddenly prompted to the question by a strange suspicion that flashed that moment into my mind.

"Why, I hardly know; let me see," she said pensively. "Twenty-three or four; twenty-five, may be."

"Nonsense! Miss Jenny," said Agnes, a little tartly. "He is twenty-eight. I saw the record of his birth in the big Bible you keep on your table, up stairs."

"Well, my dear," Miss Jenny said placidly, not a whit ruffled by the contradiction, "perhaps you are right. It only seems to me the other day, however, that he was a little fellow no higher than my shoulder, and it is hard to believe the time has flown so quickly. I believe I was mistaken, though; let me see—he was born in 18—, yes! that makes him twenty-eight, sure enough. Who would have thought it, though!"

"Not many persons, that is true," replied Agnes. "He is certainly the youngest-looking person for his age I ever saw. But there is nothing of the boy about him except his face, you may take my word for that."

Sharp-sighted Agnes! Where had she learned the wisdom that I had so utterly failed to acquire? I said nothing, while the two chatted on, but the information I had just received gave me fresh food for thought. How my cheeks tingled when I remembered the manner in which I had conducted myself toward Edwin Harrington ever since I had known him! It was small wonder that he, a man several years my senior, should have easily misunderstood the condescension, the petting, the fa-

miliar freedom with which I had uniformly treated him. What could he have thought the occasion of it, except an undue interest in himself? I could have cried from shame at the remembrance of my own folly. And with the sound of his dishonorable words still ringing in my ears, the fire of those insulting kisses still burning on my lips, I marveled indeed that I could ever have been so deluded.

I followed Agnes to her own room when she retired that night.

"I want you to explain to me one portion of your love affairs that has mystified me not a little," I said to her, after first telling her of the letter I had written to Frank, and setting her mind completely at rest in regard to her own future, so far as it lay in my power to influence it. "I still can not understand how it is that I was led so completely astray from the very beginning, in thinking that you and Eddie were lovers. I certainly had good grounds for my belief at one time, for you were always talking and whispering together at the most unseemly times and places. I came upon you accidentally many times, to find him talking earnestly and fervently, and you blushing and confused; and you would start away from him at my approach, shrinking from notice with every mark of confusion. Now, pray tell me, if this conduct was not caused by love, what did cause it?"

"It was caused by love," replied the girl, laughing and blushing, "but not love for him, my dear sister, I assure you. In those days he used to be forever teasing me about Frank, whom I had already begun to think a great deal of. He used to always have some long tale to tell me of something Frank had said about me, how much he admired me, and all such nonsense, and I liked to listen to it all very well, for of course I believed it, though Frank has told me since that it was all fabrication from beginning to end, and that he never talked to Edwin Harrington or to any one else about his feelings for me, until he had talked to me first. Do you know, I used to have an idea then, that Master Eddie wanted to make you believe he was in love with me? I had no idea what his object was, and I haven't now, either. Perhaps it was all imagination on my part, but there is one thing certain, Caro, though I know you won't believe it: Eddie Harrington is not nearly so innocent as he tries to make people believe. He is a real, downright humbug, that is what I think of him, and I have often wondered how any one so clever as you are, can be so deceived by him."

Oh, wise, wise Agnes! Was not I growing

every moment more ready to confess that my experience had at length taught me what your maiden instincts had so long ago discovered? However, I did not deem it expedient to enlighten her as to my present opinion, so after a little more chat, I bade her good-night and sought my own apartment.

It was some time after I had gone to bed before John came home. Since our quarrel, he had occupied the room adjoining mine, and I very seldom saw him of an evening if he went out after supper, as it had been my custom, ever since my illness, to retire to my room early in the evening. This night, however, instead of passing on immediately to his own room, he stopped at my door and rapped hesitatingly upon it.

"Are you asleep, Caroline?" he asked, in a strange, eager voice.

"I have gone to bed," I answered, "but I can rise again if you wish me to do any thing for you."

He was silent a moment, but then answered, I thought, in a disappointed tone—

"No! never mind, I won't trouble you. I had hoped to have spoken to you to-night, but perhaps it will be better to wait until morning. Good-night!" and then, before I had made up my mind whether or not to accede to what he so evidently wished, he had passed on, and entered his own apartment.

My conscience rebuked me very loudly for my selfishness, and yet it was not altogether selfishness that made me so disinclined to a *ré-à-tête* with him that night. I was determined that by no carelessness of mine should the promise I had given again be broken, and I really feared for the firmness of my resolution, had it been put to the test of another interview with my husband as exciting in its nature as the one of the previous afternoon. Once the twenty-four hours to which I had pledged myself had elapsed, and I should be as anxious as he for a full and clear understanding of how the ground really lay between us. I had resolved to place before him a full account of his brother's conduct, humiliating as the confession would certainly be to me. I felt that it was his due, so long as I bore his name, and accepted his protection, to keep from him no secret which, as my husband, he ought to know, and nothing would I extenuate or hold back. My innocent encouragement of what I considered the brotherly affection of a boy; my extortion from his unwilling lips of John's fatal secret; my strange misunderstanding of Agnes's feelings, and finally the disgraceful interview which had termi-

nated forever the intimacy between Edwin Harrington and myself. Not an insult which I had received would I conceal; and somehow, in spite of all the harsh suspicions which had been awakened in my breast by the singularity of my husband's conduct, I yet instinctively felt that he would give me no cause to repent my confidence. True, Eddie had assured me that when under the influence of passion or jealousy John was a totally different man from his ordinary self—that all reason seemed to desert him, and that he could become a very fiend for wickedness. True, I had myself seen him, from the slightest causes, become so overpowered with anger, that I could hardly help believing that if he had really any cause for suspicion, he might allow his anger to carry him to almost any length. Yet, in spite of all, I believed in him; believed in his honor, his affection, his good sense; and I relied upon these qualities to control him, even when he knew how terrible a cause for anger he had against his brother. I relied upon them, I say, even while my reason assured me that I had every cause to believe that my faith would ultimately be completely overthrown.

So musing, I at length fell asleep, and it was bright day-light ere I again opened my eyes upon life and its realities.

I heard Miss Jenny moving in her room overhead, and knew that she would soon descend in readiness for breakfast. So, ashamed of my tardiness, I hurried through my morning toilet, and descended to the kitchen to commence my neglected duties. I was there met by the agreeable sight of a genial fire burning in the stove, while upon it the kettle was singing cheerily. The good genius who had thus performed these earliest household duties, was seated in front of the stove with the morning paper in his hand.

"Oh, John!" I cried apologetically, "I am so sorry. I really overslept myself this morning, and I am afraid I shall keep you all waiting for breakfast."

"It is of no consequence in the world, so far as I am concerned," he said; "you know I am a gentleman of leisure, and an hour or two lost in the morning does not trouble me much. I am glad you slept well, Caro; I did myself, also; better than I have slept in any night since Frank Nettlesby's party."

I looked curiously at him, and he laughed at my evident amazement. Never had I seen such a change in any one as had taken place in him during the past twenty-four hours. He looked ten years younger than he had yesterday

done. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkled, and his voice was as joyous and light-hearted as that of a boy. What had become of that jealous monster, on murderous thoughts intent, whom Eddie, but yesterday, had depicted to me in such frightful colors? Unconsciously I heaved a great sigh of relief, and with that sigh a mountain of care, of whose existence I had hardly been conscious, was lifted from my heart, and I laughed too, I knew not why, as I met his eyes.

"Yes!" he said, answering my mute inquiry. "You are right. I am changed indeed. The blind, jealous fool who rushed from your presence yesterday will never return to you. 'Richard's himself again,' and can defy all the ghosts of all the dead and buried passions that ever disfigured either your life or his own, to transform him again into the self-tormenting wretch he so long has been."

"But why—?" I commenced, and again he answered, before my lips had formed the question—

"Common sense has returned to me. One ray of truth has illumined the chaos of my imaginings, and now all is light and peace."

"You have grown poetical, I perceive, along with all other changes," I said, a little crossly, for I could not forget that however his mind might have been illumined, mine was still groping in darkness; a darkness that never could be illumined while the barrier his crime had reared between us maintained its position.

"I have not the time to seek an explanation of your mystical speeches now. Help me lift out the table, please; it is high time breakfast was ready."

He obeyed my mandates in a fashion, that is, he himself lifted the heavy table from its position against the wall, and placed it in the middle of the room, utterly disdainful the assistance I stood ready to afford.

"Get to your cooking if you are in such a hurry. I will try my hand at setting the table. Spare me those scornful glances, Mrs. Harrington; I am quite competent to the task, I assure you."

What could it all mean? I asked myself, as, dreading my dignity should yield to the joyous face and cheery voice, I yielded him the occupation he sought, and busied myself with other preparations for the meal. Presently he stood by my side again, and, as I hammered viciously at a beef-steak, he re-commenced the attack.

"Any thing else I can do for you, my dear?"

"No!" I curtly replied.

"Well, then, perhaps you will let me tell you what I think you will consider good news. Frank Nettleby and I are friends again, and on Monday I resume my old position in the store."

"I am glad of that," I said, looking up at him, with tears of joy starting to my eyes; "glad, of course, that Agnes's lover and you are friends, but still gladder to think that you have at last found suitable employment. I have felt so sorry for you, John, lately; I could not help it, in spite of—"

"In spite of what?" he questioned eagerly, as I stopped abruptly; but I paid no attention to the question.

"Tell me all about it, can you?—why you quarreled, and how you have both succeeded in forgetting your grievances?" For surely, I thought, if a knowledge of John's crime had been the cause of the quarrel, he never could have resumed his position in the store.

He flashed deeply, and his eyes sank before mine, as he answered, at first somewhat confusedly, but afterward rapidly and distinctly—

"I told you yesterday, Caro, you know, what an absurd impression I had for months been laboring under. I know now how utterly foundationless my suspicions have been, and what a consummate fool I must have appeared both to you and Frank. If you knew all, perhaps you would not think me quite so mad as you now must; but I can not tell you my excuses now; indeed, they are no excuses, after all, and I shall never offer them as such. The most I can hope is, that they may serve to extenuate my folly a little; excuse it, nothing can. I should have believed in you, in spite of mischief-makers; and had I done so—but I see you are impatient to hear of my interview with Frank, and explanations of all that preceded it will come in due time, for henceforth, Caroline, there shall be no misunderstandings between us; whatever may be our troubles, I will have no more mysteries."

"That is my own determination," I said, as I met bravely the honest eyes that so fearlessly gazed into mine. "And I, too, will have a story to tell at no distant day, that will perhaps grieve and anger you not a little. But go on with your own account now."

"When I left you yesterday, I went immediately to Edwin—but perhaps he has told you of what occurred between us? He promised me that he would when I left him, though I hardly believed at the time that he intended to keep his word."

"He didn't," I remarked concisely; for I need scarcely say that to not one syllable of the

graphic story with which Master Eddie had yesterday regaled me, did I now give credence.

And John resumed—

"I feared as much. Then that, too, is reserved for me to tell, but the task must be deferred until a later date. It was dark when I went to seek Frank, for as I was desirous of securing a private interview with him, I waited until I knew that I should find him in his rooms, and then I sought him there. I was fortunate enough to find him alone, and in a very few words I explained to him how the web of misunderstandings which my blindness had woven around our friendship, had been severed by the discovery I had made of his feelings toward Agnes. I told him of my past sufferings and my present remorse; I humbled my pride before him as I never thought I could have done to a fellow-man, and entreated his pardon. I pleaded my cause bravely, Caroline, for I persuaded myself that in winning his pardon, I was also winning yours. And like the noble-hearted, generous fellow he is, he granted me unconditionally the grace I sought, complete oblivion of the past, and a cordial renewal of more than our old friendship for the future. I communicated to him the purport of your letter, inviting him in my own name, as well as in yours, to call upon you at the time you appointed, which he faithfully agreed to do."

"You have told me nothing about the origin of your quarrel with him, John; whether it was your fault or his, or when it transpired."

He looked a little foolish.

"I do not feel at all anxious to tell you, Caro, I assure you; but as I have promised to make a clean breast of it, I will conceal nothing. As I told you yesterday, the cause of our estrangement was the belief existing in my breast (how impressed there is too long a story now to tell), that you loved Frank, as you had never loved me. Do not insist upon my telling more. You can not guess the mortification which even the bare remembrance of my folly now occasions me. Your wifely purity I never for one moment doubted; hardly in that moment of overwhelming passion when I discovered you, flying from your home, as jealousy whispered, to the arms of your lover. I believed even then, mad with passion though I was, that your mind was affected by the struggle you were undergoing between your love and your duty. The fever which had already seized upon you, proved that I had partially surmised the truth, and that for your actions that night you were really not responsible. But though I could feel no anger against you when your conduct

was thus explained, my ire against Nettleby was all the more bitter. I sought him in the first days of your illness, when I was almost out of my senses with jealousy, rage, and the fear of losing you; and branding him with every epithet of shame and contempt that one man could apply to another, I revealed to him the base suspicions that were goading me to madness, and, deaf to remonstrance or explanation, I declined all farther intercourse with him, of whatsoever nature, and forbade him to communicate with any member of my family, under pain of I know not what indefinite threat of vengeance. I do not suppose my threats would have had much effect, had my suspicions been true, or my accusations just ones; as it was, imagining I dare say the mortification my insane jealousy must be productive of to you, and willing to save you all possible annoyance, he obeyed my behests as literally as if he had really feared the mad threats I had made. That is all I have to confess, Caroline; and now tell me that you have forgiven entirely all my stupidity, for, indeed, it has been no worse, as you will know when you have heard all that I can bring forward in extenuation; yet, I have a longing to hear you say that you will forget and forgive all the wrongs my jealousy has inflicted upon you, from your own kind and generous heart, without waiting to hear my excuses, or to judge the extent of my misdemeanors."

He looked at me so eagerly, yet so confidently, seeming so certain of receiving the answer that he desired, that my heart ached within me when I remembered that, while all his cause of complaint against me had been completely swept away, mine against him still remained in full force. I could not conquer the trembling in my voice as I answered—

"Your sins of jealousy and suspicion, John, I find no difficulty both in forgetting and forgiving, for, until yesterday, I did not even know that they existed. You *must* know—it can not be possible that you have so long failed to know that my alienation has sprung from a far different, a far more serious cause."

He looked at me wistfully, and yet a little perplexedly too, as he said—

"Like yourself, I can not understand how you have failed to know that it was jealousy of Frank Nettleby that has caused my almost unpardonable conduct toward you; and I have as surely thought that it was love of him which had turned your heart from me. You say it is not that; you tell me that you have never even suspected my jealousy; in Heaven's name, what is it then that can so have altered you?"

I hung my head mutely; not yet had come the time for my confession, and I dared not say a word, lest I should again unconsciously break the promise I had given the day before. John looked at me, as I stood before him, with eyes so eager, so questioning, that I felt as if they were reading my very soul.

"I know you do not love another," he said, in a voice whose pathos stirred my spirit to its inmost depths. "My wife, do you not love me?"

I turned my white face toward him; my eyes looked into his, and the truth sprang to my lips as so long it had been in my heart—

"God knows I do; I can not help it."

His face was lighted up as if by magic; every shadow of doubt and perplexity vanished as he looked at me, and in a voice quivering with exaltation he said—

"Then all is well. So long as we love each other, my Caroline, no difficulties, no estrangements can seriously impair our happiness. Tell me what it is that I have done to anger you? Once brought to light, I know this hideous spectre will prove to be the merest nothing that ever an imaginative woman allowed to torture her."

"Don't force me to become your accuser, John," I said, and the tears started to my eyes. "Your own conscience must surely supply you with an all-sufficient cause for my estrangement."

He looked puzzled for a moment, and then with a start, as if the idea had but just occurred to him—

"Surely!" he said, "you have not been allowing that miserable affair at Casey's to cause all this trouble between us? It was all hushed up at the time, you know, and I had hoped it was quite forgotten; I would have told you all about it myself, long ago, had I not hoped to spare you useless pain by keeping the knowledge from you. Your pride must indeed have been of a fiercer nature than I had ever dreamed it, if you are going to allow such a trifle as that to influence you so long and deeply."

I was almost paralyzed at the audacity which could speak of so heinous a crime in so flippant a manner. When I spoke again it was in a cold, hard voice, that showed no signs of softening or relenting.

"A trifle or not, Mr. Harrington—and I suppose by familiarity with crime we may learn to look upon any deed, however horrible, as a trifle—I think you will find it all-sufficient to hinder me from ever again being, in aught save the name, your wife. My pride has still enough vitality to preserve me from any companionship

that I can avoid, with the man who has brought dishonor upon my father's name."

"Nonsense!" he said, and he actually laughed, a joyous, exultant laugh that almost provoked me to a flood of angry tears. "My dearest girl, if that romantic notion of yours is all that is to intervene between me and happiness, I do not despair of proclaiming myself, ere the new year has come upon us, the happiest man in Boston. By this, I swear it!" And placing a hand on either side of my head, he lifted my face to his, and, stooping, kissed me.

I was terribly indignant, but, fortunately for him, the entrance of Agnes to inquire concerning the mysterious non-appearance of breakfast, caused my wrath to pass off speechlessly, and in triumph and good nature my husband took his place opposite me at the table.

No farther opportunity for a matrimonial tête-à-tête did I afford Mr. Harrington that day. I kept Agnes with me constantly while I went about my household duties, and ere they were all accomplished, Frank Nettleby made his appearance. I will not detain the reader by a prolonged account of the conversation which then ensued. It was a painfully embarrassing one to me in some respects, yet, relieved as I was of the one great fear that he (Frank) was cognizant of my husband's crime, all other grievances seemed but minor evils.

Frank, himself, was only too glad to have the course of his love affairs thus suddenly and pleasantly made smooth before him, to quarrel at all as to the manner in which the affair was settled, and with his natural generosity of temper, tacitly consented to forget and forgive, entirely and immediately, all the disagreeable circumstances which had occurred in the last six months. Eager and enthusiastic as ever, Frank Nettleby at thirty was as self-satisfied and confiding a lover as he had been at five-and-twenty, and his extravagant devotion to Agnes was disturbed by no doubts as to the complete reciprocity of feeling on her part. Nor do I think he had any cause for doubt, for I fully believe that then, as now, my little sister loved her handsome adorer with all the strength and passion of her nature, which, if not a very deep, was as innocent and guileless a one as ever was possessed by woman.

Frank, in his old unceremonious fashion, stayed to dine with us, and John, seeing no probability of quiet at home, and probably not yet able to feel himself quite comfortable in his friend's society, with a muttered apology betook himself to the streets, and I, leaving the lovers to their own devices, quietly sought my

room, to muse in quiet over the odd and exciting events that had transpired within the past few days.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRANGE DEVELOPMENTS.

SOMETIME during the course of the afternoon Mr. Nettleby departed, not however until he had extorted from his *fiancé* the promise to accompany him in the evening to some place of amusement which he imagined held forth particular attractions. The boy lady had only consented upon the condition that either I or Miss Jenny could be persuaded to accompany her. I proved obdurate; but Miss Jenny finally yielded to the joint persuasions of the lovers, so it chanced, after tea, when the three had departed, that John and I were left alone, to luxuriate as freely as we pleased in the pleasures of a confidential interview.

Mr. Harrington had accompanied the trio to the door, and after fastening it upon them, he returned to the parlor to find me standing by the front window, gazing blankly into the gas-lighted streets, longing for yet dreading the coming explanations, which in my own mind I had quite resolved should settle at once and forever the future relations which were to be maintained between us.

John's first act, upon entering, was to come to my side, and pass his arm around my waist. I pushed him away from me with all the strength I could muster.

"Once for all, let me tell you, John Harrington, this must not, shall not be. If you persist in forcing your affection upon me, spite of what I have told you concerning the nature of my feelings toward you, I will leave you immediately and forever. I will, though my heart should break in doing so."

He looked at me, gravely indeed, but with by no means so submissive an air as I had intended him to exhibit.

"Very well, my dear, I will do my best to refrain from such demonstrations of affection if they really displease you, but you must not expect me to act the part of a despairing lover, for I tell you candidly I don't despair, by any means. Be seated now, and let me hear the explanation which you have been kind enough to promise me."

Now I had fully intended, in my mental anticipations of this moment, giving my husband a complete synopsis of my intercourse with his brother, from the very beginning of our intimacy; telling, in the course of the tale, the manner in

which his dark secret had been revealed to me, and finally winding up with an account of yesterday's interview. But somehow, when once I started to speak of Edwin, my mind, still excited with the disclosures of the preceding day, reverted continually to them, and before I knew it, I found myself pouring into my husband's attentive ear a complete description of the conversation which had so distressed me; incoherent indeed, from tears and blushes, yet at all events sufficiently clear to render the whole affair tolerably evident to my hearer.

He listened to me throughout in silence, a contemptuous smile playing round his lips during the account of the imaginary interview between his brother and himself; but gradually, as I proceeded, a dark frown settled upon his brow, while his compressed lips and hands involuntarily clenched, told how powerful was the restraint he was putting upon himself to repress a more noisy demonstration of his wrath, until, when I told him of the concluding words of my would-be lover, and the insulting kisses which he had dared to press upon my lips, then a savage oath, the first I had ever heard him give utterance to, burst from his lips, and springing from his chair, he paced the room in violent agitation.

It was some moments ere he could sufficiently control himself to speak to me again; then he came and stood by my chair, and said in a voice more of sorrow than of anger—

"He is my brother, Caroline; what can I do?"

Relieved beyond measure to find, that the anger I had so much dreaded to arouse he was certainly able to hold in suitable control, I responded hastily—

"Do! you can do nothing, of course. There is nothing to be done. I do not imagine that Eddie will make his appearance before either of us again at a very early date, and the wisest course for us to pursue, for our own sakes and for Jenny's, is to bury the whole affair in utter oblivion."

"You are right," he said gravely, resuming his seat as he spoke. "Any disturbance made in the affair would bring more mortification upon you than upon him. It is only one more count in the indictment against him. Heaven help him when it comes to be settled!"

"John," I said, a little timidly, after a moment's pause, "how happens it that you can look upon this affair in so rational a light, when you were so unreasonably angry with poor Frank for so much lighter a cause?"

"It is *your* love I am jealous of, Caroline.

not theirs. All the world may adore you if all the world pleases, and so long as I am satisfied you give no returning affection, it will disturb me not a whit. Frank Nettleby I was fool enough to believe you loved. Edwin Harrington—" He stopped short, but the contemptuous shrug of his shoulders more than finished the sentence.

"Ah! you don't know all yet," I began, intending then to tell of my own mistaken conduct toward my brother-in-law, but I was interrupted by a ring at the door-bell, which John left the room to answer. He returned shortly, and tossed a letter into my lap.

"A very bulky missive for you, delivered by a little ragged urchin, who scampered off as soon as he had thrust the document into my hands."

I tore open the envelope in some surprise, and glanced at the signature.

"Edwin Harrington."

I could not repress an ejaculation of dismay, which made John, who had picked up a newspaper over which he was glancing, evidently determined to evince no curiosity, look up at me rather anxiously and say—

"Nothing wrong, Caro, I hope?"

"No," I replied briefly, and then turning to the commencement of the letter, began eagerly its perusal. I did not finish it until sometime later, for the disclosure which the first few pages revealed to me, rendered me for a time quite incapable of comprehending the rest.

For the sake of unity, however, I will transcribe the precious epistle in all the perfection of its audacious villainy. It was dated the preceding evening, and ran thus:

MY ADORED CAROLINE.—For, spite of fate—spite of your husband—spite of yourself even, that title I have a right to use, and no one can deprive me of the privilege.—In my interview yesterday with my sagacious brother, he exacted from me a promise that I would reveal to you the ingenious little train of circumstances, principally originated by myself, by which he was induced to believe that Mr. Nettleby had the honor of reigning supreme in your affections, to the utter exclusion of his marital claims. With the charity which it is his custom to exercise in judging of the motives and intentions of your humble servant, he received my promise, so unhesitatingly given, with marked incredulity, and I readily saw that he had very little idea I should keep my word. Consequently, for the express purpose of disconcerting his sage conclusions (more especially as I can conceive of no earthly motive for withholding from your knowledge a series of stratagems of which I am not a little proud), I will give you herein a true statement of the facts in the case, "nothing extenuating, and setting down naught in malice."

But first I have a little confession of my own to make, which, when you are made acquainted with, I am sure you will agree with me in thinking of much more interest and importance than the history of his jealous suspicions.

In revealing this precious little mystery of mine, it will be necessary to transport you back into the realms of the fairy past to a time when first I began to love you; for there was a time, oh! treasure of my heart! when I not

only loved you not, but positively regarded you with feelings of veritable disdain. In those far-off days, when the fruit was still within my grasp, ere my blundering brother had stretched forth his hands to pluck it, I considered Miss Caroline Manners a commonplace, inanimate doll, as devoid of passion as of beauty; nor did I ever dream of my deplorable mistake—the *one* mistake, mark you, of my eventful career—until, upon my return from Europe, I beheld in the woman who sat at the head of my brother's table, and was called by my brother's name, the one woman whom I could love; the one soul throughout the universe of animate creation whose pulses I could have taught to beat responsive to my own. I recognized this fact in all its appalling intensity, and resolved from that self-same moment to combat the decree. I commenced with myself somewhat in this fashion: "The Lord who made John Harrington and myself, has seen fit to endow him with home, friends, respectability, and the woman he loves; to me He has denied these gifts, but in their place He has given *brains*, and with them the steadfast determination and undoubted ability to win for myself the woman whom I love. The odds are on my side, John Harrington, and I think I shall win the game."

From that moment I set myself to work to steal from his arms the treasure I coveted, the woman whose possession would have made of me any thing she willed; whose loss will make of me—that which I love you too well to mention.

I have failed; I have risked all and lost all; I am not one to struggle against fate; still less am I one who would rather destroy the jewel he can not grasp than see it in the possession of another. Your love will never be given to me; then what care I to whom it is given? As well to John Harrington as to any other man; nay, I will say still more; I had rather it were given to him than to any other man; I owe him several good-natured turns, and I am not ungrateful; I will give him back his wife; would that he could appreciate her as she deserves! But that, beloved Caroline, no man save myself could do; and me you have rejected.

That my love is far above all petty malice, let the following confession prove. To secure *your* happiness I draw down unhesitatingly the blackest opprobrium upon my devoted head, and all that I ask at your hands in return, is an occasional sigh to the memory of one who, despite his errors, loved you as only he could love.

You were a very devoted couple in those days of my first dawning love; I will give you both credit for that. I was obliged to watch long and sharply ere I detected a flaw in your matrimonial armor. At last the fortunate day arrived. I guessed at it darkly during that memorable dinner in which the character of Mr. Casey's clerk was so freely dilated upon. I might perhaps have dropped the clue thus found from want of farther immediate unravelment, had not my worthy brother himself directed me to the light. The emotion which John displayed at that time was evident enough to your unsophisticated eyes, and of course did not escape mine. I had thought myself pretty well posted in his private affairs, and, I confess, such needless excitement puzzled me not a little. I seized the first opportunity to ask him the cause.

"What affected you so strangely during Frank Nettleby's revelations? You only told the simple truth, and Frank knew as well as yourself that it was purely impossible that you should be the person alluded to by S—."

And in guileless simplicity he responded—

"It was not Frank Nettleby's suspicions that I shrank from exciting, but those of my wife. She knows nothing about the Casey affair, and I pray God she never may. She is extremely high-spirited and over-sensitive regarding any stain upon our family honor. My agitation was caused by the dread that the knowledge of that shameful affair should come upon her unprepared, and at such a time and place."

"Oh," said I carelessly, "I thought perhaps it was because you were a little sensitive concerning the influence Nettleby seems to exercise over her."

"Nonsense!" was the impatient rejoinder. "Nettleby and she are old acquaintances; it is natural that she should pay him more than ordinary attention."

"Oh, of course, John. You know I would not dream of suggesting that your wife cares more than she ought for Frank, but you know, I suppose, as well as I do, that he is madly in love with her. It was on her account, you remember, that he left America when you were married. Poor fellow! he is not wise to seek her society so constantly now."

That was enough; I had now possessed myself of material sufficient to have sown dissension between the fondest couple that ever breathed. Jealousy on the part of the husband, pride on the part of the wife—invaluable weapons were these in the hands of so skillful a fencer as myself, and I wasted no time in setting to work.

You will doubtless remember the conversation I held with you shortly after, in which you disclosed to me what you imagined to be your sentiments concerning love and honor. That I was fool enough to take it for granted that you spoke the truth, I sorrowfully admit. I can only account for this unusual blindness on my part by the plea that I was in love, and in my infatuation seized eagerly upon an assertion that it was so much my interest to consider true. I ought to have known that a woman of your strength of character possesses affections as powerful and enduring as her nature; that with such a one, to love once is to love forever, in utter disregard of the worthiness or the unworthiness of the man upon whom she bestows herself. Ah! these truths are patent to me now, but then I was scarcely more clear-sighted than yourself, and I suffered myself to be ensnared as easily as the veriest school-boy might have done. But to return to my recital.

I rather disturbed your peace of mind in that interview, did I not? I flatter myself those seeds of suspicion were very judiciously sown; at all events, as you yourself can testify, they were of rapid growth, and bore plentiful fruit.

There is no need for me to dwell upon the events of the next few months. I was not such a tyro in the art of deception as to pour the calumny I meditated into unprepared ears; still less was it likely I should shake your confidence in my own guileless simplicity by open attacks upon the character of the man whom I as well as yourself was bound to love and reverence. I was prepared to worship him as enthusiastically as did his charming wife, could that worship in the end have helped me to win her affections from him.

I made no charges, no definite assertions of any thing concerning him; yet, if you will do me the justice to recall those days, you will remember that not one of them passed over our heads wherein my little scheme was not dexterously forwarded. Now it was a covert insinuation; now a broken sentence; now a sigh or a tear appropriately introduced, and applied by you as I intended it should be. The half-spoken charge which I had brought against him upon that memorable day of our argument, I never for one moment suffered you to forget. Doubt rankled in your heart, and the wound spread and festered until you became so sore upon the subject of John's honor and truth, that you grew to imagine the most casual sentences referred in some indirect manner to the subject which so incessantly haunted you.

So matters progressed, and at last I came to the conclusion that you were "ripe for rebellion," and then I let fly my thunder-bolt.

You of course have not forgotten the coin and its tell-tale envelope. The shock you then received affected my sympathetic heart scarcely less than it did your own. Had it only been possible to have won your love without torturing you in the process, believe me, dearest Caroline, I would myself have borne tenfold the agony I was obliged to inflict upon you, that you might have gone scatheless. Yet it could not be; though I knew when I replaced the blank paper which had enfolded the coin with the delectable letter which I that morning had ransacked boxes and drawers to discover, and had mutilated to suit my purpose,

though I knew what suffering its contents must bring upon you and through you upon my ingenious self, yet I hesitated not in my intention, but with steady nerves accomplished my design, and by this seemingly fatuitous discovery, your mind readily received the impression I had intended that paper to convey; and all this with no apparent intervention of mine, with not one doubt awakened concerning my fraternal affection.

Was not that a master-stroke of genius? I think it was, and I consider myself quite a competent judge in these nice little Machiavellian manoeuvres. However, it is scarcely fair to expect that you should now appreciate my talents as I could wish you to do, and as I know, my Caroline, that you are capable of appreciating them; but the day will come when you will do me justice; when you will turn with contempt from the dull, plodding earth-worm, who claims you as his wife, to that soaring soul, so tuned in unison with your own, whom now so readily you reject and disavow.

With more than the blindness of Titania of yore, you fondly imagine that the realization of your dreams has been found in the unearthly creation whom so delightfully you adorn with the glories of your own luxuriant imagination, and lost in the magic spell which has thus bewildered your reason, you turn from Oberon, your king, your mate, with a fainty that for your sake he can now only hope may be indefinitely prolonged.

Heaven! when I remember those days of bliss, wherein hour after hour I sat unchided by your side, basking in the light of your glorious eyes, reading in your glowing face the ardor that fired my own impassioned breast, as, in words that great souls had written for souls like ours to enjoy, I poured into your listening ear thoughts and visions never to be obliterated from your brain and heart; when I recall those days, I could almost wish I had been the fool you thought me; the pretty, amiable boy, looking up to his stately sister-in-law with a miraculous blending of respect and affection, quite unconscious of the existence of such monstrous possibilities as faithless wives, jealous husbands, and adoring lovers. There were times during those few brief months that I was actually happy; when I almost persuaded myself that virtue was not a sham; that happiness might indeed be found in the bosom of one's own family, etc., etc.; and I even tried to turn my thoughts from you, my queen, and to wonder whether, with wife and home of my own, I too might not taste the blessedness I envied John. I tried to imagine myself a Benedict, with the golden-haired Agnes for my spouse; I tried to imagine a future of domestic love and peace with that pretty little puppet for my frisky angel. I really had serious notions at one time of following the path you so benevolently had marked out for me, and of making for myself another claim upon your affection by marrying your sister. But do not be indignant at this seeming inconstancy, Caroline, for I swear to you it was but seeming. One tone of your voice, one glance of your eye, one touch of your dainty hand, and down would topple the airy fabric I had so virtuously been trying to erect, and, mad with love, I would prostrate myself once more at your feet, and vow that neither heaven nor hell should stay my course until you were won—or hope forever lost.

But I do not flatter myself these fond recollections mine can possess much interest to Mrs. Harrington, so, apologizing for my brief digression, I resume the thread of my narrative.

The blow had fallen! I had cried you "cheek!" That John had lied to you, you could no longer doubt; that he had lied to you to conceal some deed of shame and darkness that disfigured his early life, you fully believed; and what could you then do but fly to me for enlightenment and relief? There was no other course for you to pursue, and that you ultimately did so reflects less credit upon my discernment than my ingenuity. That appeal to Jenny, he it remarked *en passant*, was a side stroke for which I was quite unprepared; your turning to me in your trouble and bewilderment was at once so natural and probable an occurrence, that I had quite overlooked

any possible reference to her. It was the movement of a pawn whose existence I had forgotten, and how it failed to save you, I even yet can not understand. It is true that Jenny did not know much of the mysterious affair which perplexed you, but what she didn't know you did, and how, between you, you did not chance to blunder on the truth, is a circumstance at which I marvel to the present day. The devil stood by his own that day, however he may have deserted him since.

So you came to me for help, so lovely in your tearless agony, that again was I almost tempted to waver in my schemes; and again did I trample on my own weakness, and lead you forward to the goal of bliss, even though my faithful breast echoed your every sigh, and ached with your every pang.

Is it necessary that I should recall that eventful interview? Is not every incident impressed as indelibly upon your memory as upon mine? I know that it is; yet even at the risk of being considered tedious, I must call your attention to some of its details. When you learn all, you may marvel perhaps, in recalling the scene to your mind, at the histrionic powers I that day developed. I flatter myself that no actor that ever stalked before the footlights could have portrayed more accurately than did I that day the varying emotions of astonishment, conscious confusion, indignation, fraternal solicitude, shame, sympathy with your wrongs, and amiable defense of your husband's crime, and finally the remorseful twinges of an over-sensitive conscience, which were developed to extract from you the promise of secrecy, which you so reluctantly gave. You will be less astonished, however, at the talents which I thus unexpectedly evinced, when I tell you candidly that my emotions were not all feigned.

Up to the actual point of revelation, I assure you it was genuine alone that was manifested; but when I came to tell in plain English the "lower true tale," of which not even I, with all my philosophy and particularly proud, I confess it was unadorned shame that impeded my utterance; and when, after you had read the extract I had pointed out to you, you turned to me in passionate scorn, with righteous indignation burning on your brow, the feeling that prompted my defense of the criminal was the most genuine emotion I had ever experienced in my life.

It was the basis of truth which underlay the whole plot that made it so conclusive and impressive. I might easily have fabricated a more plausible story, and indeed, in the start, I had intended doing so; your own mistake suggested the idea I finally carried out. I thought the scheme a very wild one when it first occurred to me, but after I had meditated upon the subject and began to look up the circumstantial evidence I could bring to bear upon the supposed criminal, I was really almost startled to find how simple and natural a face my plot could be made to assume.

Need I say that the event proved the sagacity of my decision? And yet how small a part, after all, did I take in your deception! I never lie when I can help it; I think it a low, disgraceful practice, utterly unworthy a man of genius. There are a thousand ways besides downright lying by which the desired end can generally be accomplished, and with far less risk and discomfort to yourself than always accompanies the vulgarity of a lie.

Note how beautifully my scheme developed itself in this instance. John denied that he had ever been in Casey & Co.'s employ; you thought he had spoken falsely, and yet it was the literal truth! You thought the letter which you discovered revealed that lie to you, and so it would have done had it been addressed to your husband, which it was not. Finally you accepted the newspaper testimony as conclusive evidence of his guilt, which it would have been, doubtless, had it referred to him at all, which it did not; for old S—'s story, the mutilated letter, and the newspaper paragraph, my dear, hasty Caroline, referred not to Doctor Harrington's oldest, but to his youngest son; not to your harmless husband, but to his unmitigated scamp of a brother, the individual who now has the honor of addressing you.

Does this announcement astonish you? Does it seem quite incredible to you that the individual whose burglarious exploits so aroused your virtuous indignation, should have been a boy of the tender age of—let me see—fourteen—ten—five—how old did you imagine me to have been eleven years ago?

My bewildered darling! I will trifle with you no more, but tell you in very earnest that the guileless boy upon whom you have lavished during the past year a flood of almost maternal affection (you see I no longer deceive myself as to the nature of your regard), is in reality a man who, even at so early a date as eleven—nay, twelve—years ago had attained the venerable age of seventeen. Still too young, do you say, to have performed the part I claim to have acted in the little drama of which we have been speaking? Perhaps so, had I been an ordinary boy; but, without vanity, I think I may say that I scorn the imputation. Precocity was one of my failings, and I assure you that my seventeen year old brain originated ideas and schemes which that adulated John of yours is, even now, quite incapable of conceiving.

At all events the fact is indisputable, that it is I, and I alone, who am entitled to the doubtful honor of having distinguished myself and family in the manner you wot of. I am not proud of the affair, as I told you; it was scandalously ill-managed, and altogether unworthy of so clever a brain as I imagine mine to be. My youth is all I can allege in defense; that and the fact of being almost distraught with the difficulties into which my cleverness had brought me, and from which I thus awkwardly tried to extricate myself.

One other declaration I must make, whether you believe me or not; I swear to you that pistol shot was an accident. How the cursed thing went off I know no more than you; but that it was a voluntary act on my part I solemnly deny. That Mr. Casey himself took this view of the case is evident from the fact that he instituted no legal proceedings against me. John got me out of the scrape in his blundering way, and the affair was hushed up so completely, that even Jenny never knew why I resigned my situation so suddenly, and quitted the country.

I rambled over Europe for two or three years, experiencing, I venture to say, in that time more of the zest of life, than many a man can gather in an existence of half a century. Finally I got tired of that and came home to Jenny again, quite contented to settle down to my books in an easy, innocent fashion that was quite refreshing after my holiday. It was about this time I first became acquainted with you, and since then my career has been well known to you. I shall return to Europe again now, and if my present impressions continue, I shall never re-visit America. I have ties in the Old World which I am not unwilling to renew, and I had long since made up my mind to return there at no very distant day, whatever might have been the result of the little project I have been nursing so long. Had you been the companion of my travels, as I had once so fondly hoped, vastly different from my present anticipations would have been the life before me. As it is, the end and aim of my life for some time to come must be to seek oblivion, and the probabilities are that I shall not be remarkably particular as to the ways and means by which I strive to obtain it. But I shall conquer at last. Picture not to yourself, my tender-hearted Caroline, an aimless wanderer, heart-broken and despairing; such a one would be unworthy of adoring you as I have done. As the remembrance of a faultless poem, or an exquisite picture, must Caroline henceforth be to me. Life, glorious healthy life is still before me, and in the boundless joys which youth and intellect offer to my grasp, the memory of crushed hopes, defeated schemes, and slighted love shall forever vanish into oblivion.

Again I crave your pardon for this egotistical digression. Let me briefly narrate to you the balance of the romance which has lately been enacted, and then I must give a few moments to the fulfillment of my promise to

John, and make for him the excuses he is too clumsy to make for himself.

I never have been able exactly to understand what took place between you and John the night following your discovery of his supposed guilt. That you had an explanation of some sort I was convinced, but whether enough to compromise me or not, I was for a long time doubtful. John has a peculiar faculty of concealing his thoughts and feelings in his own obtuse fashion, that sometimes puzzles even me, and this was the case during those weeks that you were ill. Imagine my feelings if you can, Caroline, at that unlooked-for denouement of my plot! For the first time in my life I felt what you righteous folks, I suppose, would denominate remorse. Had my manoeuvres been successful in accomplishing the effects which I desired, I should never have thought, save with pardonable pride, of the means I had used to effect them. That I should fail at all was bad enough, but that I should have your death upon my conscience to boot, was altogether more than I had bargained for. What I suffered during those weeks of suspense, mortal tongue can never tell! You may perhaps guess at the intensity of my feelings when I tell you that at the time you were lowest, when all hope of your recovery was given up, I made to myself a solemn pledge to this effect: "That if your life were spared, I would repair the evil I had done, and restore you to happiness; in my own fashion if it were possible to do so, but, if I once became convinced that my own schemes were impracticable, then I would undo the mischief I had done, and restore you to your 'Poor's Paradise' again, at whatever cost to myself, as promptly and entirely as it was in my power to do."

This letter is the fulfillment of that pledge; for, mark you, I never break faith with myself; a resolution once made, a vow once uttered, with my own soul security for its fulfillment, and I would redeem the bond to the very letter, though my dearest hopes must be sacrificed in so doing. That I so long have delayed in accomplishing a promise I held so sacred, you must attribute to the fact that I still hoped to insure your happiness by the same event that crowned my own, namely, your acceptance of my love. Once convinced that I could never succeed in that endeavor, I have lost no time, as you see, in making you happy in your own way. I pity your blindness, but I submit to fate. The deplorable bad taste you evinced in becoming the wife of John Harrington was the only flaw ever discovered in your perfection, my queen, and I shall always believe that pity rather than love first led you to commit that unaccountable folly.

And now a few words concerning John's affairs, and I have finished. He came to me this afternoon in a vast state of excitement, requiring the recantation or explanation of several little bits of romance with which I have at odd times during the past year regaled him. I was beginning to be vastly tired of the existing state of affairs, and concluded if a crisis were coming that now was a very proper time for its arrival; so, promising my confession with a request similar to one I afterward made to you, I drew from him a promise that for twenty-four hours the particulars of our interview should remain a secret. Then I announced myself in readiness to answer, truthfully and in detail, any question he might see fit to propound.

He had, by some means, at last become awakened to the astounding fact that you were not in love with Frank Nettlesby, and the poor fellow was so unconsciously remorseful for having doubted your wisely allegiance, that out of the kindness of my heart I promised him that you should have a full and true account of the manner in which he had been led to imbibe that very sagacious idea. And really, Caroline, my dear, I do not think you will find it in your heart to blame him when I tell you that I had far less difficulty in persuading you that he was a thief and a murderer, than I had in convincing him that your affections had very naughtily bestowed themselves upon another individual than his exclusive self.

The result was achieved finally, but I really feel ashamed of myself when I remember how much lying was

expended in the process. To be sure John was not such a firm believer in my immaculate simplicity as was your own dear, confiding self; and I grieve to say that my simple affirmation, even when uttered in the most unaffected and casual way, was received with an incredulity with which my precious Caroline could never have insulted me. I had to call you to my aid many times, and, in unconscious self-devotion, you never failed to respond.

Do you remember the day you followed me to the front door to try to gain possession of that terrible letter, which you thought betrayed so much that it was not good for the world to know? Do you remember also how John interrupted our little *tête-à-tête* in time to hear words that amply corroborated a statement that the day before had fallen from my thoughtless lips? What wonder, then, that he believed his own senses when I afterward laid before him not only the letter which you had that morning privately requested me to convey to Mr. Nettlesby, but also the answer which Mr. Nettlesby with equal privacy had desired me to hand to you. There was no danger of the letters themselves deceiving him. I had not spent half of the previous night in concocting them to render likely any such clumsy misadventure. And what motive could he possibly have for doubting that the very natural story I told to him, in such an affectionate, brotherly fashion, of how I had, with some little hesitation, consented to convey your letter, feeling all confidence in you; how, after I received Frank's answer, I came across your note to him, which he had accidentally dropped from his pocket, read it unthinkingly, and discovered it to contain matters of such grave import, that my conscience would not rest until I had placed both the letters in my brother's hands; how could he doubt, with the letters before him, that my guileless tale was true?

That he did believe it I have his own word to prove, and John can't lie; it is a feat utterly beyond his mental capacity; yet had he not himself said so, I never to this day should have been quite certain that I had succeeded in outwitting him. The preposterous course of action which he has pursued toward you from that day to this, has been so utterly at variance with what my own conduct would have been under similar circumstances, that he has succeeded in keeping me in a mild state of bewilderment ever since your illness. And upon my soul, Caroline, though I do not really like to confess it, I think you may catch of you thank your own incomprehensible temper, rather than any scheming of mine, for the long estrangement that has existed between you.

And now my task is done. I have proved to my own satisfaction that though intrigue is my native element, I am by no means devoid of that noble simplicity of character which enables a man—if you will pardon the inelegant though forcible expression—"to tell the truth and shame the devil!" I have confessed my own defeat, and in return for my sacrifice at the altar of fraternal affection, I ask but one boon in return. Be happy; forget the past; conquer the aspirations of your higher self, and strive to be contented in the arms of the man from whom I have so vainly endeavored to rescue you; and if ever you bestow a thought upon that dreadful "boy," Eddie Harrington, forget not that his sins were committed, as "we" French scholars say, "*pour l'amour de vos beaux yeux*," and be accordingly lenient; and that we may never meet again, my adored Caroline, for your sake as well as his own, prays your devoted brother-in-law,

EDWIN HARRINGTON.

I had commenced reading this ingenious composition with no more serious feeling than a strong curiosity, mingled, perhaps, with a little vague uneasiness. Yet, as I read on, it can readily be imagined how the insulting lines soon assumed for me a fearful interest. Breathlessly I devoured the pages, scarce comprehend-

ing their terrible import, until doubt was no longer possible, when, at length, the truth burst upon me, in all its appalling magnitude, that for months past I had been believing my husband to be one of the worst of villains, and torturing both him and myself with the estrangement that false idea had created, while I now learned that I had only been taught thus to believe by the vilest falsehood ever concocted by man, and that John had never for one moment ceased to be the honorable gentleman I had thought him when first he won my love.

The paper fell from my trembling hands; I could not speak, but I stretched out my hands toward my husband with a cry like that of some wounded creature driven to bay.

In an instant he was by my side, and had caught my outstretched hands in his.

"What is it?" he cried with anxious tenderness, his face becoming scarcely less pallid than my own, as he marked the overpowering emotion that shook my frame and impeded my utterance.

"The letter! the letter!" was all that my choking throat could say.

He picked it up, glancing hastily at writing and signature. An angry frown darkened his face.

"More of that infernal villain's work!" he muttered. "What is it, Caroline? Tell me what new treachery he has perpetrated against you?"

"Oh, John!" I cried, my voice broken with tearless sobs, "I have thought—he told me—that it was *you* who was clerk in Casey's store twelve years ago—that it was *you* of whom old S— told Frank Nettleby—and that it was *you* who had robbed and tried to murder Mr. Casey, and had been such a wicked, wicked man always. Oh, John! he told me so."

John's dark face reddened to the very temples as he listened to my incoherent words.

"And *you* could believe this of me, Caroline?" he said. "You—my wife—could credit so gross a calumny, and never give me even the shadow of a chance to exculpate myself?" and there were actually tears in his eyes as he spoke; tears of mortification and outraged affection.

I saw his emotion; I heard his reproachful words; I felt in my inmost soul the bitter wrong I had done him, and I had nothing to say in self-defense. My blind incredulity seemed then so utterly incomprehensible, my miserable suspicions so gross, so unpardonable, I could not speak. I could only gaze mutely into his face with wild, appealing eyes, that told, more pow-

erfully than words, of the agony of remorse which overpowered me. Then my head swam, the world seemed passing away from me, and the next moment I had fainted away in the pitying arms that so tenderly opened to receive me.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself lying on the sofa, with John's face bending anxiously over me. All trace of anger and reproach had vanished from his countenance. He was very pale, and more than usually grave, but there was a love-light in his eyes that comforted my distracted soul as naught but that could have done.

"What is it? what does it all mean?" I cried confusedly, raising my hand to my head, which was drenched with the cologne water that he had poured upon it in his efforts to revive me.

He lifted me in his arms, and laid my head upon his shoulder.

"It means," he whispered, "that the night of our sorrow is ended—the dawn has come, and once more I hold within my arms my own dear, loving wife." And then he bowed his head upon mine, and I felt that tears not all my own were moistening my cheek.

There was no need of further explanation on either side. Ineffable peace had come upon us. And, as I clung to him in passionate silence, pillowing my weary head once more upon that loyal heart, whose great love had borne and foreborne so much, I knew that my sorrows had forevermore vanished, and that henceforth naught but death could part him and me.

A little later, when comparative calmness had returned to us, and we could speak in other than broken sentences and whispered words, I sat beside him, and with my head resting upon his shoulder and his arm encircling my waist, together we perused Edwin Harrington's farewell message.

John seemed to feel nothing but cool contempt, and, with almost his usual composure, declared that he found nothing in the abominable production that in the least astonished him, after the first astounding facts had been made apparent. But as for me, I raged and wept alternately, until at last, when the final words were read, I cried, in a passion of indignant tears—

"I could forgive him all the torture he has made me endure, all the wrongs he has caused me to inflict on you, his insulting language to myself; even those horrible kisses—John, I could forgive even them—but I never, never will forgive him for the manner in which he

speaks of you!" and my voice was drowned in sobs.

John fairly laughed at my vehemence.

"My dear! that is surely the very lightest of his misdemeanors. Nay! do not weep so. Can the contemptuous opinion of such an egotistical villain at all affect my actual standing in your, or any other right-minded person's, estimation? He thinks, and is by no means backward in saying, that I am far from being so extraordinary a genius as himself. I concede the point without any argument, and surely you, my love, would not wish it otherwise, and will never regret that your love has fallen upon the commonplace John Harrington rather than his brilliant brother. Let me destroy this guilty letter, and in its ashes let us bury all hard and vengeful thoughts of the poor, misguided man who penned it. May I, Caroline?"

Ah! great and noble heart! so cruelly wronged and yet so ready to forgive. Very, very humble did I become, as I recognized my

own insignificance when comparing his nature with my own.

A scarcely audible "Yes!" gave him the required permission, and lighting the papers by the lamp that burned upon the table, he threw them blazing into the grate, and in silence we watched them consume. Love and reverence for my husband so filled my heart that every angry and revengeful feeling was crowded out of it.

"We will never speak of him again, John," I whispered, as the last fitful blaze died away, and of the evidence of Edwin Harrington's guilt naught remained but smoke and ashes.

"Amen!" was the solemn response. And then, hand locked in hand, my husband and I once more took up the burden of life, wiser and humbler from the tribulations through which we had passed—the vows which each at that time inwardly recorded being no less solemn, and far more sacredly kept, than had been those which consecrated our wedding-day, five memorable years before.

THE END.